

Requests Time to Work on Solution

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) - U.S. Rep. Mike Coffman (R-Aurora) wants Governor Bill Ritter to veto the legislation, H.B. 1317, that is designed to block the Army from moving forward with its proposal to expand its training areas in southeastern Colorado.

“I’m asking the Governor to veto the bill and give me until the end of the year to work with his office, members of our congressional delegation, the state legislature, the Army, and the impacted community to see if a solution can be worked out,” said Coffman.

Coffman gave the Governor a letter this morning explaining his request for a veto. In his letter, Coffman asked the Governor to give him until the end of the year to see if he could find a solution. If not, the legislation could be introduced again next year and the Governor could sign it if he chose to do so. In addition, Coffman explained in his letter that there is no immediate need to act right now because key members of Colorado’s congressional delegation have been successful in blocking funding for the Army to conduct an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Without an EIS, the Army will be unable to move forward with their plan.

Coffman met with the commanding general of Fort Carson, Major General Mark Graham, and his staff on Friday to review the training requirements of the Army and their plans to expand the Piñon Canyon Maneuver Site (PCMS). Coffman, a combat veteran with service in both the U.S. Army and the Marine Corps, agreed with the Army’s assessment for the need to expand their training area. Coffman is a member of the House Armed Services Committee that has jurisdiction over all matters pertaining to the U.S. military.

“The Army essentially does two things: it trains to go to war and it goes to war. The Army must train to meet current and anticipated threats to the Nation, and it must train as it expects to fight. Unit proficiency and individual readiness save the lives of American soldiers in combat,” said Coffman.

House Bill 1317 is designed to block the Army's plans by prohibiting the Colorado State Land Board from selling any sections they own in the proposed expansion area.

In his letter to the Governor, Coffman acknowledged that the Army's initial plan was both poorly conceived and badly presented. He believes that the Army, since then, has made a good faith effort in trying to work with the local ranchers and the impacted communities.

"Unfortunately, every compromise and accommodation the Army has made has been met with unremitting hostility, accusations of bad faith, and an endless repetition that the Army had failed to justify its requirements," said Coffman.

According to Coffman, the Army has conducted studies where it looked at moving the soldiers and their equipment from Fort Carson to other larger maneuver training areas out of state but the cost was too high. Coffman is concerned that since the Army has concluded that the PMCS is not large enough for the units at Fort Carson to meet their readiness standards that the Army will eventually move the brigade combat teams to another state that can give them the training areas that they need.

"Our state's economy is in bad shape. I'm not sure why the members of our legislature would want to put a stick in the eye of a \$1.8 billion a year employer in our state. An employer that is not asking for a bailout but to lease or purchase land from willing sellers at a full market price," said Coffman.

A copy of the letter is below:

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May 11, 2009

The Honorable Bill Ritter
Office of the Governor
136 State Capitol
Denver, CO 80203-1792

Dear Governor Ritter,

Last Friday, I visited Fort Carson in Colorado Springs. I met with Major General Mark Graham, the commanding general at the post, and his staff. My objective was to review the training area needs for units of the U.S. Army assigned to Fort Carson as well as the Army Reserve and National Guard units that also conduct training there.

I reviewed the Army's request not only as a Member of Congress serving on the House Armed Services Committee but through the eyes of a combat veteran. The Army's interest in expanding training at the Piñon Canyon Maneuver Site (PCMS) in southeastern Colorado derives from a need for larger land areas in which to train the newly formed Brigade Combat Teams (BCT) and associated units for contemporary warfare and the threats they anticipate encountering in the future. The BCTs are required to control more territory with fewer soldiers. In order to accurately simulate the anticipated actual combat conditions with the equipment required, the BCTs must train over larger areas of land, thus the need for the expansion of training at PCMS.

The Army essentially does two things: it trains to go to war and it goes to war. The Army must train to meet current and anticipated threats to the Nation, and it must train as it expects to fight. Unit proficiency and individual readiness save the lives of American soldiers in combat. We cannot send units and individual soldiers into battle who will be performing task for the first time.

No doubt, it is my understanding that the Army could have done a better job, initially, in working with the ranchers in the affected areas. That misstep has politically solidified into such a hostile environment that it no longer matters what the Army says or does - the answer is always "not one more acre."

However, it needs to be noted that since getting off on the wrong foot the Army has worked hard to resolve the objections of the local ranchers. Unfortunately, every compromise and accommodation the Army has made has been met with unremitting hostility, accusation of bad faith, and an endless repetition that the Army has failed to justify its requirements.

The impacted local community said it wanted eminent domain and condemnation taken off the table. The Army has accommodated this and is dealing only with willing property owners.

When the Army asked to buy, at fair market value, resources to train soldiers to fight and win the Nation's wars, the local community said it wanted economic development. The U.S. Army has now proposed \$140 million of military construction and \$9 million of annual local payroll and stimulus.

The local community wanted the U.S. Army to make absolutely sure that every acre requested was absolutely necessary. The Army did further analysis and determined that "Area B" (approximately 300,000 acres) was not feasible for expansion and reduced its proposal to approximately 100,000 acres in "Area A."

The impacted local governments may have legitimate fears that allowing the U.S. Army to acquire more land will result in a loss of their property tax base. Either a Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) can be negotiated between the Army and the local governments or a long term lease agreement with willing property owners will keep the land on the tax rolls indefinitely.

Some say the Army has not justified their training needs. The Army uses a standard, doctrinally-based model called the Army Range Requirements Model (ARRM) to determine its training land requirements. The model considers each unit's training tasks requiring land, and the number of training days required annually for each task. The army also has identified a standard land foot print for each unit type. Each foot print reflects all tasks that a unit type must train for.

Taken together, all Army units, their training tasks, total training days and the cumulative footprints determines the Army's total training land requirement. That process is applied to each installation based on the units that are assigned to that installation. The ARRM, as well as the Army's processes and procedures for land acquisition, were reviewed by the Government Accounting Office (GAO) in two reports released in January 2009 (GAO-09-32 and GAO-09-171).

The GAO summarized the Army's land acquisition approach by saying "the Army has improved its land acquisition process in recent years so that it has a rational approach for determining land requirements and alternatives rather than relying on targets of opportunity as it did in the past when making major land acquisitions decisions."

Governor Ritter, you have legislation before you, House Bill 1317, that is awaiting your decision to either sign it, veto it, or simply let it become law without your signature. This legislation is designed to permanently block the Army's efforts for any expansion of PCMS by directing the Colorado State Land Board not to sell any of their property holdings to the Army.

The Army has already conducted an Analysis of Alternatives Study (AAS) for PCMS examining the transportation of Soldiers and equipment to other, larger Army sites that would permit training to required readiness standards. The AAS showed that significant increases in transportation costs would render the alternatives unfeasible. Unfortunately, if nothing is done, the Army might move its BCTs out of Fort Carson to facilities in other states that are less hostile to its requirements. Once that occurs, Fort Carson itself could be a prime candidate for closure under the Department of Defense's Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process.

Governor Ritter, it's obvious that the General Assembly did not take into account the Army's training needs or the economic consequences to our state when they passed this legislation. We are in a terrible recession and I'm not sure why the members of our legislature want to put a stick in the eye of a \$1.8 billion dollar a year employer in our state. An employer that is still hiring and gives full health care and retirement benefits. An employer that it not asking for a bailout but to lease or purchase land from willing sellers at full market value.

Governor Ritter, my request is that you veto this legislation and give me to the end of the year to see if I can work with your office, members of our congressional delegation, state legislators,

the Army, and the impacted communities to see if a solution can be worked out that best resolves the differences for all of the concerned parties. If nothing can be worked out then legislation barring the Army's ability to have their training facilities can be reintroduced next year. You will then have another opportunity to allow the legislation to become law. In the interim, the Army's proposal will not be allowed to move forward anyway since key members of our congressional delegation have been successful in blocking funding for the required Environmental Impact Statement which has to be completed before anything can occur.

Governor Ritter, I would deeply appreciate the opportunity to work on this issue on behalf of the citizens of Colorado and of our Nation.

Sincerely,

Mike Coffman, M.C.