

Guest Column by U.S. Sen. Martin Heinrich

Gila not appropriate for Air Force flyovers

I am calling on the Air Force not to expand airspace over the Gila and surrounding areas. Especially when there are other more appropriate overflight options, it makes no sense to threaten what makes the Gila so special and unnecessarily create hostility between the public and the military in New Mexico.

Nearly 100 years ago, a forester named Aldo Leopold recognized the beauty and irreplaceable value of an untrammeled area of mountains, rivers and mesas in southwestern New Mexico. As lands across the West were being broken up by development, roads, and railroads, Leopold proposed that the headwaters of the Gila River should be preserved as the nation's first road-less, unimpeded wilderness. Today, so many of us are grateful for Leopold's foresight.

Some of my best memories are the camping trips I've been able to take with my wife, Julie, and our two sons in wild places like the Gila Wilderness. I have always been drawn to places like the Gila — landscapes where you can get away from the cell phones, computers and everything else that tends to clutter the mind. Backpacking trips into places like McKenna Park and Turkey Feather Pass, the Jerky Mountains and the Gila River canyon have given me the time and space to grow closer to my family and friends and reflect.

From the outset, local residents have expressed steady and firm opposition to the Air Force's proposal for the Gila and have made it abundantly clear that low-level flights and flares in wilderness areas would be disruptive to their way of life,

threaten public safety and damage the local economy.

The outdoor recreation opportunities in the Gila are integral to the quality of life and economy of Grant and Catron counties. Visitors from around the world are drawn to the region's hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, and peaceful wilderness.

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eas, which have been based on positive and mutually beneficial relationships between the military and the public for over 30 years. Reshaping and expanding the existing airspace agreement over the Gila risks jeopardizing the appropriate balance that has been in place for decades.

Throughout the airspace evaluation, I have urged the Air Force to coordinate with local stakeholders and to address community concerns. If the Air Force listens to those who know New Mexico best, I am confident they will reach the same conclusion I have: that an expansion of airspace over the Gila would be a mistake, and that optimizing airspace elsewhere would enable the Air Force to better train its pilots and ensure the positive relationship with the military in New Mexico endures.

This is about striking the right balance. New Mexico has maintained a good working relationship between the military and the surrounding communities for years by listening to community concerns and making smart decisions. Today, that means recognizing that overflights through the Gila are not the right approach.

U.S. Sen. Martin Heinrich is a Democrat who has represented New Mexico since 2013. He is a member of the Senate's Committee on Energy and Natural Resources and Committee on Armed Services, as well as the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities. He is a candidate for re-election in November, facing Republican Mick Rich and Libertarian candidate Gary Johnson.

Many local residents — from retirees to young entrepreneurs — choose to live in the area because of its unrivaled natural surroundings.

The military would also lose more than it would gain from the proposal. New Mexico already has in place a number of airspace agreements for military aircraft training locations, also known as Military Operation Ar-

Readers' Forum

Either market U.S. Air Force or learn a foreign language

Dear editor,

In response to Ms. Damie Nelson's recent editorial letter, "Don't help Air Force with marketing," as a retired USAF (helicopter) pilot and former middle school teacher, I'd like to respond to her concern. I'm going to presume that she's (understandably) upset with the USAF's proposal to create a training area over Grant and Catron counties for F-16 (and other) flights. That concern is valid and under discussion.

That her sister (a teacher) "was terri[fied]" by a planned, low-level demonstration flight, knowing the jets were coming — standing outside the classroom waiting for them to fly by — strikes me as a bit odd, especially given that "We get those low-level training flights over our school all the time." Of what was she terrified? The sound? *Loud* — but transient. The vibrations? *Strong* — but again, transient. Fear of a jet traveling about 200 mph falling on her head? Unlikely, given the physics of Newton's laws of motion.

... No thought to the consequences to education, the economy, or the environment..." Sorry, but this is highly overreactive! I spent many hours in my USAF pilot days educating the students I came in contact with, encouraging them to continue in school, excel in STEM and general education courses. USAF pilots are (with a dozen UAV exceptions) *all* college graduates. Education is paramount for every airman, and ongoing education a prerequisite to promotions and expertise. Aircraft, supplies and support equipment are built and maintained here in the U.S., adding to our overall economy. Environmental impact is an ongoing concern in the USAF planning community. Oh, please don't forget that school visits are a critical tool in recruiting future military volunteer members. Finally, as an aircraft safety officer and mishap investigator, I won't even bother to address the claim that, from the ground, "They were close enough that we could see the pilots in their cockpits."

So, Ms. Nelson, do you want to learn to speak a foreign language not of your own choosing? Then "don't help Air Force with marketing" and see what foreign entity becomes your overlord. In the meantime, let's find a reasonable center ground on which to discuss our local concerns.

(s)Alan D. Resnicke, major, USAF (Ret.)
Silver City

Letter Policy

The Daily Press welcomes readers' forum letters, which can be mailed to Box 1371, Silver City, NM 88062, or emailed to letters@scdailypress.com. Letters must be signed and, for verification purposes, must include an address and telephone number. As has been the newspaper's policy for more than 20 years, only letters exclusive to the Daily Press will be accepted for

Readers' Forum

Mayor made right choice on UTVs

Dear editor,

Ken Ladner, on Tuesday, Aug. 14 (a day that will live in our history), voted his love for Silver City. It isn't easy when you have to tell the kids "No, it is *not* your inalien-

able right to drive your cute little vehicles anyplace you damn choose."

Well done, Ken!

(s)Robert Donnelly
Silver City

publication. We prefer short letters which are typed and double spaced, and less than 250 words in length. Longer submissions may be rejected or considered for publication as a guest column. Letters of a religious nature; those which could be libelous; those bearing multiple signatures; and those intended simply to say "thank you" to someone will not be accepted for publication.