

A Voice For Silence
Military Flyovers, Spirituality and Democracy in Action
Matthew Crowley

A courageous act took place the other day in the basement of the State Capitol building in Denver. Four of our elected representatives to the Colorado house of representatives and fifteen or twenty of our fellow citizens stood up for our rights to use and enjoy our property unmolested by unwanted intrusion. Rep. Wes McKinley (district 64) sponsored House Bill 1066 which would have made a statement that we as U.S. citizens would not stand for the federal government and or the military from “taking” our rights to enjoy our private property and our way of life without due process.

It was the House Judiciary Committee who took testimony from those in favor and those opposed to HB1066 and from the bills sponsor Wes McKinley. The bill would have specified that aircraft flying below 500’ and disturbing the “quiet enjoyment” of ones private property could represent a “taking” and that this could not happen without due process. At the end of the day HB1066 was voted into the oblivion of “PI” (Postponed Indefinitely) by a 7 to 3 vote. Representatives Wes McKinley, Ed Vigil (district 62) Pete Lee (district 18) and Cristina Duran (district 5) and the citizens who came to testify in support of this bill, all had the courage to take a stand. Visit your capitol, enter these hearing rooms, agree or disagree with what is going on there, but don't think there is not a chance to be heard.

Listening to the people for whom he represents, Rep. Wes McKinley made a bold statement in the form of HB1066 that we as Coloradans, would not stand for such a disruption to our land and way of life. Never mind whether the state or federal government has jurisdiction over the air above our heads, this would have made a clear statement about Coloradans values.

Toward the end of 2010 Canon Air Force Base in Northern New Mexico announced their intention to establish a Low Altitude Tactical Navigation Area over nearly ½ of the state of New Mexico and 2/3 of Colorado. There is a NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) underway and an overwhelming majority of people commented in the negative to the military’s intentions to fly massive 4 engine turbo prop C130’s as low as 200’ above the ground, mostly at night. I have heard it said that the various branches of the military already have access to 50% of the skies over America to practice for war. They do not need to expand that area to include even more wilderness areas, public lands, and places that are already economically fragile and sacred to those who live and visit them.

Rather than condemn the Representatives who would not take this stand with us, I prefer to think that they heard me when I testified that this was not a stand against our military. That I could not *imagine* a group of people (our veterans and men and women in uniform) who were more deserving of places such as Crestone and the public lands that surrounds it. Places that Newsweek called “one of the ten quietest places on earth”. Places that have the lowest measured ambient sound levels of any park in the

lower 48 states. I prefer to think that all of the people present in that hearing room might have learned that the spiritual groups who have a presence in this tiny quiet town of Crestone have an international constituency of probably more than a million people and that we will stand up for our rights and our values. I believe I was heard yesterday and that my words represent the values of a vast majority and that words have power.

Standing up for our property rights, our values, our lifestyles is *not* a vote against the military. These are the things that our military is supposed to *defend* not take away. They work for us, the lawmakers, the generals, the pilots, all of them. Let them know that, remind them of what it is we ask them to defend. And if they will not listen, let them know we will use every means at our disposal, from voting elected officials out of office, making new laws and if necessary using our judicial system to demand due process and when merited compensation for damages.

Of the tens of thousands of people who visit Crestone for spiritual, religious and contemplative retreat, many of them *are* members of the armed forces and many more are veterans. Ironically, the Baca Grande subdivision was originally planned as a military retirement community and many property owners are indeed current and former members of the armed services. The same is true of the *hundreds* of thousands of people who visit the Great Sand Dunes National Park and other public lands of the San Luis Valley.

Take a few minutes and send a letter or e-mail the representatives who had the courage to take a stand for us. E-mail those who did not and tell them you would support them if they *did* (Google Colorado Judiciary Committee). E-mail our State Senators Bennett and Udall and tell them you will not stand for the military taking away your right to enjoy your property in peace and quiet. Our Senators did weigh in with a letter to the General Wurster during the NEPA scoping process, but they need to know you have their support to take an even stronger stand. Send a message to Lieutenant General Donald Wurster care of 27SOWpublicaffairs@cannon.af.mil. Let him know if the military proceeds with their plan, you will document any and all disruption to your right to enjoy your private property unmolested. That our communities, organizations and places of worship and places of business will document any loss of revenue or disruption to their right to worship and do business and that we will hold the military monetarily accountable under existing federal laws.

Although I testified the other day on behalf of 23 religious and spiritual organizations, the values of quiet, beauty and the right to use and enjoy our property without unwanted intrusion are universal. These are not exclusive to religious and spiritual practitioners and retreatants, they apply equally to farmers and ranchers; republicans and democrats, hikers, hunters, sportsman and all people who have an appreciation for nature. The San Luis Valley with its more than 1 million acres of public lands is just not my backyard, it's America's backyard.