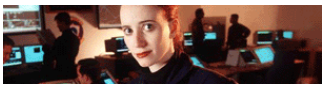

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Legislators examine 'sound of freedom'

Air National Guard Col. Pete Byrne (top right), vice commander of the 140th Wing, Colorado Air National Guard, gives legislative staffers a peak inside an F-16 Fighting Falcon jet during the staffers' visit with Colorado National Guard leaders May 14, 2009 at Buckley Air Force Base in Aurora, Colo. CONG leaders discussed the numerous missions and roles of the Guard in the nation, state and community, as well as the challenges future leaders will likely face with respect to encroachment and future flight operations at the Air Force base. *Photo by Tech. Sgt. Cheresa D. Theiral*

By Tech. Sgt. Cheresa D. Theiral
Colorado National Guard Public Affairs

BUCKLEY AIR FORCE BASE, Colo. – More than a dozen Colorado legislators and staffers visited Buckley Air Force Base May 14 to learn what the Colorado National Guard does for the state as well as how the legislators can best support the Guard.

Senior Colorado National Guard leaders discussed the numerous missions and roles of the Guard in a state and federal capacity, as well as the challenges future leaders will likely face.

Encroachment is perhaps the biggest issue facing the 140th Wing and the Colorado Air National Guard as it prepares for the next generation of fighter jets, and the $1.2 billion dollar annual economic impact Buckley has on the surrounding community is no small matter, said 140th Wing Commander Brig. Gen. Trulan Eyre.

"When our current [F-16s] time out, our flying mission could go away and we want to prevent that from happening here," said Colorado Air National Guard Director of Operations Col. Rick Martin.

"When the Air Force considers bed-down locations for the F-35, they're going to look at a lot of different issues," said Martin. "There won't be enough F-35s to go around, so every base that's flying fighters today won't be guaranteed to fly fighters in the future."

Two of the considerations for future flying operations are space for flight training use as well as how close the surrounding community has grown around the fence line – otherwise known as encroachment.

A number of factors create a "footprint" of noise around an installation with a flying mission, and many cities across the country use the size of the footprint to help determine what to do with respect to zoning and construction surrounding a military base. While this isn't a big problem east of Buckley yet, the anticipated noise footprint of the new F-35 fighter is expected to be larger than the current F-16 footprint.

"What we want to prevent happening is residential development in nearby locations that could prevent Buckley from being candidate for the F-35 mission," said Martin. "We want to buffer the base so that residential zoning and development won't potentially end our flying mission here."

In an effort to bring the issue home, legislators received an overhead tour of the base – which allowed them to examine potential encroachment areas – aboard UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters from 2nd Battalion, 135th General Support Aviation. The Colorado Army National Guard aviation unit is also concerned with the issue, as

Colorado Army National Guard aviation unit is also concerned with the issue, as encroachment affects its mission, as well.

“An Air Force base without a flying mission is vulnerable,” said Eyre. “If too many people complain about the aircraft noise near a base, the Air Force can shut down the mission.”

We’re trying to avoid giving the Air Force any reason to scratch us off the F-35 list, and encroachment and our noise footprint is one just one part of the big picture, Martin said.

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