

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
PRESENTATION TO THE COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
UNITED STATES SENATE

SUBJECT: UTAH TEST AND TRAINING RANGE ENCROACHMENT
PREVENTION AND TEMPORARY CLOSURE ACT

STATEMENT OF: MAJ GEN MARTIN WHELAN
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INSTALLATIONS

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The Air Force's operational capabilities are advancing at a rate that challenges the geographic boundaries of our ranges; these constraints compromise effective test and evaluation and our ability to conduct realistic and relevant live training. One important aspect driving the need for larger geographic containment is the increasing size of weapon safety footprints. Paradoxically, as precision guided munitions become more accurate and reliable, the safety footprints become larger in part due to design but also due to greater employment distances. For safety reasons, the Air Force must control, for the duration of a mission, access by non-mission related personnel and the public to areas where there is even a very remote chance that debris or components could land if the weapon employment went catastrophically wrong. The Air Force's enviable test safety record is testimony to this extraordinary level of caution.

In the last 20 months, the Air Force expended over 27,000 munitions in support of OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE, which is more than we expended during all of OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM. The Air Force's involvement in such combat operations is not expected to decrease in the future. A well-trained force and continued testing and training of our improved combat capabilities are critical to our continued success supporting these operations. Technological advances incorporated in both our legacy and newest combat aircraft, and the weapons associated with those systems, represent an unprecedented leap in combat capability. These advances enable crews to identify and engage multiple targets from greater distances with improved accuracy. The technology that enables the greater employment distances and the ever increasing precision in weapons require larger segments of range and airspace to maintain the historically excellent record of weapons test and training safety. Safely containing large footprint weapons testing, like that historically accomplished at the Utah Test and Training Range (UTTR), is especially challenging. Some standoff weapon footprints will soon exceed the capability of our existing range enterprise configuration to provide the superior live-weapons testing, tactics, and techniques and the procedures validation environment that has long been a US strategic advantage in capability and readiness. We are working diligently and creatively to overcome these limitations. In some cases, we have relied on modeling and simulation to accomplish specific events. In other cases, we simply accept certain levels of artificiality that degrade training quality for live events at the local and regional level. Given this gradual drift from realistic local training, it is imperative that we maintain certain irreplaceable live environments, like the UTTR, to accomplish those unique and uncompromising test and training events that require a highly relevant and realistic environment.

In the past and under select circumstances, the Department of Defense (DOD) components have assumed administrative jurisdiction over buffer lands, with full responsibility for land management. Generally, however, it is not efficient for the components to expend resources on full-time land management when all that is required is restricted access for short periods. Most military missions affecting extended buffer areas will only last a matter of hours; DOD component jurisdiction would result in significant additional restrictions on other government agencies and on compatible public uses such as recreation, hunting, and grazing.

As I previously stated, the Utah Test and Training Range provides a singular capability to test our advanced systems and to improve warfighting capabilities.

Additional with the first operational basing of the F-35 Lightning at Hill AFB, the current safety buffers will be insufficient to meet future test and training requirements. If enacted, S. 2383 would provide the Air Force the capability to employ larger safety buffers at the UTTR through the temporary closure and use of current Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land and any State land transferred to BLM. This capability would only be exercised when needed, thus resulting in fewer impacts on other Federal, State, and local agencies and the public. The Air Force and the Department of the Interior (DOI) would enter into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) to address the management of the affected lands, and no land would be transferred to the Air Force. Exercise of the new measures provided in the legislation would be limited to a maximum of 100 hours per year in increments of no more than three hours.

This bill is similar to legislation allowing the overlap of weapon safety footprints on the Cabeza Prieta wilderness in Arizona. The use of the Cabeza Prieta is an example commonly cited by the Air Force on how to successfully enable the military mission while minimizing the impact on other agencies and the public. We believe that the bill's concept of short, periodic closures would serve the public interest better than the alternative of a complete withdrawal, reservation, and closure of the lands at issue. The Air Force believes that this bill as it pertains to Air Force mission matters would achieve the needed capabilities; however, the Air Force acknowledges the Administration continues to have concerns about several provisions in S. 2383 (as introduced) that may create challenges for the effective management of these lands. We welcome the opportunity to continue to working with the sponsor and the Department of the Interior to address these concerns.