

The Case against the Condor Low Altitude Flights

On Saturday, November 14, the Massachusetts Air National Guard will hold a hearing in Farmington to receive public comments on their proposal to lower the floor of the Condor Military Operations Area from 7000 feet to 500 feet above the ground. The Condor Low MOA extends over 4000 square miles from Greenville to Bethel and will be used for low-level air combat training.

This proposal comes on the heels of a long series of base closings throughout our region. We seem to be entering an era where the military has no use for economically beneficial facilities in Maine but expects Maine to do its part while compromising its tourist economy and tranquility in order to "Support the Troops."

But what troops? Neither the Taliban nor Al Quaeda has an air force. The type of air combat training planned for Condor is irrelevant in Iraq and Afghanistan. Necessary ground support training is currently conducted in the Adirondack MOA, which is closer to the Massachusetts base and has the needed Army and Air Force facilities close by.

The Massachusetts Guard could easily conduct its low level air combat training by deploying to existing areas further west or by slightly modifying the existing low level area in the Adirondacks with far less impact on residents and their economy than in Western Maine. The reasons they don't are money and politics.

The Massachusetts proposal rules out deploying to an existing training area, as it would cost some \$1.2 million per year. They totally ignore what it might cost the Maine economy as they don't have to budget it - but we will. The land underlying Condor has a valuation of about \$8 billion. Consequently it yields an estimated \$120 million per year in real estate taxes. Just a one percent loss of this tax would equal the Massachusetts deployment cost.

The Condor region has robust tourist and second home industries, which contribute several hundreds of millions of dollars to the Maine economy and yield significant sales and payroll tax revenue. Converting the sky above into a low-level air combat area will most certainly have serious negative economic and tax impacts. The Massachusetts proposal makes no mention of these impacts.

Massachusetts Senator John Kerry reportedly arranged diversion of some \$22 million from the military Operations and Maintenance Budget to fund a memorial for Senator Kennedy. If these people are going to treat our military needs so cavalierly, why should the Western Maine people be asked to pick up the slack?

Mr. Guernsey is a former Chair of the Kingfield Planning Board. He presided over the permitting of the \$60 million Poland Spring bottling plant in Kingfield