

PEORIA REPUBLIC

MIDWEEK, DECEMBER 17, 2008

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OPINIONS

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PEORIA REPUBLIC

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OUR VIEW

Protection of Luke demands drumbeat of support

With a couple of lawsuits hovering around Luke Air Force Base, it's understandable that Attorney General Terry Goddard would want to reassure brass at the Pentagon of Arizona's unqualified support for the military base.

And that's exactly what Goddard and Peoria Mayor Bob Barrett recently did.

Their discussion with Air Force officials centered on local efforts to protect the base from encroachment and the potential of calling Luke the future home of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter.

Glendale Mayor Elaine Scruggs' absence on the trip was noticeable — especially since Glendale lives, breathes and preaches protection of Luke.

Scruggs was invited, but given her previously scheduled engagements and the tough financial times all cities are facing, it makes sense that she opted to turn down the trip.

But Goddard was already in Washington, and he wisely took advantage of an opportunity for a little face time.

Goddard and Barrett met with Gen. Norton A. Schwartz, Air Force chief of staff, and Michael B. Donley, secretary of the Air Force, to assuage any potential concerns about the yet unresolved lawsuits about development around Luke Air Force Base.

One lawsuit, filed by Goddard, with support from the cities of Glendale, Peoria, Surprise and others in the West

Valley, is aimed at effectively stopping Maricopa County from issuing permits that might threaten the mission of the base and its auxiliary fields.

It was a move meant to defend one of the country's greatest defenders.

Maricopa County has stopped issuing all building permits, awaiting a court decision on its lawsuit questioning the constitutionality of a 2004 state law. The law says that cities and counties must not issue residential building permits in areas affected by the noise of base operations or possible crashes.

The courts are expected to soon resolve the entire issue.

And as Valley leaders look ahead to the continued success of Luke Air

Force Base, there are reports of plans to take a contingent of West Valley and Arizona officials to Washington to show support for expanding the base mission with the F-35, the next generation of fighter jets.

We have urged the cities and state, while waiting for the lawsuit to be decided, to continue to lobby for protections for Luke, including providing for payments to property owners.

They are doing just that.

The defense of the base and other military installations in Arizona is going to require a steady drumbeat of support, a constant reminder that West Valley cities fully back the mission and viability of the base.