

Missile Ranger, Nov. 27, 2002 -- Pearce explores WSMR

By Donna Braun, Editor

Over the years, newly elected U.S. Rep. Steve Pearce has been thwarted and diverted by White Sands Missile Range. But on Monday, he was welcomed with open arms. Pearce spent the day touring the range and learning about its capabilities in order to perform his job in Congress.

Pearce said his first dealings with WSMR came when he was a student at New Mexico State University in the late 1960s. He said he would get stopped at roadblocks on his way to Las Cruces from his home in Hobbs.

Following his graduation from NMSU, Pearce served as a pilot in the Air Force. He flew C-130 and KC-135 aircraft on missions in Vietnam from 1971-1974. In the years following his military service, Pearce continued to fly privately. He said Monday's visit was particularly rewarding because he finally got to see a part of the state that has long been a mystery to the native New Mexican.

"I have flown for the past 30 years, and I have always had to navigate around the range. I have been in Truth or Consequences and needed to come to Alamogordo and have had to navigate all the way around the range. Since 1968, I have had to fly around the facility and today I finally got to see it. It is exceptional," Pearce said. "It was the culmination of 30 years of wondering 'what is it?'"

Pearce had received a brief orientation about the range during his primary campaign, but spent Monday learning more about the facility and its capabilities.

"I understood before about the uniqueness of the land mass that you have here, but I did not have any concept of the missions and of the actual things that were tested," he said. Pearce was impressed with what he learned.

"I fell like we were investing our money very wisely. As a person who takes my fiscal responsibility very seriously - we take taxpayer money and then we give it out - I want to see that it is well spent. I think it is well spent here for the United States as a whole and for the world as a whole."

"This is an exceptional place and it does require that money be spent here and it will help me prioritize my funding requests. I think what we are seeing here is extremely important. People want to know how we accomplished in 45 days what the Russians couldn't do in 10 years - it's our weapons systems. And the testing occurs right here, so obviously I place that high on my priority list," Pearce said.

Pearce spoke about the Army's Third Wave initiative and his views on privatizing government work.

"There are some things that don't privatize too well. I am pretty big on privatizing; but having said that, I am concerned that there are things that we don't want to privatize. I would be concerned about the availability of qualified and trained personnel in this area. Right now, if we have a shortfall we look around the military and we reassign them - they are used to that. That is not necessarily the case in privatized companies so I am concerned about that," Pearce said.

"I would like to see the performance standards before we begin to privatize, and I would like to see some actual performance evaluation. I know by my Air Force background

the IG will come in and hold the military to very strict tolerances, so I am concerned how that all plays out."

He said those concerns run beyond just the Army's plans.

"I have some pretty deep concerns. I have actually very parallel concerns about privatizing the air traffic controllers. I like the system – it works. If I can't find any better, I can only find worse," he said.

Pearce said he was impressed with the people at WSMR he met on Monday and the mission they perform.

"I just think that mission that they do is so exceptional and the way that they do it is above standard by far. I have a good friend who works here. We went to New Mexico State together then I went into the Air Force and he came out here. I had a distant association with the mission here and I have always thought the quality here was very good, but now I am convinced of it," Pearce said.