

TESTIMONY OF CONGRESSMAN TOM LATHAM (R-IA)

ON NATIONAL DEFENSE PRIORITIES

BEFORE THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

APRIL 17, 2012

Chairman McKeon, thank you for giving members the opportunity to bring their priorities and concerns to the committee in this open process. As you know, in order to meet the requirements of the Budget Control Act the Air Force intends to substantially cut its force structure, with a majority of the cuts coming from the Air National Guard.

Like you have expressed, I am also concerned that force structure changes are being recommended to Congress based purely on meeting the right budget number in the short term and not based on the national security environment or on finding a more cost-effective arrangement. I am greatly concerned that just one F-16 unit out of the entire Air Force, the Air National Guard's 132nd Fighter Wing in Des Moines, was singled out for elimination under the plan – with no justification given. The unit's performance is highly rated and it has won numerous awards. Its pilots average more than four combat tours and its skilled maintainers average a decade of experience. When I asked senior Air Force leaders why this unit was chosen, I was told simply that it was a "judgment call." Obviously I am concerned about the economic impact in Iowa and the future of those airmen, but I am most concerned that it appears the decision was made using non-strategic criteria, and that the greater cost effectiveness of relying on Air Guard units was completely ignored.

The decision would have three significant national security implications. First, eliminating these multi-role fighters and nearly 500 positions would be an irreversible decision. It takes at least 10 years to achieve the average level of experience of Guard pilots and maintainers. At the same time, in order to manage uncertainty about the future strategic environment, Secretary Panetta's new military strategy released in January insists on "reversibility" in any reduction in capabilities, ensuring they can be quickly regenerated if the

need arises. We must carefully consider whether to eliminate this expertise, because it will not be possible to reverse course as the security environment unfolds.

Second, the Air National Guard will be flying F-16s for many years, even decades into the future – indefinitely in fact, since the Air Force has yet to submit a long range Total Force structure plan and most incoming F-35 aircraft will be flown by the active components. So the Guard will need to maintain expertise in operating F-16s for a very long time.

Third, having an adequate number of fighter aircraft available now and in the future is critically important. Having the most advanced aircraft is important, but sheer numbers of airframes also matter, because an aircraft and its pilot cannot be two places at the same time and can only carry a limited number of weapons. We currently have the smallest and oldest air force in our history, which is a significant challenge given that the new military strategy places renewed focus on the Asia-Pacific region. In reference to the Air Force restructuring plan, according to the American Enterprise Institute, “No matter how capable weapons systems might be on an individual level, the Asia-Pacific domain demands adequate numbers of key platforms.” According to AEI, the considerable distances between bases and potential targets could spread aircraft too widely, limit dwell time over targets and limit fighter coverage. I agree with Senator Graham, who said recently on the Senate floor concerning the Air Force plan, that “keeping the ‘active duty-first’ approach will mean smaller and smaller forces that are stretched thinner and thinner, and cannot respond where and when we need them to.” Indeed, I worry that a continuous cycle of budget cuts targeting aircraft and personnel assigned to the Air National Guard would pose an unacceptable national security risk by limiting our ability to surge large numbers of aircraft.

Finally, there is the issue of making the most of each taxpayer dollar – which is precisely what Congress should be doing, and what the American people expect in response to the budget constraints. Air Guard F-16s bring greater experience and lower operating costs, for both personnel and infrastructure. Yet the Air Force proposal ignores the cost-effectiveness of the Guard as a way to achieve additional cost savings. They have relied upon what many believe is a flawed costing model, which compares deployed members only, and concludes that reservists cost more than active duty members. In contrast, the Air National Guard has developed a different costing method known as the airman cost effectiveness (ACE) model, which has been

used to show that Guard personnel are less costly at all stages of war. While costs are similar during a deployment surge, the Guard is drastically less costly than active duty forces during non-surge and post-surge periods – even at the ideal deploy-to-dwell times in each of those scenarios. For example, at post-surge deployment rates an Air Guard member can meet the same requirement for about one third of the cost, or about \$500,000 versus \$1.5 million in the active component over a ten year period. As for infrastructure efficiencies, the Air National Guard has access to \$5.9 billion in community airport infrastructure for \$20.6 million per year – the equivalent of renting a \$300,000 house for \$87 per month.

It is difficult for me to understand that there is serious disagreement on the issue of cost-effectiveness of the Guard and Reserve among our military professionals, but I believe it is something that must be worked out in order for us to make sound force structure decisions. The Department of Defense and GAO are currently conducting a new study on comparative cost-effectiveness mandated in last year's defense bill. The study will also examine what mix of forces could carry out the range of missions anticipated under the national military strategy. The results of the study are due to this committee in June of this year. Before we allow the Air Force to shift the active duty/reserve component mix back to the Cold War ratio of the early 1990s, we need to have these results.

There are alternatives to eliminating the 132nd Fighter Wing and to carrying out many of the other proposed reductions in the Guard. As you may know, the Council of Governors has suggested a series of detailed alternatives to the Air Force that would achieve the same cost savings through a more equitable distribution of reductions, and others have suggested alternatives such as reassigning more active duty fighters to the Guard. As we face a very challenging defense budget, let's work to minimize cuts to capabilities we need in the long term. I believe that the members of the committee understand the seriousness of this issue and I know they will do what is best for the future of our nation's defenses. Thank you.