

Congressman Cravaack's HASC NDAA Testimony [Final]

Thank you Chairman McKeon and Ranking Member Smith for holding today's important legislative hearing, and I thank the committee for kindly allowing Members of Congress to testify on our national defense priorities for the FY13 National Defense Authorization Act.

Mr. Chairman, the national defense issue that I would like to bring to your attention today pertains to NORAD's proposed reduction of the 24-hour alert mission requirement at two Aerospace Control Alert (ACA) sites in the Continental United States. It is my understanding that this proposal was submitted in line with the President's budget request for FY 2013 and the U.S. Air Force's decision to make force structure changes.

The 148th Fighter Wing of the Minnesota Air National Guard, also known as the "Bulldogs," operates out of Duluth, Minnesota, in my district, and is one of the two proposed ACA sites to have its 24-hour alert mission eliminated.

I think we can all agree that the ACA mission plays a crucial role in defending the sovereignty of our nation's airspace. In fact, the Bulldogs have performed this mission to the highest degree, protecting our nation from air threats that date back to before the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.

For its noteworthy contributions, the 148th was selected for the Raytheon trophy, formally known as the Hughes trophy, which is awarded for outstanding performance to an Air Force or Air National Guard fighter unit with a mission in air defense.

In fact, the Director of the Air National Guard, Air Force Lt. Gen. Harry M. Wyatt III announced just this week that the 148th Fighter Wing was selected as the 2012 Air Force Association Outstanding Air National Guard Flying Unit.

Therefore, I have great concerns that narrowing the mission of a unit nationally recognized for its high performance leaves our nation more vulnerable to attack. Specifically, there will be virtually no US armed force protection of our country's northern border between Madison, Wisconsin, and Portland, Oregon.

My greater concern, however, is that the proposed decision to reduce the 24-hour alert mission at these two ACA sites was based on analysis that could not adequately balance risk with targeted budget reductions.

Military commanders were forced to make painful decisions that jeopardized military readiness responding to what I consider draconian budget cuts.

These cuts have and will directly affect our national security and the security of our citizens.

In January 2012, GAO produced a report, titled "Homeland Defense: Continued Action Needed to Improve Management of Air Sovereignty Alert Operations," that reviewed NORAD's 2010 analysis on whether it could change the number and location of its fighter sites without affecting the military's ability to defend the country against airborne attack.

This report found that NORAD did "not identify potential cost savings that could result from eliminating a given number of sites."¹ This finding, among others, led GAO to conclude that:

Should NORAD, DOD [...] or Congress consider modifying the number and location of ASA sites in the future, without an analysis that balances both risks and costs, decision makers will be unable to make fully informed decisions about whether the potential cost savings (or increase) warrants the corresponding increase (or decrease) in risk.²

I recognize that our country's current fiscal reality necessitates the Department of Defense to tighten its belt and look for ways to do more with less.

¹ P.18 of report

² P. 18 of report

Congressman Cravaack's HASC NDAA Testimony [Final]

However, I think it is imperative that decisions that directly affect our nation's ability to defend itself should be made on the basis of risk-management principles that balance risk and costs.

Therefore, I support the NDAA draft language that Mr. LoBiondo has been working with the committee on, which would direct the Secretary of Defense to maintain our nation's existing eighteen ACA sites until the Secretary submits a report that shows the cost-benefit analysis and risk-based assessment of how future ACA changes would affect the DOD budget and force structure.

Again, thank you Chairman McKeon, Ranking Member Smith, and all members of the committee for allowing me the opportunity to testify today on my concerns regarding a critical piece in our nation's defense system.