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Congress of the United States
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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY
& COMMERCE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY

April 10, 2026

The Honorable Mike Rogers
Chairman
House Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
House Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Smith:

Thank you for providing Members with the opportunity to share our priorities for the Fiscal Year 2027 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Following a twenty-year career in the United States Air Force as a fighter pilot, National Security Council advisor, and retiring as a Colonel, the issues the NDAA addresses for our service members and our global security presence are of the utmost importance to me.

I am proud to represent both Goodfellow Air Force Base (GAFB) and Fort Hood, as well as the civilians supporting these historic and important installations. GAFB and Fort Hood play an integral role in ensuring our nation's readiness and maintaining our competitive edge in the great power competition. It is imperative that this Committee builds on the work done in the FY26 NDAA to refocus our military on lethality, support our servicemembers and their families, and strengthen efforts to counter adversarial nations. Specifically, GAFB's 17th Training Wing's distinct mission is to train, develop, and inspire 14,000 world-class fire-rescue, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) professionals annually. However, there is an immediate need to address quality-of-life issues. Unfortunately, GAFB is not the only installation in need of infrastructure renovations. In fact, of the 538 installations owned by the Department of War (DOW), 80 percent were built before 1970. I urge the Committee to continue building on the DOW's successes in its "Strategy for Resilient and Healthy Defense Communities" initiative and to bridge the gap between our current installation conditions and what our warfighters deserve.

Our warfighters are the best in the world, and it is our responsibility in Congress to provide them the equipment and capacity to maintain peace through strength. But we are asking them to fly the smallest, oldest, and most heavily used Air Force in our history. Ten aircraft types still in service first flew more than 50 years ago, accounting for roughly two-thirds of the inventory. The fighter force has shrunk by about 60 percent since Operation Desert Storm, and fighter pilots who averaged 22 flight hours per month in 1991 now struggle to reach eight. As a former fighter pilot, I speak from experience: the Air Force is the leading edge of the Joint fight, as we have seen throughout Operations Midnight Hammer, Absolute Resolve, and Epic Fury, but the system should be blinking red. We are achieving extraordinary results on a force that is wearing out faster than it is being replaced.

I strongly support the President's historic FY27 defense topline and the 42-percent increase in total resources for the Department of War. But within that topline, the Air Force must be prioritized. Chronic underinvestment in the Air Force has left the service dangerously short of aircraft, munitions, and trained crews. A significant share of Air Force funding is passthrough spending that does not generate Air Force capability. And after two decades in which the Air Force received roughly \$65 billion less per year than the Army, a single year of proportional increases cannot close a 30-to-40-year hole. Therefore, I urge the Committee to reject incrementalism and authorize a substantial increase to the Department of the Air Force topline above the President's request, fenced for procurement, readiness recovery, and force regeneration. That means restoring flight hours, rebuilding munitions inventories, increasing squadron capacity, and fully funding Weapon-System Sustainment, alongside stable, multiyear procurement of the F-35A, F-15EX, F-47, and B-21 Raider. Airpower underwrites the joint force's speed, reach, and survivability; a force that is too small and too old raises deterrence risk in peacetime and operational risk in war.

Furthermore, the passthrough problem is exactly why the Department of War's budgetary tables must be clarified to reflect each department's true allocation. I urge the Committee to direct the Department of War to place all "passthrough" spending in the "Defense-wide spending" account. The Committee should also direct the Secretary of the Air Force to provide Congress with standardized, recurring reporting on fleet health, mission-capable rates, and flight-hour execution. High-tempo deployments increase aircraft wear and reduce aircrew training opportunities, and without reliable data, the readiness gap only deepens.

Rebuilding the pipeline of warfighters must begin at our Service Academies. As Chairman of the U.S. Air Force Academy Board of Visitors, I sent our Semiannual Report to Secretary Hegseth in February, which delivers a strategic roadmap to strengthen the Academy. I urge the Committee to include Report Language directing the Secretary of the Air Force to conduct a feasibility study to return cadet end strength to 4,400 cadets. Additionally, our Service Academies must adapt to the new landscape of collegiate athletics, and I recommend that the Committee include the establishment of a Military Service Academy Panel on Athletics in the bill. I also request that the proposed provision concerning a Government Accountability Office audit of faculty composition be included in the NDAA. Furthermore, the Designated Federal Officer for the Service Academy Boards must have the authority to communicate with Congress, and I recommend the Committee include this provision in the NDAA. Moreover, the most capable aircraft in the world demands the most capable pilot, and I urge the committee to continue working with DOW to support scholarship and recruitment to our Nation's top institutions. Strengthening the Service Academies, expanding ROTC, modernizing talent management, and removing barriers that drive capable Americans away are all essential because people alone cannot compensate indefinitely.

Our institutions train our service members to adapt to any battlefield, but today's threats are adapting faster than our institutions. I urge the Committee to work with DOW to incorporate insights from Ukraine and from our conflict with Iran to modernize training and tactics, particularly in Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) employment and counter-UAS operations. As my friend Dr. Paul Schwennesen has put it, "We don't need a Pearl Harbor or 9/11 to wake us up. We are already awake; we need to deal with this now." That same UAS threat extends directly to the homeland. Building on the FY26 NDAA Sec. 1707 "COUNTER Act," I urge the Committee to extend 130i permissions to Title 32 (National Guard) so States have joint State and Federal authority to protect critical infrastructure from all threats.

Protecting that infrastructure also requires confronting "Greyzone Threats", hostile actions below the traditional threshold of conflict that target our civilians and the systems sustaining both our military bases and civilian life: hospitals, railroads, airports, and power plants. I urge the

Committee to support language strengthening our ability to defend against and counter these threats, and to continue supporting the President's success in nuclear energy and the deployment of Small Modular Reactors to harden that infrastructure. The same logic applies to our personnel security: I urge the Committee to close loopholes that allow unregistered agents of foreign adversaries, including former U.S. servicemembers and defense officials, to lobby in the United States while retaining active security clearances. Of greatest concern are individuals lobbying on behalf of Chinese military companies, who hold invaluable insights into U.S. military strategies, technologies, and vulnerabilities. Granting them continued access to classified information while they advocate for our adversaries jeopardizes sensitive data and compromises national defense. I ask that language be included to revoke the security clearances of retired or separated DOD personnel who lobby on behalf of foreign entities.

Separately, I urge the Committee to amend 10 USC 1370 to include "non-regular service" in the "highest grade" provision, so that Reserve Officers eligible for voluntary retirement may include satisfactory non-regular service in determining their highest grade.

This Committee also plays an important role in defending our greatest ally in the Middle East, Israel. The U.S.-Israel Anti-Tunneling program should continue to receive \$100 million to locate, map, and destroy illicit tunnels. In 2023, it was reported that over 1,500 new terror tunnel shafts had been built under hospitals, schools, and homes in Gaza, part of a network of 350 to 450 miles of tunnels with more than 5,700 entrance points. The technology developed through this bilateral program is used domestically on the southern border and around the globe to thwart smuggling and disrupt terror cells, providing invaluable operational information to protect our citizens from Narco-Terrorists. The FY27 Presidential Budget's request that DOW assist in

The FY27 NDAA presents a unique opportunity for Congress to fully address the myriad threats facing our national security and our men and women in uniform. Above all, this bill must end three decades of underinvestment in American air power. It is imperative that the important legislation meets the mark once again. Thank you for your full and fair consideration of these priorities. I look forward to working with you in future endeavors.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "August Pfluger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "August" and the last name "Pfluger" clearly distinguishable.

August Pfluger
Member of Congress