

Congressman Ron Barber
Testimony before Defense Subcommittee on Appropriations
April 4, 2014

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on a matter of deep importance to our national defense. As your subcommittee works on the Fiscal Year 2015 Defense Appropriations legislation, I urge you to include sufficient funding to keep the A-10 Thunderbolt flying and continue the operation, maintenance, and training of A-10 pilots within the United States Air Force, both active duty and reserve.

As you know, the President's Budget calls for the divestment of the A-10 fleet beginning in fiscal year 2015. If this proposal is adopted it will create a very serious gap in close air support and the A-10s other important missions that provide highly effective support to our ground troops.

The Warthog may be, as some have said, a bit ugly. But, regardless of its looks it is a solid and reliable airframe that is easily sustained at a low cost.

At its core, the A-10 represents a proven aircraft of unmatched survivability, maneuverability, and lethal armaments that is only surpassed by the deeply-ingrained close air support culture and expertise of its pilots.

No other fixed-wing close air support airframes are as proficient as the A-10 in conducting visual support operations below 1000 foot ceilings while being able to effectively target the enemy.

Our experience in Iraq and Afghanistan clearly demonstrates the A-10s well-documented capability to operate in rugged environments with low visibility while still providing effective close air support.

The Air Force would argue that other platforms in its inventory can replace the Close Air Support capabilities of the A-10.

While, the F-15, F-16, B-1, and B-52 are incredibly effective aircraft that are important components of the Air Force inventory, none of these platforms can fully replace the capabilities and focus of the A-10 in many Close Air Support situations.

The A-10's low altitude, slow flying speeds, and armored hull allow it to be more engaged on the battlefield than other faster, lighter, and higher altitude flying fighters.

Closer communication with ground forces makes the A-10's close air support more accurate and lethal. Further, the A-10 provides our men and women in uniform with added peace of mind as it stays close in sight and overhead.

On Wednesday, General Scaparotti, the commander of US Forces Korea testified in the House Armed Services Committee that as an infantryman he has benefited from the close air support the A-10 provides in combat, and that the airframe is an important tool in his area of responsibility due to the terrain in the Korean peninsula.

Additionally, General John Campbell, Vice Chief of Staff of the Army testified in the Senate Armed Services Committee by saying, and I quote:

“Commanding the 101st in Afghanistan, we had A-10 capability come in and provide close air support to our soldiers in very bad terrain. What I think the soldiers on the ground, both the special operators and conventional forces, would tell you it's a game changer.”

In recent years, Congress has approved the investment of significant resources to modernize the A-10 fleet – including state-of-the-art cockpit displays, digital data links, advanced targeting pod integration, full laser and GPS guided munitions integration, and the best integrated threat countermeasures.

These modernization efforts will help ensure that the A-10 can continue to provide one of a kind close air support for many years to come. A divestment of the A-10 would represent an irresponsible waste of the tax dollars that we have invested in the A-10 and would disregard congressional intent.

As the Department of the Air Force looks for ways to accommodate the budget cuts under the Budget Control Act, it is imperative that decisions are made with the needs of our ground troops and national security foremost in mind.

I urge you to sufficiently fund the A-10 mission so that we can most effectively protect our troops in combat and avoid a capability gap before our next generation of fighters is sufficiently fielded.

Until then, we simply cannot adequately support the warfighters we have on the ground without the A-10.

Thank you for your time and I yield back.