



Chairman Rodney Frelinghuysen

Subcommittee on Defense, House Committee on Appropriations

**FY 2016 Budget Hearing – U.S. Air Force
February 27, 2015
Opening Statement As Prepared**

The Committee will come to order.

This morning the subcommittee continues a series of defense posture and budget hearings with our military services, our combatant commands and other major components of our armed forces.

Our hearing this morning focuses on the Air Force budget request for fiscal year 2016.

It is my honor to welcome back to the subcommittee

- the Honorable Deborah Lee James, the Secretary of the Air Force,
- and General Mark Welsh III, Chief of Staff of the Air Force.

Welcome to you both and thank you for your leadership and service to our great nation.

The Air Force's budget request this year reflects a determined commitment to modernization. There are several key investments in the future fleet of fighters and bombers, the nuclear enterprise, and other important missions from the KC-46 tanker to the Combat Rescue Helicopter.

At the same time, this budget seeks to recover readiness in the wake of recent budget turbulence, and reverse years of decline in end strength.

Unfortunately, the variable that will have the biggest impact on your budget next year, and for years to come, is not a part of your request.

The Subcommittee has heard me say this before and I will say it again: unless there is a dramatic legislative change, the law of the land will require the Appropriations Committee to mark up bills this year to the level dictated by the Budget Control Act – the BCA.

In the case of the Air Force, President's base budget request is roughly \$10 billion above the funding level projected under the BCA.

So I need to say right up-front that we'll all need to work extremely closely together to ensure the funding appropriated for the Department is sufficient to take care of our airmen and maintain your readiness at the highest possible level.

As we build our FY '16 bill, we'd like to have your input. Make no mistake: the Committee will cut \$10 billion with you. Or we will cut \$10 billion without you.

I must also mention that this budget makes some decisions that many in Congress will resist, such as your renewed proposal to divest the A-10.

I understand that the Defense appropriations bill is a zero-sum product, and every money-saving proposal the Congress declines will have to be made up for elsewhere, taking money from some other priority.

Throughout the process, we are committed to ensuring that the decisions we have to make are fully informed by the best advice our military leadership can provide. And we will continue to call on you to give your most frank assessment of how living at BCA levels over time might affect this nation's security—and how that would have to be managed.

Again, welcome to you both. Your written testimony will be entered into the record, and I look forward to a dynamic and informative discussion this morning.

I now would like to turn to the ranking member, Mr. Visclosky, for any opening remarks he would like to make.

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