

Members' Day Testimony- Rep. Earl L. 'Buddy' Carter (1st District of Georgia)

Thank you for this opportunity to share with you my concerns and priorities for the military installations within Georgia's First Congressional District. It's an honor to represent a district which houses four major military installations, every branch of the military, and thousands of veterans who have served our country so honorably. With this unique military footprint, the district's defense elements are important not just to our state and region but to the nation and America's interests around the world.

The First District is the proud home of Ft. Stewart and Hunter Army Airfield. As the largest Army installation east of the Mississippi River and home to the "Rock of the Marne," the 3rd Infantry Division (ID), Ft. Stewart has a long and storied past as well as a vibrant role in today's national defense missions. Its level of significance and contributions continues to be a point of pride for the district, from spearheading of the advance into Baghdad during Operation Iraqi Freedom to the deployment of soldiers to West Africa to help contain the Ebola outbreak. Today, as I speak, the 3rd ID is deployed to Afghanistan and Eastern Europe.

With the Army's planned manpower drawdowns, the maintenance of effective troop levels and missions sets at Ft. Stewart has become a very concerning issue. I've heard discussions about reducing the total number of Army Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs) nationwide and additional manpower cuts which could affect the 3rd ID by the reduction of one or even two BCTs. Such reductions would be a severe blow to the ability of the 3rd ID, Ft. Stewart and Hunter to provide their extraordinary capability to our national defense.

Fort Stewart and Hunter are uniquely equipped and strategically located to deliver a devastating blow to our adversaries world-wide. It has vast training areas, modern facilities and

an extraordinary network of intermodal deployment options through nearby ports and on-base and nearby airports. For those reasons and more, I am requesting that the Army broaden its evaluation of Fort Stewart and Hunter with regard to BCT reductions. That should include factors such as cost efficiencies of operations and speed of deployment, the regional training capabilities with other installations, and community support.

The regional capabilities and multi-service resources include another unique resource of national significance located in the First District-- the Townsend Bombing Range (TBR). TBR is itself owned by the Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort and operated by the Georgia Air National Guard. Townsend is integral not just to the State of Georgia but also to the Air Force, Navy, Army, Air National Guard and Marine Corps elements that use it. Recently, I've learned that the Air National Guard (ANG) Headquarters has signed over the operational control of TBR to the USMC because of the apparent ANG inability to devote the necessary personnel resources for the expansion of the range. While we're excited that the range is expanding to accommodate 5th generation fighters like the F-35, there are concerns about access to the range by other services and the provision of adequate resources to address community concerns. Two counties in my district, Long and McIntosh, are in discussion with the USMC about compensation for losses to their tax digests, and I am working with the Marine Corps to secure clarification on a number of related questions and issues.

Nearby Fort Stewart, my district proudly includes the Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base, located in St. Mary's, Georgia. Kings Bay is the home port for the Atlantic ballistic missile submarine fleet. The fleet of submarines located at Kings Bay plays an indispensable role in our nation's security as an element of the nation's nuclear triad. It is currently home to 8 Ohio-class submarines, 6 of which are ballistic missile submarines and 2 of which have been converted to

guided missile submarines. While these submarines fulfill a critical role in nuclear deterrence and readiness, they will soon be reaching the end of their expected timeline and a replacement will be needed. The last guided missile submarine is expected to be retired in 2028, leaving the Navy with a 60% reduction in in undersea strike capacity.

The first Ohio-class replacement submarine was originally scheduled to be procured in FY2019, but necessary deferments by the Navy have pushed back that timeline. This means that there may be a gap in the retirement of the Ohio-class boats and the procurement and production of its replacement class of boats. Because of this, I submitted a programmatic request in support of the Department of Defense's budget line of \$1.391 billion for the Ohio replacement development in accordance with the President's budget.

The Virginia-class fast attack submarine is another major program with a critical role in the defense of our nation and our Navy. With the Ohio-class replacements on the horizon, Virginia-class submarines will continue to fulfill a larger role in the submarine fleet, especially with their life expectancy projected to reach as far as 2070. The Virginia Payload Module (VPM) is a cost-effective way to preserve our undersea strike capacity by adding expanded capabilities and armaments to the Virginia-class submarine fleet. With the rise in development and procurement of anti-access and area denial systems, undersea strikes will, through necessity, assume a more dominant role in future conflicts. It is through an expansion program, like the Virginia Payload Module, that we would be able to effectively maintain our capabilities while assuming cost savings until a guided missile replacement can enter service. The development of the Virginia Payload Module must continue to ensure that all Block 5 boats procured in Fiscal Years 2019 through 2023 can incorporate the capabilities of the expansion. This will help to ensure that we don't have a loss in undersea strike capabilities between the retirement of the

Ohio-class submarine and the procurement and construction of its replacement boat. It is for all these reasons discussed that I am requesting \$168 million for the development of the Virginia Payload Module.

Moody Air Force Base located in Lowndes County is currently home to the 23rd Wing of the Air Combat Command as well as the 94rd Air Ground Operations Wing. The A-10s, operated by the 23rd Wing, have been providing critical close air support (CAS) for our ground troops since they first entered service in the 1970s. It is this unique ability to perform effective close air support that has garnered the A-10 with high accolades in recent theatres of conflict, including Iraq and Afghanistan. As we speak, A-10s are flying CAS missions against ISIS advances in Iraq. In an article dated from January of this year, Iraqi News reported that “the aircraft sparked panic in the ranks of ISIS after bombing its elements and flying in space close to the ground.” This combination of abilities and its record of survivability against defensive platforms have earned it many supporters over the years and has elevated the airframe to a level of CAS that is unmatched by anything in our fleet of aircraft, including the untested F-35 in CAS missions.

Plain and simple, the A-10 is the only aircraft of its kind that can effectively accomplish its mission of protecting our troops while loitering around the battlefield for any additional support that may be needed by ground forces. The A-10 platforms provide a cost-effective and proven mission set that is fully capable of filling a role that no other airframe can accomplish to that degree. With the F-35 untested in the CAS role, we cannot afford to retire the A-10 airframes, especially with no how much life is left in the planes. That’s why I am requesting your support of full funding for the A-10 fleet in the Fiscal Year 2016 Defense Appropriations bill.

I also would like to discuss United States Marine Corps (USMC) procurement. The Marine Corps is a service that has learned to do more with less. Their procurement process is often different than the other services because they service a wide range of missions for a smaller force. The engineer equipment currently in use by Marine Corps operators is insufficient in today's wartime environments and doesn't provide adequate protection for those Marines who are in harm's way. In addition, the committee has previously recognized the need for versatile engineer vehicles, especially backhoes, for expeditionary forces and for homeland support missions. It is for this reason that I am requesting to provide an additional \$15 million for the USMC's Engineer and Other Equipment procurement account.

Lastly, I want to address improved camouflage systems and their role to the services in future conflicts. Current camouflage netting systems do not afford proper concealment against enemy threats, specifically short-wave infrared (SWIR) sensors. Research and development of next generation systems is essential for our military to maintain the edge against our adversaries in multiple environments. For that reason, I have requested report language encouraging development of new and improved camouflage netting systems that will thoroughly provide protection for our troops.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony to the Subcommittee today. With our rich military heritage, these issues are extremely important to me and my constituents in the First District of Georgia. I'm very proud of the men and women who serve in our military and it is my intention, as I am sure it is yours, to do everything possible to ensure they continue to be the best equipped, most highly trained, and well cared for fighting force in the world. I appreciate your attention to these requests and thank you again for the time today.