

Testimony of the Honorable Glenn ‘GT’ Thompson (PA-5) Before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense

March 15, 2016

Chairman Frelinghuysen and Ranking Member Visclosky,

Good morning and thank you for your continued dedication to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense. I recognize the challenges placed before the Subcommittee and appreciate your ongoing commitment to our soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, coast guardsmen and reserve forces. As the father of an Army staff sergeant and vocal supporter of our nation’s defense programs, I am grateful for the opportunity to share my FY17 priorities.

Despite the military drawdown, our nation continues to recruit volunteers to join the ranks and regenerate our Armed Forces. While our Military Entrance Process Stations do a great job examining the physical health of incoming recruits, experts have acknowledged an information gap when it comes to behavioral health.

To address this issue, I have advocated for improving military suicide prevention, by proposing a mental health assessment for all incoming recruits to be used as a baseline for evaluations throughout their careers. This legislative proposal, known as the Medical Evaluation Parity Service members or MEPS Act, received bipartisan support and was included in the Fiscal Year 2016 National Defense Authorization Act.

While the MEPS Act has no negative budgetary impact, CBO has indicated it would require a small increase in appropriations to implement and fulfill. Accordingly, I urge the Subcommittee to fund Consolidated Health Support Programs within the Department of Defense at the Administration’s at adequate levels.

Not only is it vastly important for us to properly screen our veterans prior to their service, it is also our shared duty to make lifesaving resources accessible to them when they return home. For this reason, I support the development of new technologies that connect healthcare providers to information, patients, and other providers to provide better care – especially in rural and underserved areas.

In light of recent technological advances, evolving telemedicine programs and the authority given to the Department of Defense by Congress, I request strong financial support for both the Medical Information Technology Development Program and Medical Technology Development Program within DOD Defense Health Programs.

It is undeniable the DoD has demonstrated their willingness to work hard to improve the lives of military members and civilians alike. Medical research conducted within DoD has led to lifesaving breakthroughs and the development of effective treatments for a myriad of conditions.

While we work to assist our service men and women who are here with us, we must keep in mind that more than 80,000 American citizens who served in the Vietnam War, Korean War, and World War II are still missing in action. For those who made the ultimate sacrifice, their families and loved ones deserve no less than our greatest recovery efforts. Diligent work, planning and sufficient funding is necessary. In order to continue to provide grieving families the opportunity for closure, I respectfully request that the Subcommittee supports robust funding for the Defense POW/MIA Office.

In tandem with providing adequate support services to all of our servicemen and women, we must also recognize the value of encouraging innovation in the U.S. defense industrial base.

The Manufacturing Technology, or ManTech Program, is intended to improve the productivity and responsiveness of the U.S. defense industrial base by funding the development, optimization, and transition of providing manufacturing technologies to key naval suppliers.

Specifically, in Pennsylvania's 5th Congressional District, Penn State's Applied Research Laboratory manages two ManTech Centers of Excellence, the Institute for Manufacturing and Sustainment Technologies, and the Electro-Optics Center. The work accomplished by these partnerships includes basic and applied research and technology demonstrations and the facilitation of technology commercialization. I would appreciate the committee looking favorably upon these programs.

Finally, an issue that has been of great concern to me and other members of the Pennsylvania Delegation - the expansion of Russia's geopolitical aspirations through their positioning as a regional energy giant.

A current case in point is in the development of the Army's new medical center at the Rhine Ordnance Barracks installation area. This hospital, budgeted at nearly \$1-billion, is to be the replacement for the aging medical complex in nearby Landstuhl. Now in the advanced state of planning, no final decision has been made on the energy source for furnished heat for the medical facility, which will serve U.S. uniformed and civilian personnel based on three different continents.

I thank the Chairman and Ranking Member for their understanding that domestic sources of U.S. energy will ensure that U.S. interests are secured abroad.

I have language that will be submitted along with support from the Pennsylvania delegation and other like-minded members, who know that we cannot simply leave Russia to be the supplier of energy to U.S. military installations. Failure to address these concerns could leave our service men and women serving overseas in a new and very literal, "Cold War."

I look forward to working with the committee as the appropriations process moves forward and thank you for the subcommittee's continued commitment to our military and defense of this great nation.