

Testimony to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense (HACD)
Representative Ann Wagner (R-MO)
March 15, 2016 (as prepared)

Chairman Frelinghuysen, Ranking Member Visclosky, and Members of the Subcommittee. I want to begin by thanking you for your steadfast commitment to our Nation's most pressing national security matters. In that vein, I want to highlight the growing stresses on and demands for United States Navy tactical aviation.

As you know, the ongoing wartime operations against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) have greatly increased the operational tempo of our tactical aircraft. The carrier based aircraft – F/A-18 Hornets and Super Hornets, have been the backbone of our force projection and engagement.

Last year the Chief of Naval Operations testified that his Navy faced a shortage of operational aircraft. This is commonly referred to as the tactical aviation shortfall. Congress – and your Committee led the way – addressing part of this challenge with added aircraft in Fiscal Year 2016.

However, the President has not budgeted to take on the challenge more robustly in this year's budget. Only 2 Super Hornet aircraft were added in the OCO, in response to training and operational losses. The Fiscal Year 2018 budget shows a demand for 14 more aircraft, but there still is a potential gap this year.

These actions taken to address the tactical aviation shortfall are not enough. That is why the Chief of Naval Operations has provided Congress with an "unfunded requirement" request for 14 additional Super Hornets above the President's Budget.

There remains a shortfall of at least 36 Super Hornet aircraft. Given the critical capability that the Super Hornet provides for ongoing wartime operations, any shortfall is dangerous to the Navy's ability to project force throughout the world.

This unfunded requirement request helps mitigate that shortfall, anticipating that the Navy will follow through on its promise to add aircraft in next year's budget deliberation.

In addition, the addition of these Super Hornets keeps a key production line open for capable strike-fighter aircraft in St. Louis which supports 5,000 local jobs.

In years past, your committees have been incredibly responsive to the warfighter's most pressing needs. The budget and its unfunded requirement request demonstrate how important tactical aviation is to the Navy's mission.

The Super Hornet is providing that critical capability today at the most affordable cost.

I ask that you urgently consider the Navy's unfunded request and add 14 F/A-18E/F Super Hornets to the President's Budget to address the tactical aviation shortfall and the warfighter's needs.

I look forward to working with you throughout the year on this issue. Thank you for consideration of this request.

We ask that you take into consideration the recent demands placed on Naval tactical aviation as you consider the President's Budget request for Fiscal Year 2017.