

Representative Wm. Lacy Clay - Missouri, 1st District

Testimony to the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee (HACD)

Thursday, March 9, 2017

Chairwoman Granger and Ranking Member Visclosky, it is an honor to be with you today offering support for the men and women in our armed forces. This is the third year in a row that I have testified, and I appreciate the opportunity to let my voice and that of my constituents be heard. Even without the benefit of the Fiscal Year 2018 budget yet, it is important to let you know my priorities.

Last year, I testified in front of this Subcommittee about the Navy's tactical aviation shortfall, and supported the Chief of Naval Operations call for more strike fighters to fill that requirement. This Subcommittee responded by adding both F/A-18E/F Super Hornets and F-35Cs in its markup. Since then, it has become well known that the Navy and Marine Corps are facing readiness challenges to more than half of its aviation fleet. Significant delays in maintenance and sustainment of legacy aircraft have created a readiness crisis. On top of that, higher than expected utilization rates of the Super Hornet has only exacerbated the strike fighter shortfall. This trend needs to be reversed quickly.

The near-term solution to this challenge is twofold. First, procure additional F/A-18E/F Super Hornets with upgraded capabilities to meet the threats we face in the 2020s and beyond. The Block III Super Hornet will complement the F-35C by bringing enhanced networking capability, extended range and increased number of weapons into battle. I believe that the Navy's budget will show an investment in these modernized aircraft and how they can support carrier operations for decades to come. Second, the Navy should invest in sustainment of the

existing fleet of Super Hornets, a plan that the service has worked on, but will finally implement in the upcoming budget. Extending the life and capabilities of these older aircraft, paired with new Super Hornets, will immediately help fill the strike fighter gap.

After several years of congressional support, I expect the Navy to take action to budget for these solutions. Congress has provided a life preserver to the Navy, but it is time for the Navy to step up.

St. Louis is one of the Nation's premier homes for tactical aviation, an area of expertise that I know the Chairwoman knows a great deal about in her own district. I'm proud that my district is the home of the Super Hornet, and the men and women that work on the aircraft are proud for what they do for the warfighter. Their efforts are in service to the Navy and to their country. They also understand the critical role that Congress plays in ensuring that the Navy has the most capable and cost effective fleet of aircraft.

I hope that the Fiscal Year 2018 budget submission includes the procurement of at least 24 new Super Hornets, and that the Subcommittee can support them in your markup. The strike fighter shortfall is a serious issue that can and should be addressed. I look forward to working with you throughout the year, and I have been a strong vote yes for the work that this subcommittee has done each year.

Thank you for offering this opportunity to discuss my national security priorities.