

Testimony of Rep. Trent Kelly (MS-01) before the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Defense

March 9, 2017

Chairwoman Granger, Ranking Member Visclosky, and Members of the Defense Subcommittee, thank you for the time to share with you my priorities for the Fiscal Year 2018 (FY18) defense appropriations bill. I have served in the Mississippi National Guard for the past 31 years. In 1990 I mobilized for Desert Storm as an Engineer Second Lieutenant. In 2005 I deployed as a Major to Iraq with the 155<sup>th</sup> Brigade as the Operations Officer of the 150<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion. From 2009 to 2010, I deployed as a Lieutenant Colonel to Iraq as the Battalion Commander of Task Force Knight of the 155<sup>th</sup> Brigade Combat Team and commanded over 670 troops. I represent Columbus Air Force Base, where half of all Air Force pilots are trained. I am not someone who needs to be convinced of the unsurpassed importance of our national defense or the significant work you have before you in deciding how to best fund our military.

As a member of the House Armed Services Committee, I have heard firsthand from our military leaders and national security experts regarding the threats we are facing around the globe and how well equipped we are to address them. I am greatly concerned about the readiness crisis facing our armed forces. General Daniel Allyn, the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, testified last month regarding this issue:

*“An unintended consequence of current fiscal constraints is that the Army can no longer afford the most modern equipment, and we risk falling behind near-peers in critical capabilities. Decreases to the Army budget over the past several years significantly impacted Army modernization. Given these trends, and to preserve readiness in the short term, the Army has been forced to selectively modernize equipment to counter our adversary’s most pressing technological advances and capabilities. At the same time, we have not modernized for warfare against peer competitors, and today we risk losing overmatch in every domain.”*

General Allyn is not alone in this assessment. General Stephen Wilson, Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force, testified that, “Today we find ourselves less than 50 percent ready across our Air Force and we have pockets that are below that.” Readiness of our military must be addressed. My priorities reflect the importance of rebuilding our armed forces to ensure we can defend ourselves.

At all times, but especially under current conditions, the contributions of the National Guard cannot be overlooked. These men and women train and stand ready to defend our nation at a moment’s call. In my district, the Mississippi National Guard has an Apache company based in Tupelo. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 149<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment has Apaches in both Houston, TX, and Tupelo, MS. Due to the Army Restructuring Initiative (ARI), Tupelo may lose its Apache

company over the objections of both the Mississippi and Texas National Guards. The Guardsmen in Tupelo are dedicated, capable, trained, and professional. I would put their expertise and skill up against any other company in the military. If the Army chooses to move these Apaches, they have admitted the loss of readiness would take up to five years to regain. In our current climate, I do not think anyone here would say that is acceptable. With the threats we are facing now, we cannot afford to make decisions that will only make matters worse.

Instead, I urge the Committee to take action to ensure that combat units have access to the equipment they need, and that National Guard Apache battalions remain equipped with 24 helicopters and that number not be reduced.

I am committed to working with you to ensure our military is the strongest fighting force in the world, and I am happy to provide you with any additional information you may need.