

The Honorable Glenn “GT” Thompson
Pennsylvania’s 15th Congressional District

Testimony before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans
Affairs, and Related Agencies

Member Hearing on Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2020
Tuesday, April 2, 2019 at 10:00 a.m. | HT-2, The Capitol

Chairwoman Wasserman Schultz and Ranking Member Carter:

Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to share my priorities for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 with the House Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee. As the father of an active-duty soldier who received a Purple Heart during Operation Iraqi Freedom, and a strong supporter of our nation’s service members, I appreciate your willingness to receive my testimony.

I recognize the challenges facing this Subcommittee and appreciate your ongoing support for our service members, both active and retired. These brave Americans put their lives on the line regularly in the defense of a higher cause, so we have a responsibility to support them in the strongest and most responsible way possible.

While I certainly understand that the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs have the best interests of our troops in mind, our oversight role is necessary to ensure these Departments stay on the right course.

Specifically, the Army Corps of Engineers’ work to construct the Rhine Ordnance Barracks Army Medical Center in Germany, or “ROBMC,” concerns me and warrants additional oversight.

The ROBMC is a new hospital being constructed in Kaiserslautern, Germany that will serve injured troops from AFRICOM, EUCOM, and CENTCOM. It is located less than two

miles from the flight line at Ramstein Air Base and will be the most strategically important military hospital outside of the continental United States. It will cost the American taxpayers more than \$1 billion.

Congress fully understands the strategic importance of this hospital, but also recognizes its vulnerabilities. One of the main vulnerabilities is its potential reliance on Russian-sourced natural gas. According to the Energy Information Administration, Germany imported 40 percent of its natural gas supplies from Russia in 2015 and this percentage has only increased since. Just last year, Germany bought more natural gas from Gazprom, Russia's state-owned gas company, than any other nation. Considering Russia's willingness to use its energy exports as a political tool in the past, we need to ensure our military installations are not subjected to Russian interference.

As a result of Germany's increased reliance on Russian natural gas, Congress included language in both the FY18 and FY19 National Defense Authorization Acts (NDAA) that limits Russia's influence over our military bases in Europe. The FY18 NDAA called on the Department of Defense to limit the use of Russian-sourced energy at military facilities in Europe as much as possible. The FY19 NDAA took these concerns a step further and specifically cited the ROBMC and its energy supplies. It called for the Medical Center to be fueled using a mixed-fuel source that is domestically-sourced when possible, and that limits the use of Russian gas. The mixed-fuel source is particularly important, as it ensures energy security through the diversification of fuel sources.

The Army Corps is working in direct contravention of these laws. It is planning the construction of an on-site cogeneration plant that will only use natural gas to produce the hospital's electricity and hot water backups. This is contradictory to Congressional intent and an

illogical, costly path forward. The Army Corps insists on moving forward with this single-sourced plant despite Congress's previous actions calling for a mixed-fuel energy source.

It is also an illogical approach to ensuring energy security for the hospital. The Army Corps is planning on using Russian-sourced natural gas as a redundancy for disruptions in Europe's natural gas supply. These disruptions, however, are most likely to be caused by Russia's willingness to shut off gas supplies to Western Europe. This is an irrational approach to energy security and poses a major threat to the American troops serving in the three Areas of Responsibility that the hospital will serve.

I respectfully request the committee's consideration in including language in the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill that limits funds for the construction of the ROBMC's on-site cogeneration plant— not the rest of the hospital — until the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers can certify that it is in compliance with U.S. statute.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be here today and I look forward to working with you as the Appropriations process moves forward.