

Opening Statement of Chairman McKeon

WASHINGTON— The House Armed Services Committee held a hearing today on [The Fiscal Year 2014 National Defense Authorization Budget Request from the Department of the Air Force](#). Chairman Howard P. "Buck" McKeon made the following opening statement as prepared for delivery:

Witness testimony can be found on the [Committee Document Repository website](#), or linked below. All witness testimony is as prepared for, and embargoed until delivery.

"Good morning. The committee meets today to receive testimony on the President's fiscal year 2014 Budget Request for the Department of the Air Force. I am pleased to welcome Secretary Donley and General Welsh. With It takes great leadership to guide people through this kind of uncertainty and our nation is fortunate to have you as our nation's "flight leads." Thank you for your outstanding service as you continue to tackle these incredible challenges.

"After reading your budget materials, I was struck by the fact that in fiscal year 2013 your active duty end strength was 329,500 – a number which makes the Air Force about the same size it was when it became a separate component in 1947 and yet the world is certainly a different place today. Your fiscal year 2014 request reduces end strength to 327, 600. I worry about this; especially as we consider the strategic implications of recent events on the Korean peninsula where airpower plays such a critical role in assuring our national security interests. As you say in the budget materials, you're attempting to trade "size for quality" but quantity often has a quality all its own, particularly in the vast expanse of the Pacific. At some point, we all must recognize that the assumption of mission risk will be too great. I hope you will highlight your concerns regarding this issue in your testimony and provide more detail about where you see this trend going into the future.

"I also hope you will discuss the recent announcement of unit stand downs across the Air Force and its implications for force readiness. It could take years to recover from this decision, because your people will not be able to train. This complicates an already seemingly untenable situation after nearly two decades of procurement reductions or deferrals for the Air Force and the resulting risks of maintaining an aged fleet of aircraft. With pilots not training, depot maintenance not being done, and the continued reduction of new aircraft procurement we must ask ourselves where the "breaking point" is and what we need to do to prevent it. How much risk is too much?

"I am encouraged by the request for the Air Force's three most important modernization programs—the KC-46A tanker, F-35A, and Long Range Strike Bomber—that those programs are budgeted to stay on track. But the effects of sequestration in fiscal year 2013 could result in a potential \$1.6 billion bow wave in research, development, test and evaluation, and a \$1.3 billion bow wave in procurement. The fiscal year 2014 budget request does not provide any margin to repay programs that will be sourced to pay for critical readiness in fiscal year 2013. Air Force modernization cannot wait for the next big up-tick in defense spending.

"We are in difficult time and we must make hard choices. Your testimony today will go a long

way to help this committee and others in Congress make the right choices. Thank you, again, for being here."

Witnesses

The Honorable Michael B. Donley

Secretary of the Air Force

- Witness Statement [[PDF](#)]
- Witness Biography [[PDF](#)]

Gen. Mark A. Welsh III, USAF

Chief of Staff, U.S. Air Force

- Witness Statement [[PDF](#)]
- Witness Biography [[PDF](#)]