

Rep. Phil Gingrey, M.D. – FY14 HASC Testimony Submission

May 8, 2013

Mr. Chairman, as you and the other Members of the House Armed Services Committee work to craft the Fiscal Year 2014 National Defense Authorization Act, I want to bring forward an issue of critical importance to the safety of our troops in theater.

Over the past decade, while many servicemen and women have survived an initial ballistic or blast event in a combat or combat support vehicle, many of them ultimately sacrificed their lives due to post-event fire. Since 2003, according to U.S. Army reports, over 800 military burn casualties have occurred in support of Overseas Contingency Operations. This is simply unacceptable when technologies are available today – and in development – that can prevent these horrendous occurrences.

Unfortunately, in addition to physical and psychological trauma that is associated with post-event fires, thermal injuries cause significant impact ranging from loss of tactical freedom of maneuver, and there is a subsequent negative ramifications on recruitment and retention efforts, equipment losses, and the aggregate cost to the military, particularly when the consequences of these events could be avoided.

The aviation community adopted standards and specifications (such as MIL-DTL-27422) to define survivability that have successfully prevented thermal injuries. I would ask the Committee to consider similar measures department wide through Thermal Injury Prevention Strategies (TIPS). TIPS will model its focus on thermal injuries as other efforts have focused on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). Much like the consequences from these conditions, the problems associated with Thermal Injury are intolerable to the individual, the Department of Defense (DOD), and our country.

This is why I am making this request of the Committee for language to be included in the FY14 NDAA. Survivability enhancements have been applied to aviation and ground platforms to protect our troops from injury and deaths due to fires. Technologies like fuel containment, fire retardants, fire suppression, fire prevention, and personal fire protection can improve occupant safety and the chances for vehicle survivability.

Accordingly, I would ask the Committee to direct the DOD to establish threshold and objective survivability requirements and standards for TIPS on ground platforms using demonstrations and analysis to ensure that in otherwise humanly survivable events, lives are not lost to post-event fires. This should include, but not be limited to: fuel containment, fire retardants, fire suppression, and personal protection. Furthermore, DOD must be compelled to report back to all Congressional Committees with a plan for implementation of TIPS requirements and standards into ground platforms within six months of enactment of the FY14 NDAA.

Mr. Chairman, we owe that to the men and women who put themselves in harm's way to defend our freedom. Thank you for your consideration.