

House Armed Services Committee
National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015
Wednesday, April 9, 2014
2118 Rayburn House Office Building
Statement for the Record by Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers

I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony to the House Armed Services Committee. While America stands at a crossroads, our commitment to freedom, security, and to our service men and women and their families who have and continue to protect our nation must remain. As such, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015 must continue to further these commitments.

Afghanistan and the Middle East – along with turmoil in the Asia-Pacific region, Africa, and Eastern Europe – demonstrate the need to ensure that our total force has the tools they need to remain successful. This includes support for the National Guard members and Reservists who play an instrumental role in our nation's military strategy. We also need to translate these successes here at home – strengthening TRICARE, increasing support for spouses and children, and providing support to our veterans who have honorably served. We need to remember that when a service member joins the military, it is not just a job – it's a family commitment to our country.

In my district, there is no better example of these contributions and needs than Fairchild Air Force Base. Home to more than 4,700 military members and 1,100 civilian personnel and their families, Fairchild houses the Air Force's 92nd Air Refueling Wing and the Washington Air National Guard's 141st Air Refueling Wing. As such, Fairchild is vital to our nation's aerial refueling effort and a key component to the Air Force achieving global-level reach. Additionally, over time, the aviation missions at Fairchild have been complemented by the development of the Air Force Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape (SERE) school and the Joint Personnel Recovery Center.

Recently, I have had the privilege of meeting with members of Fairchild Air Force Base, military and community stakeholders to discuss future needs. In the course of these meetings, the following key issues have been emphasized.

First, the importance of authorizing funding for the KC-46 refueling tanker program. The Air Force currently maintains two refueling tankers, the KC-135 and KC-10. A recent inventory conducted by Air Mobility Command reveals that the newest of the Air Force's KC-135 were delivered in 1965, nearly *fifty* years ago. We know that refueling tankers play an integral role in our military operations, allowing the Air Force to achieve global-reach, and asking the current tanker fleet to support a 21st century defense operation is unacceptable.

While the Air Force and the Department of Defense will continue to operate in a restrained fiscal climate for the upcoming fiscal year, the importance of funding key modernization programs cannot be understated. The KC-46 refueling tanker program is the Air Force's first step to recapitalize the aging KC-135 fleet. It is the Air Force's number one acquisition program. Additionally, the Air Force has worked closely with the contractor to ensure that the program remains on schedule and the fixed-price incentive firm contract continues to be a model of a sound fiscal approach to an acquisition program of

this magnitude. Therefore, I urge the Committee to authorize funding for this program at a sustainable level in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015 to ensure that our air mobility operations remain superior.

Second, the importance of maintaining the Air National Guard (ANG). The ANG has and continues to play a critical role in our air operations – particularly as it relates to national security and emergency response operations. Members of the ANG have served and continue to serve on the front lines of our overseas military operations, at the same time responding to the needs of their local communities. I urge the Committee to continue to examine the contribution and cost savings associated with the ANG and provide appropriate authorization levels.

Third, the importance of investing in the Air Force SERE school. The 336th Training Group, located at Fairchild Air Force Base, is home to the Air Force's *only* SERE school. The SERE School offers 22 different courses to 20,000 students each year.

The SERE school also houses the 36th Rescue Flight which services two purposes. First, the 36th Rescue Flight provides additional training to more than 3,000 students, including live rescue hoist training, para drop demonstrations, and combat rescue procedures training for students in the basic Combat Survival Course. Additionally, an aircraft and crew are on stand-by twenty-four hours a day, six days a week to provide medical evacuation coverage for students and instructors.

The 36th Rescue Flight also supports the National Search-and-Rescue (SAR) plan by conducting SAR and medical evacuation missions in a four state region (Washington, Northern Oregon, Idaho, and Western Montana). The unit utilizes the *only* hoist-equipped aircraft and Night Vision Goggle-qualified aircrews in the Inland Northwest. On average, the unit responds to 15-20 calls for assistance each year and has been credited with saving over 650 lives since its inception in 1971. I urge the Committee to continue its efforts to support the SERE school and the 36th Rescue Flight.

While I recognize the need to reduce costs, I do not believe the reduction should come at the expense of maintaining a strong national defense. I appreciate your consideration of these issues.