

Rep. Roby Testimony for HASC

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Rightly or wrongly, Congress has imposed on our military certain budget constraints that will require our commanders to make very tough decisions. Congress has asked them to do more with less, and to maintain a delicate balance of readiness, end-strength, and modernization.

I believe that the United States Army is endeavoring to do just that, and I want to recognize Army leaders for their efforts.

As you know, Army aviation provides critical capabilities to our commanders in the field. Army helicopters directly engage the enemy with devastating force. They move critical cargo and troops to the frontlines. And, when every second counts, they offer lifesaving transportation for our wounded warriors.

In response to budget cuts, the Army set out to review its aviation strategy in order to exploit efficiencies without compromising operational capability. The starting point was the reality that, in a time of smaller budgets, the number of combat air brigades must decrease. The end result is the Aviation Restructure Initiative, or ARI.

I have closely monitored the development of ARI since last fall, and I believe it is the right solution for Army Aviation given current fiscal constraints. ARI ensures that the Army is able to retain its most modern, capable, and survivable aircraft, while divesting legacy helicopters that are increasingly more expensive to operate and maintain. With the growth of unmanned aircraft capabilities, ARI also allows the Army to capitalize on new technology and harness the potential of teaming man helicopters with unmanned systems. This partnership will play a growing role in the future of Army Aviation.

ARI reduces the aviation fleet by almost eight hundred aircraft, with approximately eighty-six percent of those coming from the active duty component. Furthermore, by reducing the Army aviation fleet from seven to four types of aircraft, ARI will save money that can be redirected to modernizing our best utility, attack, and cargo helicopters. Importantly, ARI also enables the Army to continue the development of aviation programs such as Future Vertical Lift.

These are, however, benefits beyond simple cost savings.

As the Army Aviation Center of Excellence, Fort Rucker trains hundreds of new army aviators on an annual basis. These pilots—the best in the world—are the most important assets that an Army aviation brigade takes into battle.

Today, new students at Rucker begin their training on old, civilian style helicopters that have been flying since Richard Nixon was President. Tomorrow, under ARI, students at Rucker will immediately begin training in modern aircraft, complete with glass cockpits and dual turbo shaft engines. These aircraft operate much more similarly to the Apaches, Blackhawks, and Chinooks that Army aviators fly in operational units. The result is better training and likely a reduction in overall training time.

Given the reality of the situation, I believe that ARI is a logical answer to a difficult question. It will provide Army Aviation with the most capability while mitigating sustainment cost. It also ensures that the Army has the most flexible aviation force to accomplish the mission when our nation calls.

Thank you.