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## Congress of the United States House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-3224

April 13, 2015

The Honorable Mac Thornberry  
Chairman  
House Armed Services Committee  
2208 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Adam Smith  
Ranking Member  
House Armed Services Committee  
2264 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

### Statement for the Record regarding the National Defense Authorization Act of 2016

Chairman Thornberry, Ranking Member Smith, esteemed Members of the House Armed Services Committee:

I stand before you today to advocate at Hancock Field Air National Guard Base. For those of you who are unfamiliar with Central New York, Hancock Field is a modern facility with very high military value. The strategic location of the base, high recruitment and retention rates, and infrastructural investment of more than \$150 million in military construction over the past 15 years, establishes Hancock Field as an important asset to our nation's military. Hancock Field is a joint facility hosting two Air Guard units – the 174<sup>th</sup> Attack Wing and 152<sup>nd</sup> Air Operations Group – and the Army Guard and Reserve and MEPS facility. The region's Navy and Marine Reserve units are co-located next door to Hancock Field. Fort Drum is just minutes away by RPA - and is home to a multi-million dollar Air National Guard range. The 174<sup>th</sup> manages the range and dedicated training air space over the Adirondacks used by several units from outside the State of New York. Combined, Hancock Air National Guard Base has attributed an economic impact of more than \$700 million to New York over the past three years and is crucial for the local economy in Syracuse, New York.

The 174<sup>th</sup> serves as one of three Formal Training Units (FTU) for remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) in the United States Air Force. With the proliferation of Unmanned Aerospace Systems in our nation and abroad, I believe it is imperative that we fully maximize the capacity of training bases for RPA pilots. The potential shortage of pilots was emphasized by Air Force Chief of Staff General Mark Welsh when he stated that the Air Force could only train approximately 180 of the 300 necessary RPA pilots. Hancock Field serves a vital role in combating this potential shortage by producing over 50 combat trained crews and 300 trained MQ-9 mechanics annually.

Recently, I had the pleasure of addressing the importance of the 174<sup>th</sup> with Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter at Syracuse University. I discussed with him the tangible benefits that the 174<sup>th</sup> provides not only to the Syracuse community but to Central and Upstate New York as well. There are many partnerships with Hancock Field, including conducting drills at Fort Drum and collaborating with NUAIR and the Air Force Research Laboratory Information Directorate at Rome.

This summer, Hancock Field will be the first Air Guard location to test Ground Based Sense and Avoid radar with the FAA. Currently, Air Guard units are prohibited by the FAA from flying their RPAs in the National Airspace System without an alternate means of compliance with FAA rules to “see-and-avoid” other aircraft. This requirement has restricted RPA operations to only those ANG units with immediate access to Restricted Airspace. This forces ANG units to base their Launch and Recovery Elements (LREs) far from their assigned bases, increasing the cost of training and limiting the amount of flight time available for pilots. For example, the 174<sup>th</sup> is forced to drive two hours each way from Syracuse, NY to Wheeler-Sack Army Airfield at Fort Drum, NY to launch and recover their MQ-9 Reapers for daily training missions.

Procuring and installing a DOD approved Ground Based Sense and Avoid (GBSAA) system that is both scalable and transportable at each ANG unit’s base of operation would increase the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of aircraft training. The Army has a GBSAA system that is an approved solution to UAS airspace integration by the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the FAA. The GBSAA system will allow each unit to locate their LRE at their base of operation, reducing the cost of training and increasing the operational efficiency of each unit. The objective is to ensure readiness of the Air National Guard MQ-9 RPA fleet.

As many of you know, DHS and the Air Guard have been trying to formulate a long-term partnership involving shared maintenance training and operational support for RPAs between Customs and Border Protection and the Air Guard. This potential partnership would save the taxpayers millions of dollars and leverage the investment in facilities and manpower at Hancock Air National Guard Base.

Thank you for allowing me to speak in front of this committee and I look forward to working with you to protect our national security assets.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John Katko", with a stylized flourish at the end.

John Katko  
Member of Congress