Testimony Before the House Armed Services Committee
Congressman David B. McKinley, P.E.
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Thank you, Chairman Thornberry for the opportunity to speak before the House Armed Services Committee today. As your Committee begins the process of crafting the critically important annual National Defense Authorization Act ('NDAA'), I would like to bring to your attention the crisis facing our nation's solid rocket motor ('SRM') industrial base. This issue affects not only our national security, but also American manufacturers and the continued supply of the nation's premier air-to-air missiles.

As I have previously informed the Committee, limited new tactical missile programs, coupled with few planned upgrades to existing tactical missile programs, have placed the domestic industrial base of SRMs at risk. The situation has been made worse by outsourcing rocket motor production to foreign suppliers. My simple ask for you today is that the Committee include language in the NDAA to ensure that every US military tactical missile program that uses solid propellant as the primary propulsion system include at least one (1) American domestic rocket motor supplier. This change will not only help safeguard a vital industrial capability, but help guarantee competition which ultimately delivers much needed technical innovation and cost efficiencies.

Since the mid-1980s, the number of US domestic producers of tactical SRMs has declined from five (5) suppliers to two (2). Two main factors have contributed to this decline: (1) a significant reduction in the number of new tactical missile programs developed and produced and (2) the volatility from year-to-year of planned missile purchases, which causes financial uncertainty and inefficiencies in the marketplace. Existence of a struggling, at-risk SRM industrial base has been highlighted in numerous Department of Defense and Congressional Committee reports, which have been provided for your staff.

Aggravating the industrial base situation are instances in which missile programs have used foreign SRM suppliers. For example, the US military's primary air-to-air missile, AMRAAM, relies solely on a Norwegian supplier despite desires of the Air Force to have two suppliers. Reliance on a single, foreign supplier is an inherent national security issue and is a considerable risk in terms of supply chain vulnerability and cost containment. Further, not sustaining an American SRM industrial base now will only impede the future development of missile systems. The Defense Department's own analysis estimates that new programs could be delayed by 5 to 10 years or more should we lose domestic SRM production capability and the US will need to reconstitute its propulsion design and engineering capabilities. Simply put, SRM design and manufacturing is a highly technical and specific field, and if we lose American know-how and capabilities, it will take years of time and money to get it back.

As this Committee knows well, a constrained defense budget limits the number of weapon programs that can be started or upgraded. This is especially true for tactical missiles where SRM designers and manufacturers have undergone dramatic "right-sizing" to match reduced market demands. Nevertheless, the SRM industry remains at risk and thus any program delays or outsourcing of work has an amplified impact on an industry which relies on several key single-source sub-tier suppliers. Increased support of a shrinking SRM industrial base is warranted given the limited number of new and planned upgrade missile programs that are identified in the out-year budget. A Department of Defense policy that ensures that at least one (1)US SRM supplier be required for every US missile program that is designed, developed and used by our military will encourage competition, drive down costs and reduce a glaring national security risk.