

Testimony of Representative Mike Bost
Member of Congress
12th Congressional District of Illinois
Before the House Committee on Armed Services
April 14, 2015

Chairman Thornberry / Ranking Member Smith, thank you for the opportunity to address you on a matter of great importance to the continued warfighting ability of the United States Navy, and the preservation of an important component of our nation's defense industrial base.

The current state of overseas turmoil makes it more imperative than ever that Congress acts to ensure that our military has the platforms and capabilities it needs to meet multiplying and diverse threats to the national security. Specifically, Mr. Chairman, I am addressing the critical need of the United States Navy for additional strike fighters.

As you know, the F/A-18 Super Hornets are executing critical strike missions against ISIS and other al-Qaeda affiliated terrorist entities. The rate at which these aircraft are being used is four times their original anticipated rate of use. As a consequence, strike fighters are rapidly approaching the end of their useful lives.

I would also like to add that the newer EA-18G Growlers are providing unique and essential electronic sensing and attack capabilities to United States and coalition forces.

In recent testimony, Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Greenert stated that the Navy is experiencing a serious shortfall of between 24 to 36 Super Hornet Aircraft. The primary causes of this shortfall are the above mentioned rate of utilization and issues with the speed of repairs to Legacy Hornets at the depots.

The Navy's inclusion of 12 F/A-18 aircraft in their "Unfunded Priorities" list reflects the service's realization that without additional strike fighters the Navy may be faced with a shortage of operation-ready aircraft that will negatively impact ongoing and future operations.

The F/A-18 is currently the only operational strike fighter line in the United States, and is a significant national security asset we should act to protect.

Unfortunately, the aircraft's production line is at a critical juncture. Without Congressional action, it may close.

The inclusion of 12 additional strike fighters in the Defense Authorization Act will enhanced the national security value provided by the existence of the St. Louis area defense industrial base.

The F/A-18 Super Hornet and EA-18G Growler program line represent more than 60,000 U.S. jobs with 800 supplier partners throughout 44 states.

In closing, prudence requires we keep and maintain the F/A-18 Super Hornet and EA-18G Growler production lines. These aircraft are vital to maintaining the capabilities of the Navy. I strongly urge the Committee to authorize the Navy's request for an additional 12 F/A-18 aircraft for the coming fiscal year.

Once again, I thank the Committee for the opportunity to address you on this matter. As a former United States Marine, I look forward to working with you to ensure our warfighters have the equipment and capabilities they need to protect our nation.