

Rep. Ellmers Testimony

April 13, 2015

FY15 NDAA HASC Member Testimony Day

I. Introduction

- Thank you Chairman Thornberry and Ranking Member Smith for allowing me to testify today before the House Armed Services Committee.
- My staff is happy to follow up on any issue and provide additional information.

II. 440th Airlift Wing

- Mr. Chairman, I am the proud representative of the Second District of North Carolina, which is home to Fort Bragg.
- I would like to draw attention to an incredibly shortsighted decision the United States Air Force has made – which is the deactivation of the 440th Airlift Wing located at Pope Army Airfield in Fort Bragg.
- The 440th Airlift Wing is the only C-130H model wing in the country that the Air Force is choosing to close completely—and this is occurring at the busiest airfield in the world for training requiring tactical airlift.
- The Air Force wishes to remove all organic airlift from Pope Army Airfield and away from the 18th Airborne Corps and the 82nd Airborne Division's Global Response Force as well as Army Special Forces Groups.

- This is a decision that essentially takes the air out of airborne, as planes have been located at Pope since 1954.
- The removal of the 440th Airlift Wing at Pope Army Airfield not only lacks strategic merit but it injects avoidable and unreasonable risks into the readiness of some of the most unique and rapid deployment forces our nation's military has to offer.
- To say that I have serious reservations and concerns regarding this decision is a severe understatement.
- This ill-conceived proposal comes at a time when our nation is facing growing uncertainty abroad that could require a military response that only forces at Fort Bragg can provide.
- This Joint Mission was formed over the last eight years to provide Airborne and Special Operation Forces with easily-accessible and high-quality training so they can carry out any mission they are asked without the tyranny of distance that is often created by bureaucratic, logistical and operational delays.
- Dismantling this local Airlift Wing for the use of out-of-state aircraft is a mistake, and it is ultimately a decision that will damage our nation's military readiness.
- Eliminating the ability to rapidly mobilize, train and deploy with local commanders, aircrew, and aircraft that have an established relationship with our most in-demand forces increases risk at an unacceptable rate.
- The Air Force has repeatedly assured me that this will not impact military readiness but the very client the Air Force serves — the 18th Airborne Corps — disagrees.

- I have spoken with Lieutenant General Anderson, the commanding General of Fort Bragg, and there is a true feeling that this decision will impact his training abilities.
- This issue is **not** a partisan issue—but a national security issue.
- I am pleased to say that my North Carolina colleagues have rallied around me in both the House and the Senate in a bipartisan manner in order to prevent the Air Force from making this poor decision.
- I brought this fight to the attention of former Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel and current Secretary Ash Carter.
- Just within the last month, I sat down with both North Carolina Senators and we met with the Secretary of the Air Force Deborah James and Chief of Staff of the Air Force General Welsh.
- It is my hope this Committee sees the vital role that the 440th provides in maintaining the readiness and operational standards of paratroopers and special forces stationed at Fort Bragg.
- Mr. Chairman, I respectfully request that you maintain the mission of the 440th Airlift Wing and its C-130s.

III. Conclusion

- In closing, I believe it is more important than ever that the United States maintain its military superiority and continue to be the dominate force for freedom in the world.
- Thank you Chairman Thornberry and Ranking Member Smith for allowing me to speak before this distinguished committee and for

all of your hard work supporting our armed forces and military families.

- I look forward to working with this committee on the challenges facing our military.