

Testimony before HASC regarding F/A-18 Super Hornets

Tuesday, April 14 @ 10:00am

Representative Ann Wagner (MO-2)

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, I want to first extend my appreciation for the work that you do. As the proud mother of a son serving in the United States Army, and representing thousands of constituents that wear the uniform, I know firsthand the importance of this Committee's work for our national security as you begin to debate our defense priorities for the coming fiscal year. Thank you for the opportunity to talk about a key defense priority for the United States Navy – and our nation – the F/A-18 Super Hornet.

The past two years I've become very familiar with the Navy's tactical aviation capabilities. Last year, this Committee responded to the Navy's requirement for more electronic attack capabilities by providing 5 EA-18G Growlers in the Fiscal Year 2015 National Defense Authorization Act. Congress then added 10 additional Growlers on top of that during the appropriations process, and those aircraft will provide a warfighting capability that no adversary can match. Growlers will keep our Navy equipped to overcome enemies today and in the future in all threat environments. For that, I would like to say thank you.

Today I am here to support adding F/A-18 Super Hornet aircraft to the Fiscal Year 2016 NDAA. As you know, the Navy submitted an "Unfunded Requirement" for 12 F/A-18 "F model" aircraft. In testimony, the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), Admiral Jonathan Greenert, stated that the Navy has a "Super Hornet shortfall" of at least two or three squadrons – the equivalent of 24-36 aircraft. An aging fleet of legacy aircraft, the delayed operational deployment of the F-35 program, and the higher than anticipated utilization of Super Hornets in combat are contributing to this shortfall. To this last point, the Super Hornet is truly the workhorse of naval combat operations against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). By some estimates, the Super Hornets today are flying four times the anticipated rate. It is an absolutely critical, in-demand weapon against our enemies. To exacerbate the shortfall challenge, the Navy has lost 15 Super Hornets and Hornets over the past 5 years to battle or training losses – aircraft that have not been replaced by the Navy or Congress.

The strike fighter shortfall identified in the Unfunded Requirement request is not a new issue to the Navy. We all wish that the President's Budget request included additional F/A-18 Super Hornets, and we all expect the Navy to address the total extent of the shortfall in subsequent budgets. However, without aircraft in Fiscal Year 2016, the F/A-18 program faces a line closure decision. The F/A-18 manufacturing line is the only aircraft production with the ability to build operational strike fighters for the Navy today and AEA aircraft for the entire Department of Defense. Without it, the Navy couldn't address its shortfall, nor could it add Growlers in the future. Recall that there is likely a larger, joint requirement for more EA-18G Growlers that is pending further analysis. I would not be in front of you today if funding additional aircraft were not so vital to our warfighting capabilities. Adding aircraft and keeping the F/A-18 line alive is the right thing to do to keep our military personnel safe and to keep our country and allies safe.

I have provided a copy of a House letter signed by myself and my colleagues requesting additional aircraft. These are Members who have stood by the Committee to support defense authorizations in years past. I have also added a copy of the "Unfunded Requirement" highlighting the Navy's request for 12 aircraft. I ask that both of these documents be submitted as part of my written testimony.

In closing, I urge you add 12 F/A-18 aircraft to ensure the Navy can protect our nation now and decades to come. I look forward to working with this Committee and supporting final NDAA legislation as it moves through the House of Representatives. I stand at your service and thank you for yours.