

**Member Testimony Submission**  
**Congressman Keith Rothfus (PA-12)**  
**House Armed Services Committee**  
**National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017**  
**March 1, 2016**

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Chairman Thornberry, Ranking Member Smith, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for holding this hearing today and for receiving my testimony on the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2017. In an increasingly dangerous world, there is no greater constitutional responsibility of Congress than “provid[ing] for the common defence” of our nation. Yet, meeting this obligation has become increasingly difficult in recent years due to avoidable and unnecessary fiscal constraints.

It is a result of these constraints that our military has been forced to implement policies like the Army’s Aviation Restructure Initiative (or “ARI”), which I have long opposed. As you may recall, I have appeared before this Committee each year since ARI was first proposed to raise the alarm that the plan is dangerous, shortsighted, and will significantly harm our national security.

Specifically, ARI will have devastating impacts on the National Guard, stripping it of its Apache helicopters and ensuring that it will be less combat-ready and less able to provide operational depth. It will also deprive our nation of an operational reserve for these aircraft, which is essential to the retention and management of talented aircrews. Post-9/11, the National Guard has become a highly experienced and capable combat force. Yet, ARI represents a fundamental shift in the nature and role of the National Guard and runs counter to the wisdom and preference of many members of Congress and their constituents.

This conclusion is bolstered by the recent report and recommendations offered by the National Commission on the Future of the Army (NCFA). I joined my colleagues in urging this Committee to create the NCFA to offer a deliberate assessment of the proper size and force mixture of our armed forces. The NCFA was specifically directed to address ARI, and after extensive discussion and analysis, the commission soundly rejected the Army’s plan.

Instead, the NCFA proposed an alternative plan to maintain four National Guard Apache battalions equipped with eighteen aircraft each. The plan also proposes to add two Black Hawk battalions to

the National Guard. In the commission's opinion, this offers "significant advantages" relative to ARI by providing greater wartime capacity, improved operating tempo, higher wartime surge capacity, and contributing to a key goal of "achieving one Army that works and trains together in peacetime and, if necessary, fights together in war."

Last year, I fought to ensure that the Army could not move forward with ARI until the NCFA had completed its work and Congress had sufficient opportunity to consider the commission's report and recommendations. That time now has come; Congress must act. We must finally put an end to ARI, implement the well-thought-out recommendations of the NCFA, and retain a minimum of four Apache battalions in the National Guard.

Of course, the question remains how these aviation assets will be distributed, and there are some who argue that the battalions should be located in single states. I would caution against that approach and instead point to the many positive benefits that come from multi-state units, such as the agreement that was reached between my home state of Pennsylvania and South Carolina. Similar agreements have been reached between Texas and Mississippi and between Arizona and Missouri. Under the terms of such agreements, one state would retain a battalion headquarters and two companies of Apaches; the other state would retain the remaining company.

By expanding the footprint of the Apache battalions, the National Guard will maximize its ability to recruit and retain talented pilots and crew from different regions of the United States. Multi-state units will also ensure that National Guard companies can regularly participate in collective training and maintenance with the Regular Army, thereby advancing the Army's objective for Total Force integration. Finally, multi-state units will provide strategic "grow-back" depth in the National Guard should the need arise in the future to reestablish additional Apache battalions, such as the 1-104th, that have been disbanded. While addressing current fiscal constraints is important, we must proceed in such a way that will maximize our readiness and ability to surge in times of war.

Time and again, the brave members of the National Guard have risen to the occasion and heeded the call to defend our nation, both at home and abroad. By taking the steps that I have identified here today, we in Congress can ensure that they may continue to do so for years to come.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you this morning, and I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.