

Congressman Rick Crawford

Testimony before the House Armed Services Committee: EOD Priorities for the FY2018 NDAA

Good morning Chairman Thornberry, Ranking Member Smith, and distinguished members of the Committee. Once again, I am here to testify before the committee regarding Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) priorities for the Fiscal Year 2018 National Defense Authorization Act. I served in the Army as an EOD technician and I am proud to be a co-chair, along with Members Susan Davis, Brian Mast, and Tim Walz, of the House EOD Caucus.

EOD duties are a small, but critical capability within the Department of Defense. They provide support to the United States Secret Service for VIP Protection. They respond to unexploded ordnance on and off their installations. They assist public safety authorities with rendering safe improvised explosive devices as well as rendering safe chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons.

The first priority for the Caucus is to re-engage last year's EOD acquisition reform. Last year, Representative Davis submitted an amendment that would have established a permanent Joint EOD Research, Development, and Acquisition program, under the supervision of the Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics (AT&L). During conference with the Senate, this reform measure was changed to enable DOD to examine the current program and provide recommendations. The Department's findings were to leave the current program as it is. This means DOD's oversight of the EOD technology and training program is performed by the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, not the Undersecretary of Defense for AT&L.

This is troublesome because the oversight officer's position is scheduled to be eliminated. Additionally, the current system of acquisition causes the Services to coordinate on their equipment needs, but then they each have to compete separately through the four Service requirements systems in order to field what is called "Joint common equipment." This duplication of effort results in inefficiency and increased costs to the taxpayer.

More importantly, the current system has completely failed to deliver critical equipment, such as x-ray's, robots, and electronic jammers, to the field. Instead, each Service is buying commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) items to meet its needs. The Radiographic Imaging System for EOD (RISEOD) program is fielding systems that are not compatible with Windows 10 software, are routinely delivered with 50% of the systems broken or unusable, and is so poorly thought out that the Joint EOD Technology Center issued a safety of use message saying that using the system could, under certain threats, cause injury to the user. The Army needs an additional \$37.5M to purchase these COTS systems. This failure to deliver essential equipment that meets requirements on schedule has created a reliance on various COTS solutions that are not joint and will create a logistics nightmare for the joint force commander when deployed.

We on the Caucus urge the Committee to work with your Senate colleagues to develop a real joint EOD RDA program under the appropriate supervision of the Undersecretary of Defense for AT&L, with a funding line managed by the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, in order to ensure proper accounting and funding of a small, but critical capability and appropriate budget justification documentation to ensure proper oversight.

The Caucus also continues to be concerned with the capacity of the Army EOD program. Over the past fiscal year, roughly one third of the Army's EOD force has been cut. Current military deployments to the Middle East have decreased in the past years, but the threat of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) are not going away at home or abroad. IEDs remain a cheap, easy to assemble, and effective weapon that can have a strategic effect. Many briefings talk about the elimination of chemical or biological weapons, but virtually no mention is made of the EOD men and women who are qualified to disable, defuse, and dismantle these weapons. While working with HASC staff, we noticed very little EOD capacity identified in specific operational plans. We are concerned that the EOD capability is being overlooked in various plans, which will result in a lack of capacity when we need it. We recommend limiting the further reduction of the Army's EOD forces to match that of other sustainment capabilities.

The capacity cuts and lack of EOD planning is caused by a lack of appropriate EOD senior leaders within the Army. Many of the Army's higher headquarters, such as the Corps and Army level, have no EOD officer to conduct planning. Additionally, the lack of an EOD General Officer continues to hamstring the further development of this important capability within the Army. Therefore, the Caucus urges HASC to consider establishing an EOD Branch within the Army sustainment community, with a Brigadier General as the Chief of that Branch. We fully understand the difficulty of creating a new general officer position, and recommend, as Congress did with other newly created branches, giving the Army a limited exclusion to the general officer cap for the purpose of manning a new branch.

The National Guard's Civil Support Teams (CST) are the first line of defense for individual states in the instance of a Chemical, Biological, Radiological, or Nuclear threat. However, EOD technicians are a missing and much-needed element. The Caucus recommends a National Guard EOD Program which will authorize full time National Guard EOD positions enabling the National Guard to provide 24/7 EOD support to protect our Nation. This will also allow EOD technicians transitioning out of the active component, who currently have limited options, to transition into the National Guard.

Finally, the Caucus is submitting an amendment to merge various USNORTHCOM elements into a US Northern Command Joint Task Force for EOD and Counter-IED. The purpose of the Task Force would be to provide appropriate oversight of EOD immediate and deliberate response to civil authorities in case of a national emergency, such as an IED campaign against the United States.

Thank you for the opportunity to present my testimony today. I look forward to working with the Committee in the near future to craft legislation that supports EOD in their mission to defend the homeland and our interests abroad. I remain available to the Committee for further assistance on EOD matters, and I thank you for your consideration.