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DEMOCRATIC POLICY AND
COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

DEMOCRATIC STEERING
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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1317

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Testimony on National Defense Priorities

Thank you Chairman Thornberry and Ranking Member Smith for providing this opportunity to provide testimony essential to Illinois' 17th Congressional District.

As you prepare the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019, I want to draw your attention to three key issues:

- Relief for the widows and widowers of our servicemembers killed in action;
- The need to continue critical upgrades to the Air National Guard's fleet of C-130H aircraft; and
- The importance of keeping the Rock Island Arsenal strong and supporting advanced manufacturing.

In October 2016, Sergeant Douglas J. Riney of Fairview, Illinois, was killed in action in Afghanistan. His wife Kiley and her two young children were living in Texas where Sgt. Riney was assigned before his deployment. In a time of heartbreak, Kiley decided the family would move back to Illinois as they mourned his loss and adjusted to life without him. She knew that was the right choice for her family, but doing so meant paying costly fees to her landlord to cancel their lease early.

We should do everything we can to make life easier for families who've lost a loved one in military service. These families have made the ultimate sacrifice, and they deserve our support. The last thing they need is to be punished for having such a drastic change in their lives.

Through the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, Congress protected servicemembers from lease termination fees when they deploy or receive a permanent change of station. We should extend these same protections to widows and widowers when they lose their spouse in military service. I ask that you use this year's National Defense Authorization Act as the opportunity to ensure that these families are protected in their time of need.

Next, I want to commend the Committee's work to support critical upgrades to our nation's fleet of C-130H aircraft like those flown by the 182nd Airlift Wing of Peoria, Illinois. As you know, these aircraft are critical to the Air National Guard's mission at home and overseas. As you craft this year's bill, I ask that you continue your work to accelerate the modernization of these aircraft, including upgrades to their avionics, engines and propellers.

Finally, I hope you will use this year's bill to help ensure that adequate work is given to our nation's Army arsenals to keep their workers' skills sharp and maintain readiness. Sufficient workload is critical to ensuring our arsenals can continue supporting our warfighters for years to come.

I am proud to represent the Rock Island Arsenal in Congress. Located on the Mississippi River between Illinois and Iowa, the Rock Island Arsenal has been one of our nation's vital military assets and an integral part of the Quad-City region's economy since the Civil War.

In addition to several critical commands, Rock Island is home to the Joint Manufacturing and Technology Center (JMTC). JMTC is the only remaining foundry within the Department of the Army. In 2013, it was named a Center of Industrial and Technical Excellence for foundry operations. As such, it is unique within the Department of Defense, with the equipment and skilled workforce capable of taking raw material and transforming it into equipment that can help protect our soldiers across the world. In an unpredictable international environment, keeping this capability within the Department of Defense is critical. It allows our armed services to adapt to changing needs and emerging conflicts quickly.

In order to make that capability as strong as possible, we must ensure that Rock Island Arsenal and other industrial facilities within the Department of Defense have the necessary workload to maintain critical capabilities and hone new ones. In this year's National Defense Authorization Act, I ask you to include policies that will support that workload and give these facilities the flexibility they need to succeed. As a nation, we cannot afford to let the workforce's critical manufacturing skills decline or disappear. The Rock Island Arsenal has been there for our fighting men and women in uniform and I am committed to making sure this always remains the case.

Additionally, in recent years, the Army has been taking deliberate steps to implement advanced manufacturing techniques across the organic industrial base. To support this work, I ask that the Committee include language requiring the Secretary of the Army to establish a Center of Excellence for Advanced Manufacturing. Creating such a Center of Excellence at an Army arsenal would help bring together existing knowledge across the Department of Defense's workforce, in the private sector and at institutions of higher learning to ensure that the Army's efforts to integrate advanced manufacturing capabilities are of the highest possible benefit to the warfighter.

Thank you again for this opportunity and for your consideration. I look forward to working with you to support our military families, the 182nd Airlift Wing of the Illinois Air National Guard and Rock Island Arsenal.

Sincerely,



Cheri Bustos
Member of Congress