

Congressman Rick Crawford

Testimony before the House Armed Services Committee:

EOD Priorities on NDAA for FY2019

Good morning Chairman Thornberry, Ranking Member Smith, and distinguished members of the Committee. I am here to testify before the Committee regarding Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) priorities on the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2019. I served in the Army as an EOD technician and I am proud to be a co-chair of the House EOD Caucus along with Members Susan Davis, Brian Mast, and Tim Walz.

EOD units comprise a small force that provides a vital capability to protect America's safety and security. They are critical enablers for combatant commanders and they provide daily defense support of civil authorities. They deploy to support overseas contingency operations, and upon return to their home station, they are responding to unexploded ordnance on and off their installations: protecting the Commander in Chief and critical infrastructure from bombings, assisting public safety authorities with rendering safe improvised explosive devices; as well as providing trained and ready forces to render-safe chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons. It is noteworthy that Senate Armed Services Committee Member Senator Claire McCaskill has recently inquired on the Army's capacity for conducting chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and high-explosive operations both at home and abroad. This is timely given the Army's recent reduction of 33 percent (about 1,073 Active Component EOD qualified Soldiers) of their EOD force, the Army's sole capability to neutralize, disable, dismantle, render-safe the nuclear, chemical, biological, and high-yield explosive warheads of manufactured and improvised weapon systems.

The first priority for the Caucus is to re-engage on EOD acquisition reform put forth by Ms. Davis in the NDAA for FY2016. At that time the Department of Defense (DoD) requested time to study the issue and brief a plan to Congress on their way ahead. As of today, we still have not received a plan. Therefore, the Caucus urges the Committee to work with your Senate colleagues to establish an EOD defense program that is truly a joint EOD Research, Development and Acquisition (RDA) program that conducts under the supervision of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear, Chemical, and Biological Defense Programs. Additionally, it should include a defense-wide program element on EOD RDA managed by the Director of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency and performed by a Joint Program Executive Officer for EOD, that works joint requirements and joint programs who are responsive to the needs of combatant commanders on EOD resource requirements and capability.

The second priority for the Caucus is establishing the EOD Intelligence Program within the DoD with oversight provided by the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence, and a program of record managed by the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, a combat support agency. Our capability for EOD intelligence on advanced weapon systems of near-peer competitors has atrophied since September 2001. We must emphasize close, continuous coordination and sharing of information at all levels of security classification and special handling instructions between the Intelligence Community and the military departments. This will help to ensure the United States does not suffer strategic surprise from novel ordnance or weapons systems. We are increasingly seeing advanced weaponry used by surrogate forces throughout the

world, and we must be prepared to collect, exploit, counter, and provide attribution of these weapons systems.

The third priority for the Caucus is authorizing a pilot program on enhancing bomb squad capability in support of border security operations. The Caucus is working with the Homeland Security Committee on this effort. Briefly, it will examine the electromagnetic spectrum to identify the optimum spectrum(s) for bomb squads to operate: unmanned vehicles and platforms, such as robotic systems and drones; operate bomb squad cyber and communications equipment, including long haul secure communications to reach-back sanctuary; and operate bomb squad jamming equipment to counter improvised explosive devices. We need to coordinate spectrum resources to better facilitate interoperability and interagency cooperation on military EOD and public safety bomb squad efforts near or at the United States border.

The fourth priority for the Caucus is authorizing a pilot program on Active Guard Reserve EOD qualified soldiers for the Army National Guard's planning and immediate response defense support to civil authorities. This program will examine the feasibility and effectiveness of the Army National Guard EOD soldiers in Title 32 status versus using the current Mobilization Day EOD soldiers mobilized in Title 10 status to provide this support. It will also evaluate the need for additional legislative authorization for Active Guard Reserve EOD soldiers to conduct a fully implemented program.

The fifth priority for the Caucus is language requiring the Secretary of Defense to provide a plan to Congress on merging roles, responsibilities, and organization from various United States Northern Command elements into the roles, responsibilities, and organization of the United States Northern Command's joint task force for EOD and countering improvised explosive devices. The language builds on Committee efforts beginning with the House Report on the NDAA for FY 2013. The language will require the Joint Chiefs of Staff to provide scheduled EOD units, via rotation of the Services' EOD units to combatant commanders, that will support the Commander of the United States Northern Command's joint task force for EOD and countering improvised explosive devices. The purpose of this task force is having an EOD qualified commander providing appropriate oversight of highly technical EOD operations and ensuring explosives safety; mission command of additional technical enablers; and successful integration of military EOD forces with State and local public safety bomb squads, on planning, training, experimentation, and providing immediate response defense support to civil authorities.

Other Caucus initiatives include authorizations for the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Bombing Prevention and the Secretary of the Department of Defense's support of the Interagency Technical Support Working Group on coordination and integration of military EOD and public safety bomb squad planning, training, and on integration of EOD technology with that of public safety bomb squad research, development, and acquisition activities.

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