

Testimony of Congressman Mike Johnson (LA-04)
Submitted to the House Armed Services Committee
April 11, 2018

Thank you, Chairman Thornberry, Ranking Member Smith and members of the committee. I sincerely appreciate you giving me the opportunity to return to provide input during the committee's "member day" hearing for the Fiscal Year 2019 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

I have the distinct honor of representing a congressional district that is home to two vital military installations for our nation and national security interests around the world - Fort Polk and Barksdale Air Force Base. As I'm sure you know, Fort Polk is home to the Army Joint Readiness Training Center and Barksdale is home to the Air Force Global Strike Command. As is evident with the increased actions of North Korea, we live in highly uncertain and incredibly complex time, further highlighting the importance of these two bases and our military readiness to be fully prepared to combat any threat from overseas.

In keeping to today's time constraints, I will focus primarily on two areas I think are in essential need of attention by the committee and Congress – modernizing our U.S. Nuclear Enterprise and ensuring U.S. Army capabilities are fully equipped for necessary training exercises.

Before I begin, I would like to respectfully thank this Committee for working closely with me last year while crafting the Fiscal Year 2018 NDAA to begin the process of re-engineering and modernizing the B-52 bombers at Barksdale Air Force Base. This

much needed makeover will extend the life of the B-52's into the 2050s, improve range and fuel efficiency, and lower maintenance costs. I would also like to relay my thanks for the continued support of Fort Polk from this Committee in recognition of their vital importance to accomplishing its missions and military readiness.

Nuclear Enterprise –

Today I would briefly like to speak to nuclear weapons as they continue to play an integral role in the strategies of Russia, North Korea, Pakistan, India and China. In fact, according to many reports, and as evidenced from recent aggressive actions, these countries are increasing their reliance on, and modernizing, their capabilities whether it be in their land, air or sea-based nuclear forces.

I believe that if this Congress is going to be serious about rebuilding our nuclear infrastructure, it must continue to express support for the long-term commitment of Barksdale Air Force Base and for the majority of the Nuclear Triad. I applaud the decision by the U.S. Air Force to include the new gate at the 1-20 – 1-220 interchange into Barksdale Air Force Base on their unfunded priority list. This project must be completed to pave the way for construction of the Weapons Storage Area, which is currently scheduled to begin construction in Fiscal Year 2020. The new Weapons Storage Area is absolutely vital to our nuclear enterprise as it will support the overall activities Global Strike Command oversees and its necessary involvement in a wide array of strategic deterrence. As members of this committee, you are well aware how the Bomber Command, 8th Air Force in charge of our aging fleet and Missile Command, and 20th Air

Force in charge of the United States Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM's), are critical to deterrence and global strategy.

Ground Capabilities –

In any event that maintaining a capable and robust nuclear option does not suffice as a deterrent from war, it is imperative that we also have a capable and ready ground force. As this committee and Congress has presented a path forward to rebuilding our force structure, the need for modernizing our ground capabilities is certainly prevalent to ensure full mission readiness. As a proud member who represents one of two, unit training centers in the United States, Fort Polk Army Base and the Joint Readiness Training Center, it's crucial to highlight how the Army has continued to solidify its footprint with a state of the art Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC). As Fort Polk JRTC provides invaluable training for Advise and Assist roles and provides soldiers with the training and flexibility necessary to carry out the demands placed on them to achieve victory, it also partners with our close allies in collaborative joint exercises to prepare for the unique situations and challenges a unit may face while deployed.

As we work to regrow our ground forces, and since Fort Polk remains a national asset, we should invest into the JRTC infrastructure to replace the existing Joint Operations Center (JOC). As the current JOC was first built in 1976, it is in need of serious modernization as it is unable to offer sensitive training scenarios above the SECRET level due to the outdated infrastructure. Authorizing a new JOC at Fort Polk will allow the JRTC to replicate scenarios that are sensitive in nature but offer invaluable

training to fully prepare for any challenges ahead as it is the only Combat Training Center in the nation that also trains and deploys combat units.

The defense communities that surround both Barksdale Air Force Base and Fort Polk JRTC, have a long proven track record of fully supporting these two vital military installations and stand ready to modernize our armed forces to meet our nations mission capabilities and necessary resources. Just recently, the Army completed its largest land-purchase of over 47,000 acres in an effort to provide even more robust training capabilities for Brigade Combat Team rotations – an action that was fully supported by the local community. Furthermore, the State of Louisiana and our local community are finalizing an investment of \$90 million to construct a 1-20 – 1-220 interchange to Barksdale Air Force Base to open access to the installation’s eastern reservation, and relieving traffic congestion to pave the way for the construction of the Weapons Storage Area.

Again, I want to thank Chairman Thornberry, Ranking Member Smith, and members of this committee for taking in these important priorities for my congressional district. I look forward to doing everything I can to support the committee’s work to provide our military with the essential resources it needs.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate this opportunity to show my continued support for our men and women in uniform, and I yield back.