



House Committee on Armed Services: Member's Day

Statement for the Record

U.S. Congressman Joe Cunningham

1<sup>st</sup> District, South Carolina

*April 3, 2019*

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Thornberry and distinguished Members of this Committee, including my friend, Congressman Wilson, whom I have the honor of serving with in the South Carolina delegation. I also want to take a moment to thank the professional staff, who keep everything moving behind the scenes and are the reason this bill has passed every year for nearly sixty years running.

I have the honor of representing South Carolina's First Congressional District, which is home to the over 10,000 active duty servicemembers who serve aboard Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort, Parris Island, Beaufort Naval Hospital, and Joint Base Charleston. I'm here today to advocate for these installations, not only because they are critical to our national security, but also because they are an indispensable part of our economy in the Lowcountry. In the Beaufort region alone, it is estimated that the military's presence has an economic impact of 2.2 billion dollars annually and supports nearly 20,000 jobs.

MCAS Beaufort houses the Marine Corps' east coast fixed-wing, fighter-attack aircraft assets, and is the only place in the world where pilots are trained to fly F-35B Joint Strike Fighters. As our adversaries continue to advance their own next-generation fighters and missile systems, it is essential that we continue to increase production of these aircraft, so the U.S. can maintain its air dominance. That is why I respectfully request the Committee to prioritize funding for additional F-35s in this year's NDAA.

On Parris Island, the Recruit Training Regiment works to transform young men and women into United States Marines. As one of two training depots that make Marines, and the only depot that trains women, Parris Island is a pillar of our national security apparatus.

That is why it is essential we provide the depot funding they need to modernize the Island's firing ranges. In the Marine Corps' Unfunded Priority List, they requested funding to upgrade the Chosin Range, so recruits can continue to safely learn the fundamentals of marksmanship. I respectfully request the committee support this proposal so that Parris Island can continue to prepare our best and brightest to win our nation's battles in service to the country.

Finally, I want to take a moment to discuss how military installations in the Lowcountry are threatened by climate change and sea level rise. Parris Island and MCAS Beaufort already experience regular flooding, and by 2050, it is estimated that they could be underwater nearly a third of the year.

Last year, this Committee made important first steps towards addressing the growing national threat of sea level rise by authorizing a new Defense Infrastructure Program and expanding the department's authority to improve roads near bases that are impacted by recurrent flooding. I strongly urge the Members of this Committee to continue to prioritize climate resiliency and to ensure critical defense assets, like those in the Lowcountry, can perform their mission for generations to come.

As you continue the process of drafting the FY 2020 National Defense Authorization Act, I respectfully request that the committee incorporate the proposals I have outlined today. I look forward to working with the Members of this Committee, and I want to thank you all for your time and consideration.