

- Thank you, Chair Smith and Ranking Member Rogers, for accepting member testimony. I want to speak with you today about a few issues that are of special interest to my constituents in Louisiana's Sixth Congressional District. Many of these priorities have passed the House in recent years, and given this broad base of support, I urge their adoption in base text and inclusion in the final version of the National Defense Authorization Act.

- **Operation End Sweep**
 - For the last several Congresses, I have offered an amendment on the floor to authorize the service secretaries to award the Vietnam Service medal to veterans who participated in Operation End Sweep.
 - As you know, the Vietnam Service medal is awarded to recognize service to all service members who fought during the Vietnam war.
 - Members of the U.S. Navy and the Marine Corps were given the exceedingly dangerous task of removing naval mines from Haiphong harbor and other coastal and inland waterways in North Vietnam in early 1973.
 - However, because this crucial mine clearing happened between February and July – and the eligibility period for the service medal ended on 28 March 1973 – service members who literally risked life and limb for their country are being excluded from having their service recognized.
 - It is high time that Congress amend the eligibility criteria and allow the service secretaries to recognize the sacrifices made by the veterans of Operation End Sweep.

- **Military Commissaries**
 - Another priority of mine that has been included in the last three House-passed NDAAs is a requirement that the Department of Defense submit a report regarding management of military commissaries and exchanges to the Congressional Defense Committees.
 - While we know the Department of Defense commissary operations is essential, especially in areas where there are not consistent grocery options outside of an installation, in areas where there *are* adequate options, we want to be assured that taxpayers are providing military servicemembers with access to support services that they are actually using.
 - I would ask the Committee to require DeCA and the exchange system to not only pursue budget neutrality for the exchange system, but outline strategies to reduce cost and provide the best possible value to our service members.

- **National Guard Reimbursements**
 - In the last two NDAAs, I have had a provision included on amendment which would allow the National Guard to be reimbursed in a timely manner in response to an emergency declared under the Stafford Act.

- Unfortunately, something we know all too well in Louisiana is what it's like to experience a disaster. And after a disaster in a nearby state, the first thing Louisianians do is rush into help. This includes our members of the Louisiana National Guard.
- States have responded to these events at moment's notice, without thought to the impact on their own budgets and spending, as they know it is the right thing to do. However, given the unprecedented scale of these disasters, the response cannot be supported by states alone for such prolonged periods of time. Unfortunately, the current framework exacerbates the dramatic fiscal and cash-flow impacts during and after these catastrophic events. We have seen this on a mega-scale in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- My amendment would simply authorize the President and the Secretary of Defense, with the approval of the state or territorial governor and subject to appropriations, the ability to offer support for large-scale, complex, and catastrophic disasters. This is not a mandate – it is simply an additional tool for response efforts.
- The use of Title 32 502(f) in catastrophic situations will improve our collective response, ease the economic burden on states, and ensure the continued wellbeing of our National Guard members and their families.
- Furthermore, this change will streamline the payment process to make sure that Guardsmen and women do not have to worry about their paychecks when responding to these disasters, should Title 32 be authorized.
- **SBIR**
 - Finally, I would ask that the Committee consider establishing a pilot program under which the Secretary of Defense can provide additional assistance to certain Small Business Innovation Research (STIR) or Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) program awardees.
 - The pilot program would be available to businesses that are DEPSCoR-eligible or owned and controlled by women, veterans, or socially and economically disadvantaged individuals.
 - This pilot program would authorize DoD provide the additional assistance necessary to further bridge the gap between federal research funds and qualifying small businesses.
 - My proposal would allow small businesses that have received a Phase I SBIR or STTR award to receive a streamlined transfer and fast-track approval process for the Phase II award and up to \$1 million in additional funding before the disbursement of the Phase II award.
 - This pilot program will help ensure that small businesses are able to take full advantage of their technological potential.
- Thank you again for taking these concerns into consideration.
- Please let me know if you or your staff have questions.