

TESTIMONY: 2024 House Armed Services Member Day Priorities

Rep. Jim Costa | Word Count: 599 words

INTRODUCTION

- Thank you, Chairman Rodgers and Ranking Member Smith for the opportunity to present my priorities for the Fiscal Year 2025 National Defense Reauthorization Act.
- Keeping Americans safe is one of our greatest responsibilities as Members of Congress.
- The world is on fire with conflict, democracies around the world are under attack, and now more than ever, the United States must lead to secure peace through strength.
- And Congress must continue to invest in strategic military capabilities to meet the security challenges we face here at home and abroad.

144th Fighter Wing in Fresno

- Fresno is proud to host the 144th Fighter Wing, one of three Air National Guard bases selected to receive the new F-15EX jets.
- While this is exciting news, the 144th is facing up to a two-year gap between the retirement of its F-15Cs in 2026 and arrival of the F-15EXs no earlier than 2027.
- A gap will mean fighter pilots and maintenance personnel will have no mission and will likely transition away from the wing for other duties, degrading readiness and increasing costs of retraining and reconstituting the Fighter Wing.
- We must prevent this gap.
- Requiring continued maintenance of the F-15C aircraft for an additional one to two years until all F-15EXs can be fielded would address this. The Cs and EXs are very similar and can be operated on the same runways.
- The 144th is scheduled to receive its F-15EXs last of all National Guard Wings.

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- Requiring concurrent distribution of F-15EX fighters across the National Guard Bases would fix this inequity and reduce the projected gap.
- This solution allows pilots and maintainers in all three fighter wings to remain current on training and keep all three missions viable during the F-15EX fielding process.
- The Committee should support these fixes to help ensure the 144th Fighter Wing can continue executing its critical mission without interruption.

Support for Armenia, Countering Azerbaijan

- Armenia is in a tough neighborhood and is reorienting to the West while looking to the US for support and reassurance.
- The small nation is still struggling to absorb over 110,000 Armenian refugees who fled Azerbaijan's rapid military takeover of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) in September 2023.
- The United States has a unique opportunity right now to build stronger ties, and bolster US interests, and should respond to events in the region by:
 - Reviewing whether the US should impose sanctions on Azerbaijani officials directly involved in war crimes and human rights abuses since the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War.
 - Prohibiting any US military assistance for Azerbaijan.
 - Reviewing whether the US should provide security assistance to Armenia.
- We must send a clear message to the people Armenia that the United States stands with them as they pivot West and away from Russia's grasp.

Continued Support for Ukraine

- Vladimir Putin is a war criminal and Russia is a mob syndicate masquerading as a country.
- Ukraine is valiantly defending itself against Russian aggression.

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- The US must continue to provide its full support to Ukraine, including robust security assistance for as long as it takes Ukraine to win this war.

CONCLUSION

- To further continue to grow the best, strongest military in the world – we need to invest in our brave service men and women who are on the frontlines defending our country.
- Ensuring our servicemembers and their families have the benefits they earned and deserve.
- We also need to invest in science and technology competitiveness for next-generation capabilities in hypersonics, electronic warfare, and artificial intelligence.
- Our allies depend on our support and leadership during times of crisis. This is the test of our time. We must rise to meet it.