

Rep. Pete Stauber

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Member Day
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Thank you, Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Smith, for the opportunity to testify before you here today.

As you finalize the Fiscal Year 2026 National Defense Appropriations Act, I urge you to prioritize authorizing the procurement of next generation manned fighters and the recapitalization of active duty, reserve, and Air National Guard units by including the Fighter Force Preservation and Recapitalization Act in this year's bill.

Unfortunately, these are dangerous times. War is waging in Europe and the Middle East, while Communist China continues to threaten stability and peace in the Indo-Pacific. Thus, we must do all we can to deter the expansion of conflict, and if necessary, meet these threats with overwhelming force.

However, the Air Force has decreased fighter capacity at a 2:1 divestment/procurement ratio since 2022. This accounts for 303 fighters divested and 155 new fighters procured in that time. Since 1991, total Air Force fighter squadrons have been reduced by 58% while the average age of the fighter inventory has increased 200%. 51% of the Air Force's service-retained fighting force is in the Air National Guard. Most of the Air National Guard's fighter wings do not have recapitalization plans. This trend must be reversed.

The Air National Guard protects our nation from foreign threats both at home and abroad. They are simultaneously our frontline and last line of defense. These brave men and women are dedicated patriots and the best of the best. I would know; my wife was the first female Command Chief of the 148th Fighter Wing in Duluth, Minnesota, the most deserving home for next generation manned fighters in the Air National Guard.

Without the procurement of new aircraft, fighter wings will lose their missions and our nation will be less safe without them. In the case of the 148th, we will lose the closest fighter wing to Russia in the lower 48 and the best airspace in the United States. Most concerning, we will lose the healthiest, most prepared, and most effective Air National Guard fighter wing in the nation, and many others like it. We would be without significant defense assets and more vulnerable than ever. But this is avoidable.

By authorizing the procurement of new aircraft, we will extend the life of these crucial installations and their paramount missions of national defense. Further, we will be ready in the event of a crisis should one arise. Given the age of our fleet and the geopolitical landscape of today, the time to act is now.

In closing, I would like to thank you again for allowing me to testify before the Committee today. I am confident that you will deliver the best product possible to equip our warfighters with the tools necessary to make them the most lethal fighting force in the world. My staff and I are available to answer any questions you may have.

I yield back the balance of my time.