Statement of
Congressman Diane Black
Before the House Armed Services Committee
National Defense Authorization Act of 2014

May 8, 2013

Chairman McKeon, Ranking Member Smith, Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to address the House Armed Services Committee to highlight the importance of hypersonics technologies as it relates to the 2014 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). As Chairman of the Congressional Range and Testing Center Caucus, I urge my colleagues to consider the applications of hypersonics for the defense of the United States.

The development of hypersonic systems—flying at Mach 5 and above—would yield unique "game-changing" capabilities for U.S. national security interests.

Advances in propulsion, structures, thermal protection systems, guidance, and other areas will allow the U.S. to field high-speed time-critical strike (HSTCS) weapons. These weapons would be able to strike targets from several hundred miles away faster than adversaries could react and defend against them and from longer "stand-off" ranges still fast enough to be effective. Recent U.S. Government studies indicate that HSTCS weapons are almost in our grasp—"the low-hanging fruit on the tree."

A second application of hypersonics is conventional prompt global strike (CPGS)—striking high-value or "fleeting targets" thousands of miles away deep inside adversary countries in as little as one hour after launch without using forward-based assets.

Hypersonics technologies may also allow developing high-speed intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities. Both airbreathing and rocket powered vehicles are envisioned to provide responsive, unwarned, and survivable ISR. Sub-orbital trans-atmospheric vehicles (TAVs) would provide global non-invasive coverage of other countries by flying through space above them.

Progress in hypersonics technologies and developing the systems described above would also bring closer to reality the hypersonics "holy grail" of hypersonic air-breathing space access, a capability with far-reaching implications for national defense as well as our civil space sector.

Although hypersonics technologies offer these exciting capabilities, it is important to ask in these times of strained budgets whether we should pursue them.

The answer to that question is that other countries are investing in hypersonics. India now has cruise missiles and surface-to-air missiles that exceed Mach 2.8, and the European Meteor air-to-air missile is to be fielded as early as this year with a Mach 4+ capability. England, France, Germany, Japan, and Sweden are also known to be interested in hypersonic technology.

Potential adversaries such as China, Russia, and Iran are pursuing the strategic advantages hypersonic systems offer. China in particular is striving to develop an Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) capability, using Integrated Air Defense Systems (IADS) and tactical ballistic missiles (TBMs) to deny access and freedom of action to U.S. forces. China clearly wants to counter the Obama Administration's "Pivot to the Pacific", which is a response to China's increasingly assertive behavior in that region.

The U.S. has historically benefited from robust testing and evaluation (T&E) infrastructure in developing cutting edge military technologies. Successful development of hypersonics technologies will—like all new technologies—have new T&E requirements. I urge my colleagues to consider our ability to meet these requirements in composing this year's NDAA.

The federal government's most important responsibility is to protect U.S. citizens from foreign threats. The potential for hypersonics technologies to maintain our strategic and tactical military advantages and our ability to field such a technology must be considered with the current threat environment in mind.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement. I look forward to working with the Committee on this issue to protect U.S. citizens and our national security interests.