

Testimony of Congressman Jodey Arrington (TX-19)
House Committee on Armed Services
FY 2023 National Defense Authorization Act
April 28, 2022

Chairman Adam Smith and Ranking Member Mike Rogers, thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today on the national defense priorities of Texas' 19th Congressional District.

We are the proud home of Dyess Air Force Base in Abilene, TX. The base has approximately 5,000 dedicated military and civilian personnel and is under the jurisdiction of Global Strike Command. Dyess serves as the home of the Air Force's 7th Bomb Wing, which has B-1B bombers. Dyess is also the largest B-1B operations group comprised of the B-1B Training Base, B-1B Operational Squadron, a B-1B Training Squadron, and a B-1B Classic Associate Reserve Unit. Dyess's missions also include two Active Duty C-130J squadrons with a total of 33 of these highly-capable aircraft.

The City of Abilene and Dyess have been consistently recognized for their extraordinary service to our country including winning the Barksdale Trophy at the Air Force's Bi-annual Global Strike Challenge Awards Ceremony. This is the second time in four years that Abilene has received the distinguished award. The trophy is awarded to the community that demonstrates support for airmen and their families, base infrastructure improvements, and engagement with elected officials. Dyess Airmen also won four competitions in the Global Strike Challenge including best B-1B squadron, best bomb, best bomber maintenance, and best bomb wing.

Since 2001, the B-1B has played a major role overseas, including in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Air Force has stated that the B-1B is the "backbone" of America's long-range bomber force and carries the largest conventional payload of both guided and unguided weapons in the Air Force inventory. Last year, the Air Force retired 17 of the nation's 62 B-1B bombers, thereby reducing the fleet to only 45 aircraft. We're concerned the remaining smaller B-1B fleet needs to have the necessary improvements and capabilities to meet the nation's Long-Range Strike requirements and also to make up for this loss of 17 aircraft, one-quarter of the B-1B fleet. Given the growing competition with China and Russia, it is critical that our nation has the necessary long-range power projection capabilities. A strong B-1B fleet is vital to achieving that goal.

Most importantly, the Air Force needs to provide the reduced B-1B fleet with expanded carriage, hardpoint pylon development, and hypersonic weapons capability. Providing the remaining B-1Bs with the ability to carry hypersonic weapons will be an important improvement that will enable the B-1B to continue to play a critical role in our national defense. Furthermore, our adversaries are moving ahead with the development of hypersonic weapons and the Defense Department needs to devote the necessary resources so that it has as many options as possible to respond to this threat. We know that China is testing hypersonic weapons at an alarming rate and Russia has reportedly launched hypersonic weapons against Ukraine. Meanwhile, the U.S. has conducted only a few successful tests of hypersonic missiles. We need to accelerate the development of these lethal weapons to catch up to our adversaries.

Overall, the inclusion of authorization language in the FY 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) of \$30 million in Research Development Test and Evaluation (RDT&E) funding for B-1B hypersonic integration as well as matching the President's FY 2023 Budget request for other B-1B RDT&E and B-1B procurement and for B-21 procurement, advanced procurement, and RDT&E is critical to maintaining a strong national defense. These efforts would bolster our efforts to ensure B-1Bs throughout the nation remain lethal and dangerous. It would also accelerate the development and production of the B-21. We believe this is best for our country's national defense and critical to staying competitive with our adversaries.

As a final point, I note that the Air Force has been making steady progress with the development of its new long-range strike aircraft, the B-21 Raider. While we are very supportive of the development of the new B-21, it may be at least another 10 years until the Air Force has enough B-21s to replace all of the B-1Bs. In the meantime, the overseas threats will continue. For these reasons, we strongly believe that we need to keep and maintain our remaining B-1Bs until the B-21s can take over their role.

Once again, I would like to thank the Armed Services Committee, Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Rogers, for the opportunity to testify before you today.