

**Testimony of Chairman William M. “Mac” Thornberry**

**Before Committee on House Administration**

**February 11, 2015**

Good afternoon, Chairman Miller and Ranking Member Brady. Thank you for inviting me to testify before the Committee on House Administration on the budget request for the House Armed Services Committee.

My partner on our Committee, Ranking Member Adam Smith, and I are both acutely aware of the current budget environment. The agencies we oversee must be more efficient and more effective with the taxpayer money provided them. And the legislative branch, including the Committee on Armed Services, is no different. I wholeheartedly embrace this mandate, and it is with that in mind, that I respectfully request additional resources for the Committee’s operating budget for the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress.

In addition to the budget environment we face, Mr. Smith and I are acutely aware of the security environment facing our country, our military, and thus our Committee. Testimony before Congress from a variety of witnesses is that our country faces more serious, complex threats than at any time since World War II and perhaps more than at any time in our history. From renewed aggression by major nuclear powers, such as Russia and China, to the spread of terrorism and nuclear proliferation, to new domains of warfare such as cyber and outer space, to

even containing naturally-occurring diseases, our country faces many difficult challenges.

The Constitution of the United States places on Congress a number of specific responsibilities to help provide for the country's security. At least six provisions in Article I, Section 8 relate to the duties of Congress in this area. And so, Ladies and Gentlemen, our Committee has more work to do than ever.

In order to fulfill our duties under the Constitution, our Committee will have a major effort toward defense reform. It will have two primary goals: (1) to make better use of the resources provided to the Department of Defense and (2) to help ensure our military has the strength and agility needed to meet the wide array of threats we face in a volatile world.

We will have a dedicated staff team whose job it is to pursue a reform agenda. We will also necessarily draw on other Committee staff and resources. The reforms will include personnel reform, such as pay and benefits, including military health care. It will include acquisition reform, an effort begun last year and involving one of the most complex areas of the federal government's operations, and regulatory relief. It will also include overhead reductions and organizational reform.

The Department of Defense has proposed a number of minor reforms and headquarters reductions that will marginally reduce its operating costs. It is,

however, not enough. Major reforms are required – similar to those generated by the Goldwater-Nichols Act Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. Goldwater-Nichols made the largest changes to the United States military since the Department of Defense was established by the National Security Act of 1947. Moreover, it required years of effort on the part of both the Senate and House Armed Services Committees, as well as extensive coordination with the impacted agencies and industry. We have an opportunity to pick up where Goldwater-Nichols left off.

Reform is also needed to improve the military's agility and the speed at which it can adapt to respond to the unprecedented technological challenges we face. While much of the threat is classified, a senior defense official recently testified before our committee, "We are at risk, and the situation is getting worse... We came out of the Cold War with a very dominant military... People have had quite a bit of time to ... do things about how to defeat that force. And what I am seeing in foreign modernizations ... is a suite of capabilities that are intended clearly...to defeat the American way of doing power projection, American way of warfare...And, without saying too much about this, the Chinese, in particular -- and, again, to a lesser extent, the Russians -- are going beyond what we have done. They are making advances beyond what we currently have fielded."

The bottom line for me is that we have no choice but to put substantial effort toward achieving the goals I mentioned. History shows us that only Congress can institute major reforms in DOD. Without us, it will not happen.

In addition, the Committee must play a major role in some of the most difficult challenges facing this Congress. The consequences of various budgets options under the Budget Control Act of 2011 and the resulting sequestration is one of those issues. Another is a new authorization for the use of military force against ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

All of the issues I have mention thus far are in addition to the Committee's "normal" responsibilities to oversee the Department of Defense and elements of other departments, which comprise approximately half of the total discretionary budget of the federal government, as well as to craft the annual National Defense Authorization Act.

The National Defense Authorization Act has been signed into law for each of the past 53 years. Last year, it authorized about \$600 billion in spending, consisted of over 800 provisions, had 270 amendments offered in the Committee's markup and roughly 325 amendments filed during floor consideration. Needless to say, it is a major undertaking. The HASC bears sole responsibility for regularly authorizing *over 50%* of the discretionary federal budget with *only 6%* of the manning for the authorizing committees.

Without an additional, modest investment of approximately \$1.5M, the committee will not be able to do both the new tasks before us and continue our normal duties.

I would be remiss if I did not also observe that the HASC is the largest committee in the Congress, and this year our membership grew further. At the same time, the HASC maintains the smallest staff to member ratio of any committee in the House. We now have more members than staff.

The committee has suspended almost all other necessary administrative costs, such as equipment, and has frozen COLA and merit increase for the last five years. Management of the workforce with leadership succession planning and talent retention has become virtually impossible. The requested increase would allow the committee to fill its authorized positions on a bipartisan basis and provide a degree of much needed management flexibility.

There are other initiatives that I want to pursue. For example, Members have asked for quick, accurate information on fast-breaking national security developments around the world. Helping shape a national discussion on the proper role of the military in defending private networks in cyberspace is desperately needed, as technology and the threat far outpaces our laws and policies. And the list could go on.

Finally, let me assure you that I remain committed to maintaining the Armed Services Committee's track record of delivering results and implementing internal reforms that minimize cost and waste. The Committee has taken the initiative to improve processes to reduce cost, waste, and staff resources associated with committee hearings, mark-ups, and conference negotiations with the Senate. These efforts have set the gold-standard for other committees. I would like to highlight just a few examples:

- Recently, the HASC started a pilot program with the House Recording Studio to stream all HASC hearings on Youtube, saving the committee thousands of dollars that would have been spent on an outside vendor. By streaming directly on Youtube, the hearing videos will now be archived there as well, ensuring the public has an easily searchable and viewable archive for our hearings.
- During House-Senate negotiations for fiscal year 2015 defense authorization bill, in consultation with House Counsel, the committee used the digital file sharing system Box.com to digitally share, approve and process negotiated bill language and conference report language between the House and Senate. This file sharing system allowed the committee to reduce the amount of hardcopy material printed and made the process more efficient and saved staff time by eliminating burdensome administrative requirements.

- The staff has created a committee electronic report-language database used to draft, edit, and compile the committee report language that accompanies the annual defense authorization bill. This process had previously been accomplished using a paper-based system, which consumed a significant amount of paper and committee resources. It also allows committee staff to input and review legislative text, as well as identify and track provisions that may trigger sequential referral. The committee now uses the system to prepare the annual activities report and oversight plan. As a result, the committee has reduced paper purchase by two-thirds. A number of House and Senate committees have, or are considering, adopting a similar model system. The Senate Armed Services Committee, for example, has purchased the system and plans to begin using it this year.
- Most recently, the Committee on House Administration has been exploring the feasibility of automating the publication of hearing transcripts. The HASC has leaned forward and is working in cooperation with the Committee on this effort. In fact, HASC hearing transcripts are being used as one of models for the system.

In conclusion, let me remind my colleagues that the military remains in a readiness crisis. We've tried to legislate good stewardship of resources, but have unintentionally established layers of wasteful bureaucracy. We are now at a point

where we face impossible and unwise choices: Cutting needed systems, further eroding readiness, or breaking faith with the troops. No one in this chamber wants to do any of those things.

There is another way, and it comes through sustained oversight and pragmatic reform. Both efforts are our responsibility- they are our first congressional duty. I truly believe we have a narrow opportunity to deliver results - without having to choose between oversight or reform. Please accept my thanks for your time and your consideration of the committee's request.