

**Testimony of Ranking Member Adam Smith**

**Before Committee on House Administration**

**February 16, 2017**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Brady and Members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to once again to testify on the funding needs of the Committee on Armed Services. I am pleased to do so with my Chairman and friend, Mac Thornberry.

As the Chairman has already testified, the Committee on Armed Services bears the considerable responsibility of authorizing and overseeing more than 50% of the discretionary budget. For fiscal year 2017, that was over \$600 billion and the defense budget is likely to grow under the current administration. Even at this level, the country faces significant national security challenges and it is absolutely vital that we, the Congress, oversee the defense establishment to ensure that resources are being properly spent to achieve our national security objectives.

The operations, facilities and expenditures of the Department of Defense are vast. It is a difficult mission to oversee these operations and it has gotten more difficult every year since I became the Ranking member in 2011. This is partly due to the increasingly complex and difficult international security situation. Partly it is due to the continued fiscal disruptions on the department due to the budget caps directed by the Budget Control Act. We, the Congress, are also

responsible for considerable fiscal turbulence as we struggle to provide an annual budget and leave the department operating under extended continuing resolutions. But as I have testified in the past, the greatest challenge to continued committee oversight is reduced committee funding. Before I took over as the Ranking member in 2011, the Republican minority had a staff of 15. In the ensuing years that staff has been reduced to 13, suffered unpaid furloughs, salary freezes and has seen reductions to the overall committee operating budget. At the same time the responsibilities of that staff have increased to serving 28 members and overseeing a Defense authorization of over \$600 billion.

Reducing resources for staff is counterintuitive. As Members, we rely on staff to assist in conducting oversight and with the functioning of the committee. Staffing reductions and constrained pay don't make those tasks easier. We, the Congress, are interested in controlling spending and that is an important function. Unfortunately, we have failed to properly fund the most basic tool we have at our disposal for eliminating wasteful spending. The staff.

Staff is vital to controlling costs and overseeing policy. In this fiscal and dangerous national security environment, a professional staffer's value cannot be overstated. It takes years to gain an understanding of the complexities of national security and, when utilized, a single experienced staffer can achieve significant savings for the American taxpayer which easily surpasses their salary hundreds of

times over. Hiring and retaining qualified professional staff requires proper pay and compensation. The budget constraints of the past few years have taken us in the wrong direction on filling staff vacancies and properly compensating the experience that staffers bring to the committee.

In his testimony, the Chairman laid out the enormity of the annual National Defense Authorization Act. It is an annual piece of legislation that is absolutely necessary and that is why it has a 55 year unbroken streak. Certainly, we in the minority have our differences with the majority over some issues contained in the bill; but, taken as a whole; it is an example of what a bipartisan process can achieve. The NDAA would not be possible without the committee's experienced staff. Our ability to pass this legislation and to conduct oversight is tied closely to the funding request before you.

For this reason, I strongly support the Chairman's request for additional resources to allow us to staff to our authorized level and correct salary shortfalls that have accrued over years for outstanding staffers who have not had a COLA or merit increase. Additionally, I support the Chairman's request for funds to update committee technology and support equipment.

I am very proud to serve on the Armed Services Committee with my friend the Chairman as we execute our duty to provide for our men and women in uniform and for the defense of the nation. We are both committed to ensuring

responsible defense spending in support of national security. I fully support the Chairman's request for additional funding, and I hope you will look favorably on this request. I hope that your committee will carefully weigh the committee budget recommendations before you and that it supports us as we continue that vital mission.