

House Appropriations Committee (HAC-D) Testimony Opening Statement

The Honorable Deborah Lee James

Secretary of the Air Force

Friday, 27 February, 2015

Good morning Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Visclosky, and to all of the members of the committee. It is certainly my honor and privilege to come before you this morning. It is also my honor and privilege to be able to sit with this gentleman to my left and your right, General Mark Welsh who I have gotten to know so well over the last year or so. He is just a phenomenal Airmen and leader and a great partner for me. Thank you for having us here.

Mr. Chairman when I testified before all of you last year, as a brand new Secretary of the Air Force I outlined my three priorities and just to review them with you, is number one taking care of our people, number two balancing and getting the right balance between readiness of today and modernization for tomorrow, and number three making every dollar count, that is to say we get it in the United States Air Force that we have to treat the tax payer money as precious. We can't afford waste a single dollar of it. Certainly not in these tough budget times and so we are working hard to make every dollar count. That was then and those three priorities have not changed.

But what has changed for me personally is I have now had 14 months in the seat and I am smarter and more experienced than I was 14 months ago and I have also traveled extensively across the country and to a number of locations around the world: 60 bases and 28 states and territories as well as 12 foreign countries. And what I want to tell you is that in each of these visits I talked to our leaders on scene and I listened very, very hard to our rank and file Airmen. I asked them a lot of questions about people issues, about readiness issues, I looked at aircraft, the platforms, and I want to summarize some of my key takeaways from my last 14 months.

First of all, today we are the smallest Air Force that we have been since our inception in 1947. I

was in government in the 1990s and when I look back on the size of the Air Force in the 1990s, which to me was a less complicated period of time than the time we have today, it is stunning the amount we have come down in terms of manpower. This has happened at a time when the demand for services is at an all-time high. Furthermore, we have the oldest Air Force in terms of our platforms since our inception in 1947. The average our aircraft is about 27 years old and there are many fleets that are substantially older than that. And here is to me, the most pressing issue of all, more than half of our combat air forces, half, are not sufficiently ready for a high-end fight. That means a fight where we would have interference, people trying to shoot us down, people trying to interfere with us in space and in the air.

Yet as we sit here this morning I want you to know that our Airmen are providing two-thirds of America's nuclear arsenal, they are performing Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) and strike missions in Iraq and Syria in the fight against ISIL, and we are flying mobility missions in the Pacific, and we are reassuring European allies, and guarding our Homeland. All of these missions are critical to our Nation's defense and our Airmen are performing admirably.

But my key takeaway from my last year is, we are a force under strain. We are working to meet the combatant commanders' most urgent needs, but a budget trajectory that results in sequestration, Mr Chairman, simply will not allow us to sustain this pace. So if we must, and I listen very carefully to what you said, if we must live under sequestration, I'm here to tell you I fear we are either going to break or we will not be able to execute the defense strategic guidance that has been laid out for us. We cannot do it under sequestration.

Now we've said many times over the last couple of years that sequestration will damage national security. So as you know rather than living with that level, we are proposing in our budget figures that are higher than that sequestration level would allow us. Specifically for the Air Force it is

about 10 billion dollars more than what sequestration level funding would give us. I am here to tell you as passionately as I can, that 10 billion dollars is the difference between an Air Force that is much closer to what the Combatant Commanders need and the one our nation expects and the ability to do our strategy than we would have under sequestration. And it recognizes just how important the Air Force is to joint operation around the world.

Even if we get 10 billion dollars more, I don't want to tell you that solves every ill and solves every problem because it does not. This increase provides both the forces needed to meet our most pressing needs for the Combatant Commanders and it also allows us to fulfill those top three priorities I told you about in the beginning.

Now let me talk briefly about the three, taking care of people. Listening to our Airmen over the past 14 months, there is no question in my mind that the number one issue on their minds has been the downsizing. And given the state of the world, given everything I've just told you, General Welsh and I agree the number one thing is we have to stop this downsizing. Enough is enough and in fact we need to upsize modestly in the Active, Guard, and Reserve to a Total Force end-strength of 492,000. This would allow us to redirect some people to the nuclear enterprise, increase our cyber mission teams, plug some holes such as maintenance that we have across the entire Air Force. So very, very important and part of that as I said would be for the Guard and Reserve to buy back some capabilities and increase our reliance.

By the way, we will be reporting to Congress on March 4th, just a few days from now' on our efforts to fully address the National Commission on the future Structure of the Air Force.

Also, in the people rank, I want you to know that we are expanding services in the important area of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response programs. We are upping the training, switching the

training out, expanding our SVC programs, special victim council, and we are providing full time SARC's in the National Guard community. Currently they are only part-timers. We also have support for childcare, fitness centers, educational benefits, and a 1.3 percent pay raise for all. So that is some of what we are doing to take care of our people.

Second priority is getting the balance between readiness today and modernization for tomorrow right. And as I said, very important, because only about half of our combat Air Forces are ready for a high end fight. Therefore our proposal will fully fund flying hours to the maximum executable levels, we'll invest properly in weapons system sustainment, and ensure combat exercises like the Red Flag and the Green Flag program in particular remains strong.

I want you to know that General Welsh in particular, myself as well, but not as much as he, consulted closely with the Combatant Commanders as we put together this budget. So it reflects more than just our best military judgment, it reflects theirs as well. And so part of this budget and part of this 10 billion extra will allow us to support their most urgent needs which I can tell you is: ISR, ISR, ISR. And that is 60 steady state ISR patrols as well as extending the life of the U-2 and the AWACS program. So again, just a little about how we are meeting their most urgent needs.

We also need to support vital space programs, strengthen the nuclear enterprise by adding funding to our ICBM readiness and a number of other areas. So that's the readiness of today.

For modernization, it is very important that we continue to place nuclear at number one when it comes to modernization. So we're developing the follow on to the Minuteman III ICBM follow-on as part of our 5-year plan and accelerating the Long Range Stand Off weapon by two years. We've got additional investments for cyber, ISR, preferred munitions, and space as well.

And of course we have our top three programs—the KC-46, F-35, and Long-Range Strike Bomber, all of these will remain on track with our budget profile as we have presented to you.

My third priority make every dollar count. Again, we don't want to waste a single dollar. And we're doing number of things. We're driving toward auditability of our books in the United States Air Force and in the military at large. We took an aggressive 20 percent reduction in our headquarters funding which includes civilian, contractor and redirecting military personnel. We didn't have to do it in one year, but we did so we could get the savings more quickly. Keeping those top programs on track and looking for cost savings is part of our program as well. Maximizing energy savings, we've got a whole list of initiatives in this area.

So all of this is the good of the budget. The not so good, because even as I have told you under our figures it doesn't solve all of the issues. You've already named it Mr. Chairman and Mr. Visclosky, we are once again proposing, with reluctance but nonetheless, the retirement of the A-10 over time. We are also proposing to slow the growth in military compensation and we ask once again if you would please consider an additional round of BRAC, base closures and realignment.

And we realize that none of this is popular, they are all difficult circumstances, we get that. But if sequestration remains the law of the land it is going to be way, way, way worse.

As I said we will not be able to do the defense strategy, something simply has to give. Here are some of the things, we've talked about this before and I realize all of this is highly unpopular. But if we had to live with sequestration, we would have to divest our KC-10 refueler fleet, we would have to reduce some of our Total Force flying hours, our weapons systems sustainment, ranges, simulators, all the types of things we would need to get readier, to get that 50 percent to higher levels of readiness for the high end fight. We would have to reduce F-35 procurement by 14 in

FY16. The adaptive engine program which holds great promise for fuel efficiencies and the future of engines for the United States Air Force would be cancelled. And our program for ISR would also suffer. So a lot of good I just told you about, we would have to cancel: the Global Hawk Block 40, the U-2 would have to go, AWACS reductions, fewer of those combat air patrols.

So sequestration bottom line, it threatens everything and I am just certain in this country we can do better than this. I know the difficulties, but I certainly hope that we will.

In conclusion, I want all members of this committee to know, as well as the American people who are listening today, that your United States Air Force is still the best on the planet, but we mustn't take that for granted because we are a force under strain as I just said and we mustn't let our edge slip away.

But Mr. Chairman, with all of the difficulties, I ask all of you to please consider hang in there and trying to make the case for us that sequestration needs to be lifted permanently, lifted across the whole of government. I'm no expert in the domestic agencies, but State Department and DHS, these are key partners for us, in national security. It would be very difficult on them as well.

Again, thank you sir and I yield to General Welsh.