

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE HOWARD P. "BUCK" McKEON  
CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION

November 30, 2011

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Brady, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Armed Services Committee's funding requirements. I'm also grateful to have Adam Smith, our Ranking Member, with me today.

Our committee has one of the widest and most critical mandates in Congress. We conduct oversight of a military that is engaged in combat operations in Afghanistan, the Horn of Africa, and Yemen, sustaining a drawdown from Iraq, successfully concluding operations over Libya, and are engaged in a wide variety of training and assistance missions in support of our allies globally. We further oversee a Defense Department that is undergoing one of the most revolutionary periods in its history, both from a strategic and a budgetary perspective. The tasks we ask our military to accomplish have greatly expanded since the end of the Cold War.

Annually and without fail, we produce a National Defense Authorization Act, which fulfills Congress' Constitutional obligation to provide for the common defense. We further conduct a steady series of hearings that, under the joint direction of Ranking Member Smith and I, have included rigorous oversight to improve efficiency spending and acquisition programs in the Defense Department without compromising our national security. We also must ensure that our men and women in harm's way are properly equipped, supplied, and led.

Our staff prides itself on doing more with less. This committee provides the American people with an admirable 'bang for their buck,' especially given our low number of staff relative to the immense number of defense dollars we are charged with watching. We rank 12<sup>th</sup> in overall funding and second to last in member-to-staff ratio, with 1.15 staffers for every 1 member. It is important to note here that we are the largest committee in the House with 62 members.

We are proud of our long history operating in a fiscally conscious manner. That history includes time-tested operating practices that eschew excess and focus on providing legislation that is on time, on budget, without fail. It is worth noting that

in addition to the broad Defense Department portfolio, we also provide significant oversight and resourcing to the Department of Energy.

With that in mind, it is my opinion that the Armed Services Committee stands above our fellow committees in both cost-effectiveness and productivity.

Though we have long been a model for fiscal efficiency, we understand that we live in tough economic times, and everyone must sacrifice in order to right our financial ship. However, after absorbing a tough 6.8% cut from 2010 to 2011, I must strongly caution against any further decrease beyond 1% from our 2012 budget.

It's important to note that approximately 98% of our budget goes to payroll. We currently have 69 staff members, but should the committee receive a 6.4% cut, the only way to achieve budget compliance would be to reduce our workforce, which – as I noted- already has the second lowest member to staff ratio in the House. We did not provide COLA allowances in 2011 and currently do not have resources to offer COLA or nominal end-of-year bonuses in 2012.

These staffing shortages were the reason I requested that our committee be reduced in member numbers last year. I was, unfortunately, unsuccessful in this appeal.

It should be noted that the committee absorbed this year's reduction by delaying equipment and supply purchases and slowly backfilling 6 staff vacancies created from the new congress, reaching 69 staff in August. The committee intends to utilize any nominal remaining funds for necessary equipment, webhosting and database upgrades, and supplies in anticipation of next year's budget reduction. To date, the committee still hopes and expects to return \$50 thousand dollars of this year's funds.

A 1% cut, coupled with the over \$540 thousand dollars decrease we absorbed last year, would still significantly impact the effectiveness of our personnel and the committee's mission, but would allow us to perform the basic functions of the committee. Within that cut, we would operate at absolute bare bones for technology, equipment, and incentives – but would be able to sustain our most critical resource, our staff levels.

Additionally, committees have been directed to reinstitute reimbursement of Government Printing Office (GPO) Detailees. This was neither expected, nor budgeted for at the beginning of this Congress. Due to the volume of hearings the committee holds – over 113 this year – we have come to rely on our two GPO

Printers. However, coming at a cost of approximately \$225 thousand dollars, it cuts into personnel funding. Funding needed to sustain our current staffing level.

As you know, attracting seasoned professionals, many of them veterans, to staff our ranks is one of our top priorities. These staffers are our fiscal warriors, working to ensure –through their oversight – that Defense programs are brought in on time and on budget. Forcing us to shed key talent from our ranks represents a “penny wise, pound foolish” strategy – as we would lose the ability to properly monitor certain areas of Pentagon spending, some of which account for billions in taxpayer dollars.

Further cuts would stretch the remaining staff, already overworked by a wartime portfolio, and harm their ability to do their jobs. This committee has always stood ready to do its part and pay its fair share. But, Mr. Chairman, you simply cannot scrutinize an agency like the Defense Department on a skeleton crew.

I frequently note that the charge of our committee is specifically enumerated in the US Constitution. The Armed Services Committee has faithfully executed that charge, through good times and bad, and we pride ourselves in accomplishing this on a fully bipartisan and cost-efficient basis.

Thank you for your time Mr. Chairman. I’m happy to answer your questions once Ranking Member Smith completes his opening statement.