

Testimony of Congressman Mike Johnson (LA-04)
Submitted to the House Armed Services Committee
April 11, 2018

Thank you, Chairman Thornberry, Ranking Member Smith and members of the committee. I sincerely appreciate you giving me the opportunity to return to provide input during the committee's "member day" hearing for the Fiscal Year 2019 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

I have the distinct honor of representing a congressional district that is home to two vital military installations for our nation, and national security interests around the world – that's Fort Polk and Barksdale Air Force Base, and even our smaller National Guard facilities, such as Camp Minden. As I'm sure you know, Fort Polk is home to the Army Joint Readiness Training Center and Barksdale is home to the Air Force Global Strike Command. As is evident with the recent provocations of Syria, North Korea, Iran, Russia, and others, we live in highly uncertain and incredibly complex time, which further highlights the importance of these two bases and our military readiness to be fully prepared to combat any threat from overseas.

In keeping to today's time constraints, I will focus primarily on two areas I think are in essential need of attention by the committee and Congress – one is modernizing our U.S. Nuclear Enterprise and two is ensuring U.S. Army capabilities are fully equipped for necessary training exercises.

As I begin, I would like to respectfully thank this Committee for working closely with me last year while crafting the 2018 NDAA to begin the process of re-engineering

and modernizing the B-52 bombers at Barksdale Air Force Base. This much needed makeover will extend the life of the B-52's into the 2050s which is amazing to even think about, and improve range and fuel efficiency, and lower maintenance costs. I would also like to relay my thanks for the continued support of Fort Polk from this Committee, in recognition of their vital importance to accomplishing its missions and military readiness.

Nuclear Enterprise –

Today I would just briefly like to speak to the nuclear weapons as they continue to play an integral role in the strategies of Russia, North Korea, Pakistan, India and China. In fact, according to many reports as you all know, and as evidenced from recent aggressive actions, these countries are increasing their reliance on, and modernizing, their capabilities whether it be in their land, air or sea-based nuclear forces.

If this Congress is going to be serious about rebuilding our nuclear infrastructure, it must continue to express support for the long-term commitment of Barksdale Air Force Base and for the majority of the Nuclear Triad. I applaud the decision by the U.S. Air Force to include the new gate at 1-20 – 1-220 interchange into Barksdale Air Force Base on its unfunded priority list. This project has to be completed in sequence to pave the way for construction of the Weapons Storage Area, which is currently scheduled to begin construction in Fiscal Year 2020. The new Weapons Storage Area is absolutely vital to our nuclear enterprise, as it will support the overall activities Global Strike Command oversees, and its necessary involvement in a wide array of strategic deterrence. As members of this committee, you are well aware of how critical the Bomber Command, 8th Air Force in charge of our aging fleet and Missile Command, and the 20th Air

Force in charge of the United States Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM's), are critical to deterrence and global strategy.

Ground Capabilities –

In any event that maintaining a capable and robust nuclear option does not suffice as a deterrent from war, it is imperative that we have a capable and ready ground force. As this committee and Congress have presented a path forward to rebuilding our force structure, the need for modernizing our ground capabilities is certainly prevalent to ensure full mission readiness. As a proud member who represents one of the two unit training centers in the United States, Fort Polk Army Base and the Joint Readiness Training Center in our district, it's crucial to highlight how the Army has continued to solidify its footprint with a state of the art Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC). As Fort Polk JRTC provides invaluable training for Advise and Assist roles, and provides soldiers with the training and flexibility necessary to carry out the demands placed on them to achieve victory, it also partners with our close allies in collaborative joint exercises to prepare for the unique situations and challenges a unit may face while deployed.

As we work to regrow our ground forces, and since Fort Polk remains a vital security asset, we should invest in the JRTC infrastructure to replace the existing Joint Operations Center "(JOC)". As the current JOC was constructed in 1976, just four years after my birth, it is in need of serious modernization, as it is unable to offer sensitive training scenarios above the "SECRET" level, due to its outdated infrastructure.

Authorizing a new JOC at Fort Polk will allow the JRTC to replicate scenarios that are

sensitive in nature, but offer invaluable training to fully prepare for any challenges ahead, as it is the only Combat Training Center in the nation that also trains and deploys combat units.

Preparing to close here, I just want to say the defense communities that surround both Barksdale Air Force Base and Fort Polk JRTC, have a long proven track record of fully supporting these two vital military installations and they stand ready to modernize our armed forces to meet our nations mission capabilities and necessary resources. Congressman Abraham have visited these bases with me and he has done it himself many times and he can attest to the same. Just recently at Fort Polk, the Army completed its largest land-purchase of over 47,000 acres in an effort to provide even more robust training capabilities for Brigade Combat Team rotations – an action that was fully supported by the local community enthusiastically so. Furthermore, the State of Louisiana and our local community are finalizing an investment of \$90 million dollars to construct that I-20 – I-220 interchange into the Barksdale Air Force Base, to open access to the installation's eastern reservation, and relieving traffic congestion to pave the way for that Weapons Storage Facility. Just last week I was in Baton Rouge visiting my old colleagues at the Louisiana Legislature and went to the hearing of the Joint Budget Committee, and just wanted to thank all my colleagues there for their unanimous support for this vital project.

Finally, I just want to thank this committee for considering these important priorities for our congressional district as you do all these around the country. I look forward to doing everything I can to support the committee's work to provide our

military with the essential resources it needs. It's a top priority for all of us and it should be.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate your leadership and truly appreciate the time you all take to consider all these things and the opportunity to show my continued support for our men and women in uniform, and I yield back.