



Laborers International Union of North America National Guard Council Local 1776

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Opening Statement

General Ham and other distinguished members, my name is Ben Banchs and I am the Business Manager for the Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA) National Guard Council Local 1776. I'm also a 24-year member of the Louisiana Air National Guard and currently work on F-15 Avionics Systems. I've worked in combat aviation for over 20 years.

LIUNA proudly represent over 500,000 hardworking Americans from all walks of life. Among these are Army National Guard Technicians. It is on their behalf that I provide this testimony.

The Secret to the National Guard's Success

While this Commission has been asked to look at the entire Army, our primary focus today is the Apache proposal. The Army's propaganda slogan, led by General Ray Odierno, has become 'cheaper means second rate.' We strongly disagree.

With all due respect to the General, it is well documented that the National Guard, especially the Aviation Cadre, performs on par and even better than their Active Duty counterparts in spite of the fact that we are underfunded, undermanned and underequipped. If the main driver for the Army is cost then we believe any savings gained from the Apache proposal are eclipsed by the overall loss in our ability to bring the fight to the enemy as a Total Force.

This proposal will have far-reaching long-term effects that negatively impact the entire Army community, to include a degradation of our overall combat aviation capability. An exodus of Apaches from the Guard sets us back a minimum of 15 years to the days before the Aviation Modernization Plan of 2000; worst case we revert to a Vietnam-era posture. The most immediate affect is the elimination of a third of the most experienced Apache personnel within the Total Force, a pool of experience the Army relies on in order to maintain a '24-hour' combat aviation capability. This knowledge and experience will take years (perhaps decades) to replace, if it can even be replaced.

While an active duty aviation battalion fields 400 soldiers both in peace and war the Guard only requires a handful of full-time personnel to maintain the same peacetime readiness. The reason can be attributed to the men and women we represent; the small yet knowledgeable dual-status technician workforce. As civilian employees, technicians cost much less to employ than soldiers since, for example, they do not receive tax-exempt housing or food allowances and also pay out of pocket for a large portion of their health coverage, two of the biggest cost drivers of the active duty workforce.

Payroll savings aside the technicians, themselves, are an asset since they only do one job: either fly or maintain Apaches with very limited additional tasks. Some boast 15, 20, and even 25 years of experience maintaining, driving or flying the same tank, truck, or airframe. This in-house experience is the backbone of the Guard, and truly is the secret to our getting the job done at a fraction of the cost. I challenge you to find this pool of experience anywhere else within the military at such a bargain price. Contrast that with the younger and less experienced AD soldier struggling with multiple distractions that take them out of the cockpit or off the hangar floor and what you have is an experience gap often filled by civilian contractors, a cost the Army doesn't openly like to acknowledge.

Part-time Guardsmen also cost less since they only receive pay for one weekend a month and two weeks per year. However, part-time aviators can also perform 72 additional days of training annually meaning even a part-timer can fly over 110 days per year allowing them to maintain AD-level proficiency at a fraction of the cost.

Another factor the Army is failing to account for is that most Guard aviators also fly for a living; maybe not Apaches, but many fly in support of oil companies, news outfits, civilian medevac, and law enforcement allowing them to maintain basic flying skills when not on military duty.

A part-time Guard pilot that transports oil workers or flies medevac is usually operating over-water and landing on narrow and congested areas, including sea-borne platforms. Medevac pilots also never know where their next mission is going to take them. Add impairments caused by nature such as weather or fire and a Guard pilot brings a set of skills to the table that an active duty pilot cannot because if you're an active duty Apache pilot then that's all you are. How do you quantify that kind of 'real-world' experience?

This is where the rubber meets the road. Combine experience with our affordability and the Army's proposal makes absolutely no sense. Since 1978, study after study has shown the Guard is more affordable by a factor of almost 85% during peacetime and 5% - 20% during combat.¹ Even if fully manned we still save US taxpayers money. With recent history showing the National Guard is just as capable (if not more) than the active duty, you have to ask why the Army would choose to reverse decades of progress under Total Force?

¹ Office of the Secretary of Defense, Report to Congress, *Unit Cost And Readiness For The Active And Reserve Components Of The Armed Forces* (December 2013), pg. 3., <http://www.ngaus.org/sites/default/files/CAPE%20FINAL%20ACRCMixReport.pdf>

In Closing

Our military is the most ready and capable it has ever been because of the force-mix it provides. This is the result of how well the Guard and Reserves have been integrated since the Cold War and Vietnam. To understand how damaging the current proposal is, you have to go back in time.

The examples I provide in my written testimony of the South Carolina Army National Guard's 1-151 Aviation Reconnaissance Battalion are but a glimpse into the capability of the National Guard, as a whole, as it relates to our Nation's overall defense. I feel comfortable saying here today that South Carolina Apaches are the best in the entire Army, and invite you to travel to South Carolina and see for yourselves how the men and women of the 151 ARB manage to out-do their active duty counterparts at a net savings to the US taxpayer.

A decade of combat and two wars later, the National Guard is an integral part of the Total Force. We have repeatedly answered the call to duty around the globe performing missions from mundane to extremely specialized side by side and without the help of our active duty counterparts; we simultaneously responded to emergencies back home (something the active duty cannot say); and we have paid the ultimate price right alongside our active duty brothers and sisters, all while being underfunded, under resourced, and at a fraction of the cost. It's time for the Army to embrace the National Guard. We're here to stay.

I would like to thank each of you for the opportunity to present this testimony, and commend you for taking on such a hard task. At this time I will answer any questions that you may have.

Thank You