

**Member Comment Submission
Congressman Keith Rothfus (PA-12)
National Commission on the Future of the Army
Thursday, October 8, 2015**

Major General Carpenter and Executive Staff:

Thank you and the other distinguished members of the National Commission on the Future of the Army for holding this meeting today and for receiving my comments on behalf of the constituents of Pennsylvania's Twelfth Congressional District. Thank you also for your service to this nation – either in uniform or as a civilian – and for the important work you are now doing as part of this Commission.

To be sure, the assessments and recommendations offered by this Commission will have a profound impact on the Army for years to come. But I have confidence that you are the right people for this important mission, which is why I was a strong supporter of the legislation to create this body.

Your decades of public service and expertise in national and international security policy, military forces capability, force structure, and reserve forces policy are invaluable to tackling tough questions concerning the proper size and force mixture of our armed forces. This is particularly true given the constraints of our current fiscal environment and the many threats faced by the United States and our allies in an increasingly dangerous world.

It is a result of such budgetary pressures that our military has been forced to implement policies like the Army's Aviation Restructuring Initiative (ARI). As you know, this policy will result in the Army eliminating all single-engine rotary wing aircraft from its inventory and transferring all National Guard AH-64 Apaches to the active component. Army officials have stated that this restructuring is necessary to generate savings and make the remaining aviation fleet more affordable. I have long opposed this shortsighted and dangerous plan and asked simply: savings at what cost?

Since 9/11, the National Guard has repeatedly risen to the occasion. They have answered the call and fought bravely in Iraq and Afghanistan. At the height of these wars, nearly fifty percent of the Army's total force was a mix of reservists and members of the National Guard. The Pennsylvania National Guard alone contributed more than 42,000 individual deployments. They have fought side-by-side with the active component, all while continuing to achieve their important mission here at home. As the National Governors Association put it best, the modern National Guard has become "a highly experienced and capable combat force and an essential State partner in responding to domestic disasters and emergencies."

ARI will have devastating impacts on all that the National Guard has achieved. By stripping the National Guard of its Apache helicopters, the Army is ensuring that the National Guard will be less combat-ready and less able to provide operational depth. It will also deprive our nation of an operational reserve for these aircraft, which is essential to retention and management of talented aircrews. This represents a fundamental shift in the nature and

role of the National Guard. It runs counter to the wisdom and preference of many members of Congress and their constituents.

This issue is important in Pennsylvania and to the 1-104th Attack Reconnaissance Battalion (ARB) in Johnstown. These highly-trained airmen and crew played an invaluable aerial support role in Afghanistan, where they flew their Apache helicopters and fought alongside the active component. Later this month, the Army will begin the process of replacing these Apaches with a smaller number of Blackhawks.

This reduction will deprive the National Guard of both highly-trained personnel and equipment, which cost a fraction of what similar capacity costs in the active component. It will result in the National Guard being less effective, less combat-capable, and less able to heed the call to defend this nation, both at home and abroad. Major General Wesley Craig, former-Adjutant General for the Pennsylvania National Guard, summarized this well when he stated that ARI “does not make sense for our community, commonwealth, or country.”

Yet, despite these legitimate and serious concerns, the Army stubbornly continues to press forward with ARI. Under current law, the Army can transfer up to 48 Apaches beginning this month. It will transfer the rest next year. ARBs like the 1-104th will be shut down, and the time and resources we have spent building up this capacity will be wasted.

Thankfully, this Commission can help prevent this from happening. There is still some time left, and your recommendations will play a large role in dictating the future of ARI.

I am confident that through your deliberative approach to analyzing this issue, you will come to the same conclusion as I have: ARI makes no fiscal or national security sense, and it will have irreparable harm on our National Guard, and indeed, or national security.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you this morning, and I am happy to address any questions that you may have.