

MARK TAKAI
1ST DISTRICT, HAWAII

422 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
TELEPHONE: (202) 225-2726
FAX: (202) 225-0688

300 ALA MOANA BOULEVARD
ROOM 4-104
HONOLULU, HI 96850
TELEPHONE: (808) 541-2570
FAX: (808) 533-0133

MARK.TAKAI@MAIL.HOUSE.GOV
TAKAI.HOUSE.GOV

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
SUBCOMMITTEES:
STRATEGIC FORCES
TACTICAL AIR AND LAND FORCES

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ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCES
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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1101

Representative Mark Takai (HI-01)
Statement for the Record
October 8, 2015
National Commission on the Future of the Army Discussion

Aloha and thank you for having me here today.

I represent the First Congressional District of Hawaii, and serve on the House Armed Services and Small Business Committees.

I want to thank you for the hard work you are doing to ensure the best future for America's military forces.

My first and foremost concern as this process moves forward is that we are not addressing the bigger concern surrounding our military, the harmful effects of sequestration.

While there are many issues that divide Congress, the need for a robust national defense is not one of them. Our country has consistently shown that we recognize the need for a strong national defense and are willing to allocate funds in order to do so.

However, sequestration is creating doubt across the military that the level of readiness needed for combat can be sustained.

Lawmakers, both Democrats and Republicans, have been heard saying that sequestration is okay, that it is the only way to cut spending enough to make an impact.

But they don't take into account how harmful this is to the business of our nation. The defense industry has been plagued by continuing resolutions, furloughs, shutdowns, and the uncertainty to be able to plan long term due to the fiscal woes created by Congress.

The current sequester caps are limiting the growth of this country and hurting America's ability to retain its status as the preeminent world power.

To truly move our nation forward, and to secure a future for the generations to come, we need to remove sequestration and invest in our citizens.

This will not only provide for a robust military, but also a strong support system for the families of servicemembers. I truly believe that the status of family members is a military readiness issue, when the families of our servicemembers are provided for, the overall military structure benefits.

While there is no immediate end in sight to sequestration, I believe that all of us gathered here today, need to prioritize ending sequestration before any serious, long-term damage is done to the welfare of America.

While Congress hopefully works on bringing an end to sequestration, there are pressing issues that need to be addressed now.

However, because we face these budget challenges now, this Commission was established to figure out how to address them. I want to be clear, we have to have a balanced way to do so, all while maintaining strong Active Duty, Reserve and Guard components.

Another priority that must be taken into consideration when considering any reductions and the future force structure of the Army is the importance of the Asia-Pacific.

The Army has reiterated its commitment to the Pacific by establishing programs like Pacific Pathways, which further engage our allies and partners in the region. And the importance of the Army in this theatre cannot be overstated – a theatre where 21 of 29 defense chiefs are Army.

The final priority I must talk about is preserving the capability of our National Guard units. I cannot emphasize this enough.

I currently serve on the Tactical Air and Land Subcommittee, and a major issue that we looked at this year is the Army Aviation Restructure Initiative, which was rolled out in 2014.

Under the Army's plan, the National Guard would transfer its entire fleet of AH-64 Apache attack helicopters to the active force in return for UH-60 Black Hawk utility helicopters.

This has been debated constantly and will continue to be debated through this year. The verdict was clear, and though this was an initiative that was supposed to move ahead, lawmakers put a clear hold in place in this year's NDAA.

The Army claims that this is necessary to right-size, and align the force, all the while saving money and becoming more efficient.

But what's really under debate is the identity of the Army National Guard, its duties and mission. With the transfer of the Apaches, the Guard will lose its attack capability, although Black Hawks are also able to engage in combat.

Under this proposal, it's clear that the nation would lose Guardsmen who have decades of experience flying and maintaining the complex platforms in question.

In a fair discussion about cost savings, the National Guard — the most cost-effective component of the Army — should see an increased role in national defense. Instead, amid historic budget challenges and without discussion or compelling reason, the Army intends to gut the National Guard.

A National Guard Combat Aviation Brigade costs about a one third of what an active duty CAB does. This has to be taken into account - among other things - as we continue to evaluate this proposal.

Because Guardsmen are inherently more cost effective than their active-component brethren, a conclusion reached again and again in countless recent studies, these Apache pilots have a built-in efficiency that would be discarded under the Army plan designed to save money.

I will end with this. I have been a National Guardsmen for 16 years, and have served through one of the most challenging decades of service where the Guard has stepped up to answer the call time and again.

Throughout my service, I have seen Guard units perform the same tasks as Active units - never could you tell a difference in professionalism or executing the mission.

Mahalo once again for your commitment to our military.