

**WRITTEN STATEMENT BY**

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**BEFORE THE**

**SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON DEFENSE**

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**ON**

**A REVIEW OF THE PRESIDENT'S**

**FY2024 FUNDING REQUEST AND**

**BUDGET JUSTIFICATION FOR THE**

**NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE**

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NOT FOR PUBLIC DISSEMINATION

UNTIL RELEASED BY

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

Chairman Tester, Ranking Member Collins, and esteemed members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement prior to my testimony. Your investment in the National Guard has built a ready, capable, professional force that is vital to the Joint Force and our American communities in times of crisis. Thank you for your ongoing support.

I would also like to recognize the efforts of my wife Kelly and Senior Enlisted Advisor Tony Whitehead for their support and partnership in addressing Soldier, Airmen, and family needs. We are a unique force with unique needs and ensuring healthy and resilient Guardsmen and families is our highest priority and foundational to all we do.

## **National Defense Strategy**

The 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS) identifies the People's Republic of China (PRC) as our pacing challenge and most consequential strategic competitor. The NDS focuses the Department of Defense (DoD) on this pacing challenge while taking steps to manage other threats in this dynamic strategic environment.

The National Guard plays a critical role in implementing the NDS and advancing DoD's priorities of: Defending the homeland; deterring attacks against the United States, our allies, and our partners; deterring aggression while being prepared to prevail in conflict when necessary; and ensuring our future military advantage through a resilient Joint Force and defense ecosystem<sup>1</sup>. These priorities are how we intend to meet and deter threats to our national security and the rules-based international order.

National Guard Soldiers and Airmen are actively engaged in every aspect of our NDS. As twenty percent of the Joint Force, we are a significant component of *integrated deterrence*. As the combat reserve of the Army and the Air Force—manned, trained and equipped to fight our Nation's wars, and currently serving in every Combatant Command—we play a key role in *campaigning*. As a dual-status force that builds key partnerships at every level—including international state partners, the federal interagency, regional emergency management, and local law enforcement—we provide *enduring advantages* not found anywhere else in DoD. The NDS cannot succeed without the National Guard.

## **National Guard support to the NDS**

Priority one is defending the homeland, and the National Guard is the fundamental element in this regard. The National Guard has a community-based force structure, and our wide-ranging geographic distribution provides unique advantages to defending the homeland. Guard members defend the National Capital Region, support Ground Based Missile Defense in Colorado and Alaska; man non-stop, 24-hour intercontinental ballistic missile defense systems from Alaska and California; protect American air sovereignty; support the U.S. Space Force with fourteen operational space squadrons; mitigate critical cyber vulnerabilities; and use National Guard manning, training, and equipment to assist our communities in times of need.

Priority two is deterring strategic attacks against our homeland and our allies and partners. This priority clearly demonstrates both the interconnected nature of the threats and challenges we face and the cooperative approach we must take to counter them. Through the National Guard's State Partnership Program's (SPP) 88 partnerships with 100 nations around the globe, Soldiers and

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<sup>1</sup> The 2022 National Defense Strategy, p. 1

Airmen experience the global operating environment, develop military-to-military relationships, improve readiness, enhance access and influence, and ensure our Nation has trusted, capable, interoperable Allies and partners at our side. With the assistance of Congress, the SPP has proven to be one of the most valuable security cooperation programs available and continues to grow in support of the National Security Strategy, NDS and Combatant Commanders' theater security objectives. Fully funding the SPP through the services will ensure continued access to timely, consistent, and adequate resources to maximize the program's potential and historically robust return on investment. As the NDS makes clear, mutually beneficial alliances and partnerships are an enduring strength, and a key to the integrated deterrence and campaigning efforts of the National Guard.

Priority three is deterring aggression and preparing to prevail in conflict when necessary. This speaks directly to the National Guard's purpose: fighting and winning our Nation's wars. The National Guard is an operational force. We participate in combat, peacekeeping and stability operations, training exercises, and humanitarian missions' shoulder-to-shoulder with our parent services, and the Joint Force. We serve in every Combatant Command, enhance the readiness of the Joint Force, and support missions within the Global Force Management Allocation Plan (GFMAP) process. Being fully modernized and interoperable with our parent services and the Joint Force ensures we present a combat-credible force that can successfully deter and defend aggression from our strategic competitors and prevail in conflict if needed.

Priority four is ensuring our future military advantage by building a resilient Joint Force and defense ecosystem. This priority speaks to both people and systems—strengthening the resilience of the Soldiers and Airmen who serve, improving the resilience of the critical infrastructure on which we rely, and enhancing the resilience of our organization. We continue to devote time and resources to improve all aspects of National Guard culture to make service more appealing and inclusive, to include fostering an environment that values education and understands the importance of mental and physical well-being. We also continue efforts to enhance national resilience by protecting our nation's critical assets, communications and control, and infrastructure; and increasing our ability to withstand the effects of natural and manmade disasters.

### **Looking to the Future**

The Department's FY 2024 budget request helps build a Joint Force that is the most lethal, resilient, survivable, agile, and responsive in the world. Paced to the China threat, it builds combat-credible forces able to deter, defend, and defeat aggression if required. It advances recruiting, retention, and readiness while enhancing unit and personal resilience; strengthens deterrence, Ally and partner nation capability, and interagency capacity. However, budgetary uncertainty and inflationary pressures could erode buying power, stressing National Guard programs and personnel, and diminishing our Joint Force readiness. Continuing Resolutions in particular impede our ability to implement the NDS, hurts service members and their families, and undermines the predictability needed for Reserve Component (RC) personnel to effectively support the Joint Force.

As I engage with senior leaders and service members throughout the 50 states, three territories, and the District of Columbia, I remain concerned with several issues that directly impact future readiness and the health of the force. I look forward to working with the Subcommittee and your colleagues on solutions to address the challenges before us.

### *National Guard Space Operations*

For 28 years, National Guard space units have been providing missions as varied as strategic missile warning, nuclear detection, space domain awareness, command and control, and electromagnetic warfare, and the U.S. Space Force continues to rely on these critical space capabilities. It is imperative we appropriately train, and equip in-line with U.S. Space Force standards and U.S. Space Command priorities.

### *Modernization and Recapitalization*

To fulfill NDS obligations, the National Guard must be deployable, sustainable, interoperable and survivable on any battlefield, in any domain. For example, the Air National Guard has twenty-five fighter squadrons today, each essential to the defense of our Nation, our integrated deterrence capabilities, and our ability to campaign. As the National Guard transitions from legacy platforms, it is essential we pursue cost-effective solutions that preserve our capability, capacity and generational experience to meet the today's threats.

### *Recruiting and Retention*

The National Guard provides the unique opportunity to combine military service with a civilian career. Every member and potential recruit weigh the benefit of that military service with impact on their lives and that of their families. We've taken concrete steps to improve community outreach, bolster recruiting and retention programs, and foster a culture that makes service more appealing, inclusive, and secure. Ensuring we recruit and retain America's best in the National Guard must remain a top priority; to do so, every aspect of our recruiting and marketing enterprise must be fully resourced.

### *Healthcare*

According to a 2019 Office of the Secretary of Defense study, roughly 60,000 Guardsmen are uninsured and lack access to healthcare when not in a duty status. If unable to seek treatment for a physical ailment or mental health crisis or obtain follow-on care due to a lack of insurance, it impacts their medical readiness and ability to serve. We cannot surge medical readiness; our people must be ready when they are needed. I have formed a working group dedicated to providing the best estimate of cost and areas of potential savings and look forward to sharing those findings soon so we can identify the true cost of premium-free healthcare options and how it would impact the readiness of our force.

## **Conclusion**

The NDS signals a new era of challenges and opportunities for our Nation. With the support of Congress, the National Guard will continue to be a force for integrated deterrence, campaigning, and building enduring advantages that empower our Nation to compete and prevail. With your continued support, we boldly face the future: Always Ready, Always There.