

Date: 20 May 2025

Subject: FY26 HAC-D National Guard and Reserve Posture Hearing

Subcommittee: House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense

Subcommittee Attendees:

Chairman Ken Calvert (R-CA-42)
Ranking Member Betty McCollum (D-MN-04)
Rep Ed Case (D-HI-01)
Rep Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL-26)
Rep Marcy Kaptur (D-OH-09)
Rep Steve Womack (R-AR-03)
Rep Henry Cuellar (D-TX-28)
Rep Chuck Fleischmann (R-TN-03)
Rep Pete Aguilar (D-CA-31)
Rep Hal Rogers (R-KY-05)
Rep Susie Lee (D-NV-03)
Rep Jake Ellzey (R-TX-06)

AFR Witness:

Lt Gen John P. Healy, Chief of Air Force Reserve

Executive Summary:

On 20 May 2025, the HAC-D held an oversight hearing on FY26 National Guard and Reserve Posture.

This was a single panel hearing with the following witnesses: General Steven Nordhaus, Chief of the National Guard Bureau; Lieutenant General Robert Harter, Chief of Army Reserve; Vice Admiral Nancy Lacore, Chief of Navy Reserve; Lieutenant General Leonard Anderson, Commander, Marine Forces Reserve; and Lieutenant General John Healy, Chief of Air Force Reserve.

In his opening statement, Chairman Ken Calvert emphasized the critical roles of the National Guard and Reserve forces in overseas missions, disaster response, border security, and international partnerships. He cited examples such as wildfire response in California, hurricane relief nationwide, support in Ukraine, and operations combating fentanyl trafficking at the border. Chairman Calvert raised concerns about the demands placed on Guard and Reserve members balancing civilian careers with military duties. He highlighted the need for continued funding support, referencing the committee's allocation of \$850 million to the National Guard and Reserve Equipment Account for FY25. Chairman Calvert requested the witnesses provide input on additional resource needs for modernization and training to maintain parity with active-duty counterparts. He also asked for recommendations to improve talent retention in critical areas including artificial intelligence and cyber capabilities. Lastly, Chairman Calvert requested information about specific equipment and capability gaps impacting readiness and integration with active-duty forces.

In her opening statement, Ranking Member McCollum emphasized the importance of the Guard and Reserve to national security, disaster response, humanitarian missions, and international partnerships. She voiced concerns about the delayed FY25 budget process and uncertainty surrounding budget priorities. Ranking Member McCollum expressed interest in understanding the impact of increased troop deployments to the southern border on morale, readiness, retention, and existing missions. She

raised concerns about the effects of continuing resolutions on operations, training, and the civilian workforce. Ranking Member McCollum requested details on how force structure changes and equipment modifications announced by the Army might affect Guard and Reserve units. She also highlighted the financial and personal burdens faced by Guard and Reserve personnel balancing military obligations, civilian employment, and family responsibilities.

In his opening remarks, Lt Gen Healy stated the AFR provides operational capability, strategic depth, and surge capacity across all core Air Force missions. He mentioned their rapid 72-hour response capability for combat and domestic emergencies, including hurricane and wildfire responses. Lt Gen Healy highlighted cost efficiency, stating the Reserve delivers significant capability at reduced costs compared to active-duty forces. He emphasized challenges with the Flying Hour program, noting a funding shortfall of \$26 million due to the FY25 O&M markup and stated the flying hour budget would likely be exhausted by early September. Lt Gen Healy identified concerns over legacy aircraft divestment without adequate replacement, noting this would significantly reduce operational capacity by 2030. He stressed the importance of concurrent and proportional modernization to retain experienced personnel and maintain readiness. He also mentioned recent efforts to strengthen global partnerships through 28 bilateral engagements under the Reserve Allies and Partners program.

AFR Specific Topics/Responses:

Disaster Response/California Wildfires

Rep Calvert asked about Guard and Reserve capabilities and readiness to handle increasing state-level disaster response demands, particularly noting California wildfires, without impacting federal readiness.

As a follow-up to Gen Nordhaus's response on ANG efforts, **Lt Gen Healy** explained the wildfire response was a unified effort involving both the Guard and Reserve. He specifically mentioned the Reserve's 302nd Airlift Wing, which participated outside of its regular training schedule to assist with firefighting operations in the Los Angeles area, highlighting effective coordination between the Guard and Reserve.

Budget Uncertainty and FY25 Yearlong CR Impacts

Rep Case asked each witness to identify the principal issues they are currently dealing with due to the uncertainty and delays caused by the continuing resolution and unclear budget process.

Lt Gen Healy highlighted two primary challenges stemming from the current budget uncertainty. First, he emphasized issues related to predictable and stable funding required to pay reservists properly from O&M accounts. He also reiterated the \$26 million shortfall in flying hour funding, potentially limiting aircrew training. Second, he raised concerns over quarterly budget authorities under continuing resolutions, specifically mentioning large-ticket maintenance items such as a \$62 million periodic depot maintenance on a B-52 aircraft, which require more predictable funding.

F-16s at Homestead ARB

Rep Diaz-Balart expressed concern about outdated F-16 Block 30 aircraft at Homestead Air Force Base, highlighting their age by noting they entered service the same year IBM released its first laptop. He asked if there was a formalized plan to replace these F-16s, and what needed to be done to move forward on modernization.

Lt Gen Healy acknowledged the aging F-16 Block 30 aircraft at Homestead and noted they are currently only funded through FY27, with no formal replacement plan beyond that date. He explained the AFR aims to position Homestead as its first deployable combat wing. He indicated a desire to transition to F-35 aircraft but mentioned that currently no formal recapitalization plan exists. He also stressed the value and cost-efficiency of the AFR, emphasizing that the Reserve delivers significant Air Force capabilities at a fraction of the cost of active-duty components.

Recruitment and Retention

Rep Diaz-Balart asked all panelists how their branches were performing regarding recruitment and retention, and whether Congress could assist.

Lt Gen Healy described recruitment for the AFR as successful due to significant investment. He stated the Reserve exceeded its recruitment goals in the previous year and is currently producing an average of 2.6 recruits per recruiter monthly, which surpasses the active duty's rate of 1.9 recruits per recruiter. He expressed confidence that recruitment goals would again be exceeded this year. However, he identified retention as a significant challenge, noting the Reserve is approximately 1% below its retention goal, which could impact their ability to achieve targeted end strength numbers.

Youth Recruitment and Career Development Programs

Rep Kaptur raised concerns about the shortage of skilled technicians and mechanics. She asked each witness about military programs or initiatives that could help attract and develop youth (ages 12-18) into these critical technical career fields, possibly through connections with local educational institutions or programs.

Lt Gen Healy noted that the AFR utilizes the Junior ROTC program, administered by the active-duty Air Force through Air Education and Training Command. He explained that community outreach and youth engagement occur primarily at the individual base level through local programs.

Adversary Air Capability at Nellis Air Force Base (Divestment of F-16 Aircraft)

Rep Lee raised concerns about the AFR's 706th Aggressor Squadron at Nellis Air Force Base divesting pre-block F-16 aircraft. She asked about the plans to fill the adversary air requirement created by this divestment and about the overall impact of losing these aircraft on the AFR's mission readiness.

Lt Gen Healy confirmed the scheduled divestment of 19 pre-block F-16 aircraft from the AFR's 706th AGRS at Nellis, noting no replacement aircraft are planned. He explained that potential solutions to fulfill the adversary air mission include hiring civilian contractors, which would increase annual costs by approximately \$12 to \$18 million beyond current operations. Another option could involve using additional aircraft temporarily assigned for training. He outlined the personnel impacts, noting about 88 operations and maintenance personnel currently associated with the F-16s would be reassigned within the Reserve. He specifically noted the significant operational impact, citing a projected 40% loss of experienced instructor pilots critical to training the combat forces through adversary air exercises.

NGREA

Rep Lee noted that the purchasing power of NGREA funding had declined significantly since 2015. She asked the panelists to discuss the importance of NGREA funding and what funding levels would allow them to meet their modernization and readiness goals.

Lt Gen Healy highlighted a \$1.5 billion backlog in aircraft modernization within the AFR, noting that 88% of the fleet is more than 38 years old. He stated that while recent annual NGREA funding levels typically range between \$150 and \$155 million, the current year's funding was \$132 million. He emphasized that the AFR could effectively use an increase up to approximately \$175-176 million annually to address the modernization backlog more effectively.

Due Outs

- HAC-D will send additional questions for the record as needed.

Attachment:

HAC-D Guard and Reserve Hearing Full Transcript_20 May 2025