

**Date:** 22 May 2025

**Subject:** FY26 SAC-D National Guard and Reserve Posture Hearing

**Subcommittee:** Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense

**Subcommittee Attendees:**

Sen Mitch McConnell (R-KY), Chair

Sen Christopher Coons (D-DE), Ranking Member

Sen Jerry Moran (R-KS)

Sen John Boozman (R-AR)

Sen Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH)

Sen Lisa Murkowski (R-AK)

Sen Christopher Murphy (D-CT), No statement or questions for the panel

**AFR Witness:**

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

**Executive Summary:**

On 22 May 2025, the SAC-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; Rear Admiral Luke Frost, Director, Reserve Warfare, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations (representing Vice Admiral Nacy 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 McConnell acknowledged the critical roles of the National Guard and Reserve in national defense, disaster response, and international engagements. He expressed concern about the administration's delayed submission of the FY26 budget request, noting it was unusual to hold a budget hearing without the complete budget. Chairman McConnell highlighted the implications of a full-year CR, stressing that stable and predictable funding is essential for readiness, training, and equipment modernization. He pointed to increasing operational demands placed on the Guard and Reserve, including overseas deployments, border security missions, and responses to natural disasters. He cited examples such as Guardsmen from Kentucky involved in defending Tower 22 during recent attacks by Iran-backed forces, emphasizing the risks of adding new missions without adequate resources. Chairman McConnell concluded by requesting candid testimony from witnesses on the impacts of these funding challenges and readiness pressures facing their components.

In his opening statement, Ranking Member Coons expressed concern over the unprecedented delay in receiving the FY26 Department of Defense budget request and highlighted the historic nature of operating under a full-year CR. He emphasized the negative impacts of the CR, referencing cuts to defense spending, operational uncertainty, and challenges it creates for readiness and training. Ranking Member Coons stressed the importance of bipartisan cooperation to produce a timely and comprehensive defense appropriations bill that meets the needs of servicemembers. Senator Coons noted the increased demands placed on Guard and Reserve components, particularly with regard to domestic missions such as deployments to the southwest border, expressing concern over potential impacts to readiness and training. He further highlighted the growing pressure on Guard units during hurricane and wildfire seasons, along with the necessity of maintaining their preparedness for potential

conflicts in the Indo-Pacific region. Ranking Member Coons also addressed the civilian hiring freeze and Deferred Resignation Program (DRP), noting the burdens placed on military technicians due to the Office of Personnel Management's requirement for individual approval of civilian hires, which has led to significant delays. Lastly, he mentioned the effectiveness and value of the State Partnership Program, emphasizing its critical role in global engagement and defense partnerships.

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:**

#### **AFR Fighter Fleet and F-15E Recapitalization at Whiteman**

**Sen Moran** asked Lt Gen Healy about the decrease in the AFR fighter fleet compared to a decade ago. He referenced a proposal to recapitalize the 442nd Fighter Wing at Whiteman Air Force Base, currently flying A-10s, by transitioning to F-15E aircraft. Sen Moran asked if Lt Gen Healy supported this approach.

**Lt Gen Healy** responded affirmatively, stating he supported recapitalizing the 442nd Fighter Wing with F-15Es. He noted significant decreases in the Reserve fighter portfolio, highlighting scheduled divestments at Whiteman (A-10s in 2028), Davis-Monthan (A-10s before 2028), Nellis (F-16s at the end of the current year), and Homestead (F-16s after FY27). He highlighted that currently there was no planned recapitalization for these divestments. Lt Gen Healy emphasized cost savings the AFR provides, stating a Reserve F-15E 220 engine unit would operate approximately \$28 million cheaper per year compared to active-duty, and that a Reserve F-16 unit would operate approximately \$12 million to \$16 million cheaper per year compared to active-duty units. He confirmed sharing this cost analysis with senior Air Force leadership to advocate for retaining Reserve fighter capabilities.

#### **Reserve Allies and Partners Program (RAPP)**

**Sen Boozman** asked Lt Gen Healy to explain the AFR's recently launched Reserve Allies and Partners Program (RAPP) and to highlight differences from the National Guard's State Partnership Program.

**Lt Gen Healy** explained that the RAPP was developed to formalize international partnerships between the AFR and foreign reserve forces. Previously, engagements were informal and unscheduled, such as prior air evacuation training exercises conducted with the British Royal Air Force Auxiliary. Lt Gen Healy detailed significant international interest in RAPP, citing European and Pacific allies seeking exchanges and training focused on integrated defense logistics, base defense exercises, noncommissioned officer development, medical readiness, and civil engineering collaboration. He noted RAPP targeted established international reserve components, providing partner nations specific tailored capabilities from the Reserve's portfolio. Lt Gen Healy concluded by stating the program

currently operated without dedicated funding but expressed intent for future program growth and formal budget allocation.

### Impacts of the FY25 Yearlong Continuing Resolution

**Sen Moran** asked the panel to provide comments regarding specific readiness, training, and personnel impacts from the CR.

**Lt Gen Healy** responded by identifying predictability and stability as areas negatively impacted by the CR. He explained reservists rely heavily on advanced scheduling for duty periods and to coordinate leave from civilian employment. CR-related funding uncertainty disrupted this scheduling, particularly impacting reservists' willingness to commit to duty periods in October due to uncertain orders. Lt Gen Healy also stated exercises planned for August/September were at risk due to uncertain funding. He reiterated the previously noted \$26 million shortfall in the AFR's Flying Hour Program caused by the CR, noting it would likely result in aircraft grounding by early September.

### NGREA and Equipment Modernization

**Ranking Member Coons** asked the panelists about the value and importance of NGREA funding. He highlighted concerns about modernization needs and asked witnesses to explain the role NGREA funding plays in readiness and operations for their respective components.

**Lt Gen Healy** responded that NGREA is an essential part of the AFR budget, representing approximately 55 percent of the Reserve's procurement dollars. He explained the AFR relies on NGREA funding to maintain combat capability in older aircraft such as the F-16 fleet at Homestead ARB. Lt Gen Healy cited examples of modernization upgrades funded by NGREA, including AESA radars and electronic warfare pods for these aircraft. He emphasized that while these aircraft are among the oldest in the Air Force inventory, NGREA allows the Reserve to equip them effectively to remain combat-relevant. He also stated that 88 percent of the Reserve fleet is over 39 years old, and NGREA funding is essential to sustain these aircraft with secure communications and defensive systems upgrades, ensuring their continued effectiveness and survivability in operational environments.

### Civilian Hiring Freeze, Deferred Resignation Program (DRP), and MilTech Hiring

**Ranking Member Coons** asked all panelists about impacts caused by the civilian hiring freeze, DRP, and requested details on the hiring process for MilTechs and related readiness effects.

**Lt Gen Healy** responded by detailing impacts on AFR MilTechs. He explained dual-status technicians, who for 28 days of the month constitute 25 percent of the AFR's full-time force, perform essential daily functions including instruction, evaluation, and base operations management. Lt Gen Healy stated 440 dual-status technicians were affected by the civilian hiring freeze, which prevented them from moving into new positions within the AFR because each position move required individual approval through OPM. Although dual-status technicians were universally exempted from the DRP on April 2, Lt Gen Healy reported only 21 of the 440 affected personnel had successfully completed the hiring process through OPM since the exemption. He emphasized that delays in technician hiring directly impacted readiness, as these personnel are critical for training reservists scheduled to deploy in late FY26.

Senator Coons followed up by requesting Lt Gen Healy provide additional detailed information for the record on how this OPM hiring bottleneck is impacting Dover Air Force Base and other affected Reserve units.

Lt Gen Healy stated he would take the request for the record.

**Due Outs**

- QFR: Detailed examples and impacts for the 512 AW, Dover AFB (and any other AFRC units as applicable), highlighting and quantifying the scope of delays in hiring dual-status MilTechs
- SAC-D will send additional questions for the record as needed.

**Attachment:**

SAC-D Guard and Reserve Hearing Full Transcript\_22 May 2025