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FOREIGN RELATIONS

March 27, 2015

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee
122 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard J. Durbin
Ranking Member
Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee
122 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran and Vice Chairman Durbin:

As you begin work on the Fiscal Year 2016 Defense Appropriations bill, I write in strong support of the following programs described within this letter. As our troops are engaged in peacekeeping and security operations around the globe, we must ensure that they have the best training and equipment available to ensure their well-being and ability to accomplish their missions. The programs and equipment listed below are critical to maintaining readiness and multiply our force's ability to project American resolve.

As the Department of Defense relies on private industry for innovation and new product development, a robust Soldier Enhancement Program (SEP) (PE 0604601A/Infantry Support Weapons) facilitates greater small-scale procurement, more in-depth field evaluation opportunities, and the means to rapidly field validated technologies. Increased funding for SEP would encourage new innovations and mechanisms for increased consideration of soldier/squad equipment that might be necessary as our forces face constantly changing threats in different environments around the world. I request that the Committee appropriate funds to ensure that this critical enabler for helping the Army improve soldier equipment and capabilities remain as robust as possible.

It is without doubt that the Joint Test and Evaluation Program (JT&E) Program (PE 0605814OTE) is significant and crucial to the protection of our warfighters. With our constrained fiscal environment, new Service programs of record will be limited and the Department will increasingly rely on programs like JT&E to enhance existing platform capabilities. The JT&E Program's ability to develop non-acquisitions solutions using operational tests and evaluation processes is proven to increase warfighter effectiveness in joint operations. The proposed funding reduction for the JT&E program would have a clear adverse impact on operational effectiveness. Therefore, I request that the Committee restore funding to this program to ensure that our troops are supported by the best platforms available.

Multiple advances in weapons simulations have proven to be highly effective and fiscally responsible means for training our warfighters. The US Army, the Army National Guard, and the US Marine Corps have all benefited from simulation training systems. The established program of record for the Army National Guard is the Engagement Skills Trainer II (EST II). As the Committee has previously included small arms simulations as a priority, it is requested that the specific language regarding this program reflect this: "EST II small arms simulation training systems." This change is to ensure that the Army National Guard is allowed to procure out of the National Guard and Reserve Equipment Account (NGREA) the identical new technology simulation systems that the Army will be procuring. Further, I request that funding for the Army's EST II and the Marine Corps' Indoor Simulated Marksmanship Trainer – Upgrade (ISMT-U) be maintained.

In 2014, the Marine Corps validated its need for the Army's High Mobility Engineer Excavator (HMEE) with an initial procurement of 65 machines. HMEE is designed to perform mobility, counter-mobility, survivability and route clearance operations. This highly versatile and survivable system offers a greater array and capabilities than the Marine Corps Backhoe Loader. As the Marine Corps has continued to engage and take on new missions around the globe, the HMEE is a strategic compliment to its inventory to ensure that Marines are combat ready and effective. I request that the Marine Corps be appropriated such funds (BA-06) that it is able to procure three combat battalion sets of HMEEs.

I graciously thank you and the members of the Committee for your consideration of these requests. They each play integral roles in ensuring that our warfighters have the best training and equipment available to protect and defend our country. Should you or your staff have any questions, please contact me or Tommy Nguyen in my office at (202) 224-3930 or Tommy_Nguyen@isakson.senate.gov.

Sincerely,



Johnny Isakson
United States Senator