

**OPENING STATEMENT OF U.S. SENATOR JACK REED
RANKING MEMBER, SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

March 26, 2020

To receive testimony on the posture of the Department of the Army in review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2021

Our nation is in the grips of an extraordinary and unprecedented crisis due to the novel coronavirus pandemic and the spread of COVID-19. Right now our most immediate concern is ensuring the public's safety by practicing social distancing and promoting vigorous personal hygiene, while taking care of those that have tested positive for the disease. At the same time, Congress must continue to do our job, and I thank the Chairman for ensuring this Committee performs its oversight function while we safeguard the health of the witnesses, our staff, the general public, and the Members of this Committee.

In addition, I want to express the condolences of this Committee on the death of a defense contractor from COVID-19, as well as everyone who has lost a loved one during this pandemic. We are also keeping the servicemembers, dependents, civilians, and contractors who have been diagnosed with COVID-19, as well as all Americans suffering from this disease, in our thoughts and prayers. As a nation, we must do everything we can to stop the spread of COVID-19 and protect families, workers, and businesses.

Before turning to the Army's Fiscal Year 2021 budget request, I want to commend the Army for their efforts to assist in the response to the novel coronavirus pandemic. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is assisting the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) with the planning and construction of alternative medical facilities in New York. The Corps is also supporting planning missions for the New England region, Philadelphia, Norfolk, and Baltimore. In addition, the National Guard soldiers who have been called up for duty by the Governors have been instrumental in our response. They have provided logistics and transportation, support for medical-testing facilities and state emergency operations centers, and special help with disinfecting and cleaning missions. Furthermore, the Department of Defense announced that 16 of the military's laboratories, many of which are Army medical facilities, will begin coronavirus testing for civilians. Finally, the Army has issued orders to hospital centers at Fort Carson, Fort Campbell, and Fort Hood to deploy units to Seattle and New York in order to provide medical support to civil authorities. On behalf the Committee, we thank you.

While the Department of Defense, and the Army in particular, has been a strategic resource during the novel coronavirus outbreak, there are policy decisions that need to be immediately revisited. First, this pandemic will not be stopped by a wall on our Southern border. Right now our hospitals are contending with a shortage of ICU beds and will soon be at patient capacity in some areas. Our healthcare workers are in dire need of personal protective equipment for their own safety, and hospitals lack respirators and ventilators to treat patients. And yet, earlier this week the Army awarded a \$524 million contract to replace additional sections of the border wall. To continue to funnel billions of dollars and military manpower to this project instead of providing resources to health care providers, first responders, and state and local governments as

thousands of Americans fall ill and need urgent and immediate life-saving acute care is unconscionable. President Trump must immediately reorient all resources that have been diverted to the wall and make them available for Covid-19 support efforts.

In addition, the Army has a long history of scientific excellence concerning biological agents, and much of that work occurs at the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID) at Fort Detrick. However, in recent years the Department of Defense has not prioritized this incredibly critical mission, and in fact has cut funding for the program in the Fiscal Year 2021 budget. We need to understand immediately what the Army plans to ensure USAMRIID remains a world class institute, with a particular focus on how the Army plans to bring the new High Containment Laboratory, which is one of the world's most advanced facilities for dangerous pathogen research, on line in the quickest and safest manner possible.

The President's budget request for FY2021 includes \$178 billion in funding for the Army. Of that amount, \$150.3 billion is for base budget requirements, \$2.8 billion for base budget requirements included in the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) account, and \$24.9 billion for traditional OCO activities. The Army is reorienting budget resources to align with the National Defense Strategy (NDS) and the national security challenges facing our country. For the second consecutive year, senior Army leadership scrutinized existing programs to determine which ones supported the Army's modernization priorities, and which programs should be reduced or cancelled so that savings could be reinvested for other priorities. While this Committee may not agree with every budget decision made by the Army, and we will be closely scrutinizing their budget request, the Army did make tough decisions to prioritize funding for the future fight.

However, implementing the NDS requires more than a reallocation of budget resources to engage in strategic competition against China and Russia. It will also require that the Army train for full spectrum operations and develop new warfighting concepts, as well as ensuring our soldiers have the equipment necessary for a high end fight.

To support this effort, Army Futures Command, and the eight cross functional teams tasked with overseeing the Army's major modernization priorities, have transformed the processes by which warfighting capability is delivered to our soldiers. The Army has ramped up efforts to mature technology and build experimental prototypes, as well as conduct soldier touch points to provide feedback on the effectiveness of these new systems in the field. The Army is pursuing this overhaul of its acquisition process to ensure we keep pace with our near peer competitors by delivering cutting edge capabilities to the warfighter on an expedited timeline.

The FY21 budget request funds 19 combat training center (CTC) rotations for brigade combat teams. These rotations are critical to ensuring our soldiers are properly trained and ready to fight. However, we will likely see significant negative impacts to readiness levels as training exercises are postponed due to the COVID-19 crisis. The Army has already made the decision to cancel three CTC rotations as a result of COVID-19, and they are currently evaluating future schedules. The safety of our troops must remain our highest priority, and the Committee will be closely monitoring this situation in the weeks and months ahead.

Finally, the President's budget requests an across-the-board pay raise of 3 percent for all military personnel. However, the President has decided that civilians should only receive a 1 percent pay raise, and the budget freezes significant locality adjustments for civilians that would otherwise be due them under existing statute. At a time when we need civilians the most, this budget request sends the message that their work and contributions to our national defense are not valued, and it hinders the Army's ability to recruit the very best civilian workforce we need. If this pandemic has taught us anything it is the need for a strong and competent Federal workforce—which the President's budget does not support.

Again, I want to thank the Chairman and our witnesses for their willingness to participate in this unusual hearing method during these unprecedented time. I look forward to working closely with the Army as we move forward. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.