

VIRGINIA BEACH VISION

Testimony by Jimmy Capps
Defending Our Defenders *listening session*
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Good evening members of Congress, elected officials, business and community leaders, I am Jimmy Capps, President of Virginia Beach Vision, a non-profit, non-partisan, business association representing 120 senior level business and community leaders.

As home to the largest naval base in the world, the east coast's master naval air station, joint forces and special forces commands, the Coast Guard's largest East Coast operation, Langley Air Force Base, and countless other DoD related activities, Hampton Roads can attribute a full 45% of its Gross Regional Product to defense spending. Our desire to protect those assets and the economic impact they have on our economy, jobs and our quality of life is considerable. However, I want to address tonight some less measurable yet even more significant considerations that must be evaluated as Congress seeks to reduce DoD expenditures.

At the top of the priority list when considering budget reductions must be the safety and security of the United States and our citizens. Homeland security and national defense must never be placed at risk. Yet, some of the budget proposals being considered in Washington could significantly weaken our defense or diminish efficiencies and effectiveness.

Our region's strongest asset to the military is the close proximity of training areas to military commands and ships. We are home to a natural, deep, ice free harbor with immediate access to the Atlantic Ocean where our special forces, sailors and combat pilots can be stationed and trained contiguously. As a consequence, moving a nuclear carrier to Florida away from existing support infrastructure, nuclear refueling capabilities, joint training and support commands and at an added cost of \$600 million or more is unwise and fiscally unsound.

So too, the military culture of our region is hard to measure yet undeniable. A most recent incident, the crash of an FA 18 fighter jet out of Oceana Naval Air Station into a housing complex, exemplifies the community's support and embrace of the military. There was no resulting outcry for the base to be closed or training flights to cease. Rather, our citizens rallied to offer assistance.

When neighborhood encroachment surrounding Oceana was cited as a concern during the 2005 BRAC, both the City of Virginia Beach and the Commonwealth took decisive steps to reduce the concentration of development in the accident potential areas, committing an ongoing \$15 million annually to land acquisition.

In the quest to reduce the federal budget, you must also be wary of defense cuts that will simply defer costs or weaken our country's ability to respond quickly to a threat or attack. Already delays in completing the Joint Strike Fighter is causing our military to fly current aircraft beyond their intended life, resulting in significantly increased maintenance costs and flight risk.

Reductions and delays in constructing new naval ships and closure of shipyards will not only increase ship maintenance costs and repair time, but will result in less industrial competition and the manufacturing innovation that accompanies it. This is innovation that creates new, better, and cheaper solutions for our military defense.

As Congressman Forbes has stated, "Defense manufacturing is worth protecting. As production jobs and capability decline, the ability to recover these critical skills becomes very expensive or even impossible as highly skilled personnel are forced to pursue other careers." The inability to rapidly reconstitute such critical skills in response to emergent threats will jeopardize our troops' technological advantage on the battlefield.

The Congressional quest to reduce spending is admirable and desirable but we caution that when making reductions to the Defense Budget it must be done cautiously and strategically so we do not place in jeopardy our nation's defense or our industrial support for innovation and rapid response when demanded. It is far more expensive to rebuild or replace existing assets than it is to maintain them.

Thank you.

Virginia Beach Vision was founded in 1993 by a small assemblage of prominent business and civic leaders who saw the need for a non-partisan, issue-oriented group to provide private sector leadership that would create a vision and advance initiatives necessary to the future development, prosperity and quality of life of the City of Virginia Beach and the region. Today, Virginia Beach Vision's Board of Directors is comprised of 120 senior level business and community leaders.