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**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE DUNCAN HUNTER
CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY
PROCUREMENT
SERVICE AVIATION MODERNIZATION PROGRAMS HEARING**

This afternoon, we welcome witnesses from the four services, as well as the Program Executive Officer of the Joint Strike Fighter Program, to receive testimony on service aviation modernization programs.

As most of you know, I have been consistently critical of the inadequate levels of procurement funding by this Administration, and believe that the defense budget should be increased \$20-25 billion dollars a year on a sustained basis.

Here's why:

One week ago today, we conducted a hearing on aging equipment. Lieutenant General John Coburn, the Army's Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics, told us that the Army's only heavy-lift helicopter, the CH-47 "Chinook," has been in the inventory for 37 years and the Army expects to keep it for another 30 years—further driving up operating costs. Dr. Loren Thompson, of the Lexington Institute, said that as a result of aging aircraft, "the Nation spends more and more money on a less and less capable air fleet." Lieutenant General Martin Steele, the Marine Corps' Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans, Policy, and Operations reported that as a result of its aging aircraft, the average cost per flight hour has risen 43% over the last three years and that Marine Corps' fixed wing mission capable rates declined from 81% to 70% between fiscal years 94 and 98. General Martin, here with us today, stated for the record that "While it is difficult to quantify the exact impact aging has on Air Force readiness, we are confident it has significantly contributed to the declining mission capable rates and increasing Operations and Support costs." Lane Pierrot of the Congressional Budget Office warned that "even if future Administrations and Congresses increase funding to the \$62 billion dollars that is DoD's goal, that may still not be enough for DoD to achieve steady-state quantities of equipment that would, over the long run, halt aging and support forces of today's sizes indefinitely."

Last Friday, I attended a Readiness Subcommittee field hearing at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada that once again confirmed the fact that diminished levels of procurement funding over the last six years have taken their toll. Rear Admiral Timothy Beard told us that 14 of his 23 aircraft at Naval Air Station Fallon, Nevada—

the “Top Gun” training center—were grounded with mechanical problems. Eight of his aircraft could not fly at all because they were missing whole engines and maintenance crews were waiting for 137 parts. An F-16 “aggressor” pilot with the 414th Combat Training Squadron at Nellis Air Force Base told us that young pilots are flying half as many training sorties these days because not enough aircraft are available, usually because of maintenance problems.

It’s no surprise that the Chiefs of the military services have advised this committee about increasing amounts of unfunded requirements.

Today’s hearing will address how the Department plans to improve these conditions through modernization of our aviation programs.

Unfortunately, we’re likely to hear that near-term readiness and personnel pressures on the defense budget continue to force a migration of funds *OUT* of procurement accounts. The result is that acquisition objectives are not being met, production quantities are reduced to less economical levels, and “*band-aid*” fixes, such as service life extension programs, are being funded instead. These actions push aviation modernization further into the future, raising the height of the so-called “bow wave.”

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