

Congressman Herbert H. Bateman
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NEWS



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 22, 1999

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**STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE HERBERT H. BATEMAN
CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY READINESS**

I would like to welcome everyone here today to this field hearing of the Military Readiness Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee. This is the third in a series of readiness field hearings that this subcommittee has held this year. We have been conducting field hearings for the past several years at various military installations across the United States and overseas and I am more and more convinced that they are a valuable tool in understanding the realities of readiness of our military forces. The only way to fully understand the efforts required by our military personnel to maintain all the equipment, conduct meaningful training and maintain a high state of readiness in the current high operations tempo environment is to get out of Washington and go to where the men and women of our military live and work. It is equally important that all levels of our military have an opportunity to review the process by which the Congress and the House Armed Services Committee exercises its oversight responsibilities which are mandated by our Constitution. We are here today not so much to ask questions, but rather to listen to our witnesses give their personal perspectives on current readiness in their units.

There are several reasons why it is important for members of the committee to travel to the field to hear about readiness. As many of you will remember, over four years ago, while the Pentagon continued to maintain that readiness was as high as ever, it was this committee which began to tell a quite different story about what it saw as the early stages of a long term systemic readiness problem. Although refreshing, it was not until September of last year that Pentagon leadership and this Administration acknowledged what the committee had been asserting for these past four years—military readiness is at unacceptable levels and needs to be fixed now.

At our field hearing on military combat training centers, we heard that personnel and units arriving at the combat training centers are not as well trained as they once were. I believe that this is a major indicator that the problems in recruiting and retention, the personnel turbulence, lack of spare parts, constant constraints on funding, shortages of people, and the personnel and operations tempo

created by too few people trying to do too much work has caused a downward spiral in readiness that will take all our efforts to reverse.

I'm here today to try to convince everyone present that we in Congress are working hard to do our part. However, we must have candid appraisals of the true state of readiness and the problems that exist. We cannot act solely on the basis of anecdotal evidence. For the past four years Congress has been adding money to the defense budget only to read in the press that it is for pork that the military doesn't want. I submit to you that if we had not added over \$6 billion to the military readiness budget during the past few years, the state of readiness and the lack of resources available to train and maintain would be much worse.

We are very fortunate to have three panels of witnesses representing the four military services at all levels of command and supervision. The first two panels are composed of senior commanders from major operational commands to give us insight into the challenges they face and their views on the overall readiness of the force. We look forward to learning more about the demands on the major commands to provide the joint forces necessary to meet the alliance commitments and contingency operations that seem to continue to grow.

I am especially pleased to have as our third panel, a selection of commanders and senior noncommissioned officers. They represent the men and women who make up the level of the military that must maintain the readiness of their units and meet operational commitments while maintaining an atmosphere in their units that encourages reenlistment. I feel strongly that the views of these commanders and non commissioned officers here today are essential to getting an accurate assessment of readiness at the working level. I look forward to their testimony upon their unique perspective on these important issues and I especially look forward to having a dialogue with them on how Congress can help to make their lives better.

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