



**HOUSE ARMED SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE ON TACTICAL AIR AND LAND FORCES
CURT WELDON, PENNSYLVANIA
CHAIRMAN**

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:
March 9, 2006

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Opening Statement of Chairman Curt Weldon
Hearing on Fiscal Year 2007 Budget Request for the Department of Defense Major Rotorcraft Programs

WASHINGTON, D.C. – This afternoon we will receive testimony on the Department of Defense request for Rotorcraft Programs for fiscal year 2007 from witnesses representing the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and each of the four Services. This is the first of five Subcommittee hearings we will hold before the Easter break.

Our tradition in this Subcommittee has always been to be mindful of the needs of our warfighters. So, I am confident as we proceed with consideration of the Department's request, that all of us will keep in mind, as our first and foremost priority, the needs of our military men and women.

We have asked this afternoon's witnesses to address several rotorcraft-related acquisition issues. Our OSD witness will discuss perspectives on DOD rotorcraft investment, the rotorcraft industrial base, and the requirements process. The service witnesses will discuss their respective rotorcraft programs included in their fiscal year 2007 request.

As Members recall, several new rotorcraft development programs have been initiated in the past two years. The Army began a Joint Heavy-Lift applied technology program last year. The committee questioned whether that program was truly "joint," since the Army was the only service that had committed resources to the program. At the same time, the Marine Corps requested funding to enter systems development and demonstration for a heavy-lift helicopter program known then as the CH-53X, and now called the CH-53K. The Marine Corps cited an urgency of need due to the rapidly increasing cost of operations and high operational tempo of its current fleet of CH-53E aircraft. Yet the Marine Corps presented a CH-53K program that would not provide an initial operational capability for ten years, could not provide an estimate of program cost as required prior to entry into systems development and demonstration, and indicated that their program was not fully funded within the future years defense program.

While the committee recognizes that a “one-size-fits-all” development and acquisition strategy seldom meets cost, schedule and performance requirements for all services, the committee continues to believe that the best and most cost-effective defense programs are those that share technology between the Services and consolidate production where possible. Doing so helps to eliminate duplicative Service efforts that waste defense resources.

As a result of last year’s oversight of helicopter programs, the committee was successful in including a provision in the 2006 National Defense Authorization Act that requires that the next generation of heavy-lift rotorcraft will have a single set of requirements which will be approved by the Joint Requirements Oversight Council. We look forward to receiving an update on this issue from our OSD, Army and Marine Corps witnesses today.

Last year, the Navy also began the VH-71 program to replace the Presidential Helicopter. Members may recall that the OSD Director of Operational Test and Evaluation appeared before the subcommittee and expressed his concern regarding cost, schedule and performance risks associated with the concurrent development and production plans of the VH-71. I thank my colleague and ranking Member of this subcommittee, Neil Abercrombie, for his leadership that resulted in a provision in the Fiscal Year 2006 National Defense Authorization Act that will ensure that the Department of the Navy, in concert with the Director of Operational Test and Evaluation, will develop an event-based acquisition strategy so that that the design of the President’s helicopter will be mature and thoroughly tested before the VH-71 lands on the White House lawn for its first Presidential mission. We look forward to receiving an update on that from our Navy witness today, including an update on the Secretary of the Navy’s VH-71 report which is due next week as required by the Fiscal Year 2006 National Defense Authorization Act.

Last year, the Air Force also began a program to replace its existing HH-60G rescue helicopters known as the Combat Search and Rescue –X, or CSAR-X program. At that time, the committee questioned whether the requirements for this program were over stated and whether the Air Force had too readily discounted using a helicopter already in the Department’s inventory to meet its future combat search and rescue requirements. To address this concern, the Fiscal Year 2006 Defense Authorization Act included a provision that will ensure that the Joint Requirements Oversight Council will review CSAR-X requirements and that the Under Secretary for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics will review the acquisition schedule. Also as part of this provision, the Secretary of Defense will report on whether an aircraft already in the Department of Defense inventory can meet the CSAR-X requirements. We look forward to an update on the CSAR-X program from our Air Force witness today.

The committee has always been a strong supporter of rotorcraft programs. One example of this is the MV-22 which stood up its first operational squadron last Friday. We also believe that a strong rotorcraft industrial base, including a strong rotorcraft technology base, is required to sustain America’s lead in the rotorcraft industry.

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