

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION
UNTIL RELEASED BY
THE HOUSE ARMED
SERVICES COMMITTEE**

STATEMENT OF

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BEFORE THE

MILITARY PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE

OF THE

HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

CONCERNING

**MILITARY RESALE AND
MORALE, WELFARE AND RECREATION
ON**

APRIL 7, 2005

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Good morning Chairman McHugh, Congressman Snyder, and distinguished members of the Military Personnel Subcommittee. My name is GySgt Alan R. Gilly and I come before you today to clarify the positive and negative qualities of the Commissary and MWR facilities, experienced during the daily function of the Marine Corps, our service members and our families.

I would like to begin with my personal experiences while in Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom II. As Company Gunnery Sergeant for H&S Company I was tasked with the responsibility for security, coordinating life support at battalion operating base, balancing operational requirements, relations with tenant air wing units and commands in addition to civilian agency and force protection demands. While stationed at Al Asad air base, I gathered information for my Marines due to the fact that we were at the opposite end of the base. I was quite pleased with the effort put forth to allow me to acquire times and operating hours to assure opportunity for the Marines to use and benefit from all services provided. There were times at the Exchange in the combat areas that I was surprised at the high prices required for certain products. However, I was impressed with the variety available to us at that time. I believe it is important to remember that the simple things we take for granted here in the States become extremely important reminders of home in the lonely and desolate Iraqi combat zone. Even though MWR had only just begun to set up its services, they were an essential part of that connection with home.

Regardless of its necessity in relation to the quality of life, stateside base facilities come under much scrutiny in their purchasing and adaptation to the income of the average military family. Before coming here today, I solicited the opinions of many military families nationwide to observe their concerns in relation to the Exchange and MWR facilities. It has not gone unnoticed that the programs provided by MWR are cherished by just about everyone who has had the opportunity to use them. From the recreational opportunities and rental facilities to the classes and sports programs, MWR has achieved its goal of improving the limited time we have to spend with our families. Because of these programs my family is capable of associating with peers wherever we are stationed. Focusing not only on the service members, but also on those left behind, was extremely important to my family while I was away. MWR tried and succeeded to appreciate the loved ones who were left with nothing to do, but wait. Knowing this made it easier for me to concentrate on what I needed to do to get home. The only problem I noticed was the financial burden associated with the Exchange. The quality of the merchandise is second to none. However, the common belief is that there is no middle ground in purchasing. What I mean is that high end product purchasing leaves the average service members and their families, who are quite often on a budget, very little opportunity to benefit from their discounted items.

With regard to the commissary, I have found that its benefits are often overlooked due to minor problems that could be alleviated with minimal reorganization. The idea that a military family can walk into the commissary and afford to purchase everything they need to get them to the next payday is a valuable benefit indeed. In this situation the commissary becomes the means by which a Marine can truly provide for his or her

family. With that said, I must inject the need for quality in the products provided by the commissary. There are very few that I have talked to who have not expressed a concern in this area. From bad produce to outdated dairy, many feel a sense of not being worthy of the best. I truly think that if the commissary took on the purchasing practices of the larger discount super stores, we would see an end to this type of inequality. By doing this there would also be the opportunity to eliminate the separation of the commissary and the package store. This would provide one stop shopping for families and increase their revenue, which in turn would allow the commissary to improve its selection and diversity.

In closing, I must express my appreciation for the commissary as I feel it is a vital part of my families military experience. My suggestions are shared only in the best interest of all involved. Because of this I hope to convey effectively that a common standardization in purchasing held throughout the bases would give a sense of stabilization to military families who live a transient lifestyle. Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today, and I look forward to your questions.