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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

March 4, 1999

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## CHAIRMAN BUYER OPENING STATEMENT HEARING ON PILOT RETENTION ISSUE AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Today's hearing is the last of three hearings dealing with retention in the military. Our focus today is the challenge of retaining military pilots.

The exodus of military aviators for the airlines has been the retention issue that has captured most of the press, although I would suggest that enlisted retention may pose the greatest threat to military readiness in the long run.

However, there is no question that the pilot retention is a serious problem. Pilot retention rates remain low, and the services seem incapable of improving them. Even though Congress has added more money in recent years to improve bonuses, the response from pilots has showed only marginal improvement. The bottom line is that shortages exist and will get worse before getting better. Finally, airline hiring projections show no indication of a slowdown in the foreseeable future.

During my study of the issue, I have arrived at several conclusions:

1. The government is not going to be able to compete with the airlines on the basis of money for pilot salaries—the airlines will always have an economic basis to outbid the military.
2. We—and by this I mean Congress, DOD, and the Administration—must understand that pilot retention is not **JUST** about money. Compensation is important and we cannot ignore the necessity of remaining competitive, but pilots are leaving the military for the same varied and complex reasons that all the other people, both enlisted and officer, are leaving the military.
3. That means we must work hard to address all the other intangible reasons why people leave the military, because that will help retain pilots too. That is not to say that pilots are not unique in some ways—they are unique, and part of our purpose today is to explore some of those areas where we can change the nature of pilot retention more directly.

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The options available to us to address pilots' concerns are limited, and many of them are difficult and costly. Some are unpopular because they attack aviation culture within the military that commanders are reluctant to change.

Today, I hope we can explore options that would improve quality of life and tighten management of aviation resources. I would also hope we can hear about some of the "outside-the-box" options that people are talking about.

I do believe that we can't afford to sit back and wait for the airline hiring cycle to slow down. I believe we should take this problem into our own hands and free the military from the grip of the airlines.

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