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NEWS

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

I would like to welcome everyone to this hearing by the Subcommittee on Military Readiness of the House Committee on Armed Services. Conducting a readiness hearing here in the European theater where much of the military services' overseas operations are nearby is significant in that readiness can be seen, heard, and felt first hand. I believe that it is important to get out in the field and hear from individuals at all levels who are charged with making readiness work. We are here today, not so much as to ask questions, but rather, to listen to our witnesses give their own personal perspectives on current readiness in their commands and units.

There are several reasons why it is important for the members of Congress, and especially this committee, to travel to the field to hear about readiness. For the past three years, this committee has conducted military readiness field hearings at military installations across the United States. What we were hearing in these field hearings differed considerably from what we heard from the senior leadership of the Pentagon in Washington. The perspectives of individuals that are at the execution end of budgetary and policy decisions made in Washington, are a valuable tool that we in Congress need in order to adequately assess the true readiness needs of our military.

As many will remember, for the past several years, the Pentagon leadership was claiming that U.S. forces were at least as ready as they had ever been. Yet during this time, the committee found many indications of serious readiness problems and determined that the services were in the early stages of a long-term systemic readiness decline that was not confined to any one quarter of a fiscal year.

Some of the early indicators that led us to an awareness of these problems were that all of the F-15E and two-thirds of the F-15C air crews based in Europe needed waivers from training requirements, two of the six Army contingency corps units, the most ready in the force, reported significantly reduced readiness ratings, and 28 Navy and Marine Corps tactical aviation squadrons

had to ground more than half of their aircraft during September 1994. Although anecdotal, the committee believed that these indicators were indeed warning signs that could not be ignored. Today's hearing is the sixth in the past two weeks where the subcommittee has heard from all levels of military and civilian leadership, and from the junior officers and non-commissioned officers on today's readiness. I must, unfortunately, report that many of the early warning signs have now become realities. Fortunately, the senior leadership of the Pentagon has begun to admit that there really are serious readiness problems in our military services.

In response to these concerns, the Clinton Administration's budget request reports that there is an additional \$12 billion in the fiscal year 2000 budget request for overall defense needs. We now know that over \$8 billion of that "increase" is based on funding adjustments such as lower inflation rates, lower prices for fuel, favorable foreign currency accounts and other adjustments from one year to the next. That \$8 billion will not buy additional training time on combat training ranges, additional spare parts, more flying hours, or more steaming days for our combat ships. Nor will it begin to reduce the staggering backlog of facilities maintenance in all of the services. Of the remaining \$4 billion, if you deduct the funding for programs that are not supposed to be in the normal defense budget, such as commissary operations and Pentagon renovation funding, there is not much left to improve readiness. When you level the playing field by stripping out all of the funding gimmicks found in some of the Operation and Maintenance accounts, funding for some of the military services actually declined. If we are to ever reverse the decline in military readiness, the Administration will have to budget real dollars and abandon a tactic of trying to pay for real needs with mythical savings and assumptions.

Readiness is a perishable commodity — by the time you find out it is broken; it is already too late. I believe this hearing will be one of the most important hearings the subcommittee will have this year. It is important that Members of the Subcommittee hear what is really going on from a cross section of our military service members who are "over there" and are "in the know" on these issues. Our aim today is to hear from those that have to deal with the day-to-day challenges of maintaining readiness at an acceptable level.

We are very fortunate to have two panels representing the four military services with individuals involved in current operations in the region and from various levels of command and supervision. The first panel is composed of operational commanders to give us their views from the big picture point of view. The second panel will have officers and non-commissioned officers from individual operational units, some that are deployed in this theater and some that are permanently stationed in Europe. I am convinced that the views of these individuals are essential to an accurate assessment of readiness at the working level. I look forward to their unique perspective on these important issues.

I would like to thank Admiral Ellis and his staff, and all of the many United States Navy personnel who have assisted in making the arrangements for today's hearing. All of their contributions are greatly appreciated.

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