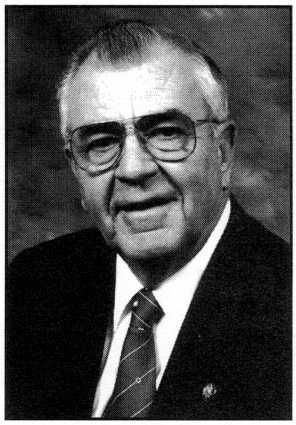
Congressman Herbert H. Bateman
AMERICA'S FIRST DISTRICT — VIRGINIA

News



2211 Rayburn HOB ■ Washington, DC 20515 ■ (202) 225–4261 ■ (202) 225–4382 FAX

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CONTACT: Maureen Cragin
Ryan Vaart
(202) 225-2539

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

I would like to welcome everyone here today to this hearing by the Subcommittee on Military Readiness of the House Armed Services Committee. My intention in having this hearing is to help members of the subcommittee understand the causes of and any proposed remedies for what seems to be a chronic shortages of spares and repair parts in the military services.

I must say that I am personally frustrated that, after the numerous efforts by this committee and Congress over the past five years to provide extra money to the military to fix this problem, commanders in the field still cannot get the parts necessary to fix their aircraft, vehicles, and supporting equipment.

A recent General Accounting Office report shows that a survey of 1000 active-duty troops in retention-critical specialties revealed that many of the respondents to the survey are dissatisfied and intend to leave the service. Under the reasons given for this dissatisfaction was their "quality-of-life" due to the unavailability of parts and operational equipment, which was listed number one and two, respectively, among enlisted and officer respondents.

Recently, while visiting with an Air Force wing commander, I was disappointed to learn of the lack of availability of critically needed spare and repair parts. It was pointed out that the results of these parts shortages were numerous aircraft that were inoperable with some sitting on the flight line with holes where there should be engines. When pressed, the commander could not tell me when he could expect to get the parts necessary to fix the aircraft.

Although this subcommittee has worked very hard since I became chairman to solve this parts shortage problem, more emphasis in this area is needed. This hearing is intended to help us focus on the causes of the shortages so we can take steps to fix this problem once and for all.

We want to better understand the process by which money is allocated to the logistical community to purchase spares and repair parts. This committee has provided an additional $2.8 billion above the budget requests for depot maintenance between Fiscal Years 1994 and 1999....funding that purchases and/ or produces repair parts. In addition, Congress provided $155 million above the budget request in Fiscal

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Year 1999 for additional repair parts. On top of all that, Congress provided an additional $1.1 billion for spares and repair parts in the Fiscal Year 1999 Kosovo Emergency Supplemental Appropriations. And yet, after all of this increased attention to this problem, parts are still not available; and operational commanders tell me there is no relief in sight.

In field hearings the past several years at installations throughout the United States and overseas, we continue to hear about the shortage of maintenance personnel, especially first line supervisors. In trying to understand this problem, we have found that maintenance personnel are spending much of their time cannibalizing equipment and vehicles for spare parts. A General Accounting Office April 1999 report points out that "Air Combat Command and the Air Mobility Command records showed that from October 1, 1996 through September 1998, maintenance personnel spent about 178,000 hours removing inventory items on the B-1B, F-16, and C-5 aircraft to replace broken items on other aircraft. This equates to about 43 people working 8 hours a day, 5 days per week for two years." The report goes on to say that "it took maintenance personnel weeks and, in some cases, months, to put an aircraft back together once parts were removed from the aircraft."

This parts cannibalization work increases the workload of an already understaffed maintenance workforce. The requirement to take parts from designated inoperable aircraft and vehicles to ensure units can meet the minimum operational needs of the day creates frustration and disillusionment among the maintenance crews and ultimately often leads to a reluctance to reenlist. Our highly trained and motivated military personnel cannot understand the problem with the lack of spare parts, and frankly, neither can I.

I would hope that today's hearing will provide the members of the committee with a good understanding of the funding process for spares and repair parts. I am told by the services that money has been withheld from the services at the Department of Defense level. I want to understand the reasons for this withholding and what impact it has on the services' ability to manage their requirements for parts.

I am also anxious to hear how the services forecast their parts needs and what flexibility they have to buy and distribute their parts. Indications are that there is some excess parts inventory being maintained by service supply centers at all levels. I want to understand the magnitude of the excess problem, but I am even more interested in understanding why there remains numerous shortages of critical spares and repair parts. This too-much-of-unneeded parts and too-few-needed parts creates frustration in the operational units and are the reason for units reporting lower readiness ratings.

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 did not ask for. 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.

It is my intention to continue to address this problem. It may be there are other problems in this area that increased funding alone will not remedy.

We are very fortunate today to have a panel of witnesses consisting of senior civilian and military leaders representing the Department of Defense and the four military services who work these problems on a regular basis. We hope the panel can give us insight into the challenges they face and some ideas about how we can all work toward fixing the problems. We look forward to their testimony.

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