

**Tactical Air and Land Forces Subcommittee Chairman Donald Norcross –  
Opening Statement (As Prepared)  
Hearing on “Navy and Marine Corps Tactical Aviation and Ground  
Modernization”  
April 4, 2019**

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*Video link to hearing here: <https://armedservices.house.gov/2019/4/navy-and-marine-corps-tactical-aviation-and-ground-modernization>*

The Tactical Air and Land Forces subcommittee meets today for our first hearing of the 116th Congress. We’re going to review the tactical aviation and ground modernization programs for the Navy and Marine Corps that were included in the fiscal year 2020 budget request.

The subcommittee has been busy over the past few weeks; we’ve been attending briefings with representatives from all military departments so that we can learn about and discuss mission areas and programs related to the jurisdiction of the subcommittee. The briefings have been very informative and establish the foundation of our oversight activities for this Congress.

I would like to welcome our distinguished panel of witnesses that includes Vice Admiral Mat Winter, Program Executive Officer for the F-35 Joint Program Office; Rear Admiral Scott Conn, Director of Air Warfare for the Chief of Naval Operations; Lieutenant General Steve Rudder, Deputy Commandant of Aviation for the Marine Corps; Lieutenant General David Berger, Commanding General of the Marine Corps’ Combat Development Command, and the Deputy Commandant for Combat Development and Integration; Mr. Daniel Nega, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisition for Aviation programs; and, Mr. Jimmy Smith, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisition for Expeditionary Programs and Logistics Management.

General Berger, before we begin our formal remarks, I’d like to congratulate you on your nomination to be the next Commandant of the Marine Corps. Although I have only served as Chairman of this Subcommittee for a short time, I have enjoyed working with you and know that our nation and Marine Corps will be well-served when you are confirmed as the next Commandant. I also want to thank the other witnesses for your service and look forward to your testimony today.

This hearing continues the subcommittee’s oversight of tactical aviation acquisition and modernization. We are grateful to pick up the work started by the notable leadership of our former subcommittee chairman, Mr. Mike Turner, and the recently retired Ranking Member of the subcommittee, Ms. Nikki Tsongas. They were a great team, and I look forward to partnering with my Ranking Member, Vicki Hartzler, in continuing the subcommittee’s bipartisan efforts.

Over the last several years, the subcommittee has learned how years of continuous combat operations and deferred modernization has created a crisis in military readiness and combat capability. It is good to see, however, that the fiscal year 20 budget request indicates that we may be starting to see real improvements. Investment in equipment modernization and recapitalization are becoming top priorities for the Navy and Marine Corps, and a plan to achieve

a modern force – one that is ready for the challenges posed by more capable, near-peer adversaries is taking shape. But surely this will come at a cost.

The subcommittee will be interested to learn from our witnesses what trade-offs they recommended over past budgets to align themselves with the new Defense Strategy – a strategy that ensures we maintain – or in some areas regain – technological and military advantage. Also, given the size of the Overseas Contingency Operations request, we need to understand what programs and capabilities within our subcommittee are funded as ‘base items’ in the OCO request.

Our witnesses today have been asked to provide an overview of the Navy and Marine Corps modernization and equipping strategy for FY 20 and to identify any significant changes to this strategy from FY19. Today we want to pay particular attention to maneuver, tactical and rotary-wing aviation, fires, and air defense forces modernization. We also hope to learn about any new modernization initiatives in the budget request and how those programs align with and directly support the goals and objectives of the National Defense Strategy. Plus, we hope to learn how any programmatic trade-offs will affect those goals, as well as the Navy and Marine Corps’ famous readiness tag-line to “fight-tonight.”

We have large portfolio of complex and expensive programs to review today, including the Navy and Marine Corps F-35 B and C variants, the CH-53K King Stallion helicopter program, Marine ground vehicles including the Joint Light Tactical Vehicle, the Amphibious Combat Vehicle, unmanned vehicles, and ground-based air defense systems. However, the over-arching goal today is to better understand the strategy applied to funding and fielding all of these programs.

Regarding tactical aviation, we want to learn more about the strike-fighter force structure mix of fourth and fifth generation aircraft, the ratio you are striving to achieve within the portfolio, and how operational risk of that ratio is managed in supporting Combatant Commanders.

We want to receive an update on the F-35 program to understand the challenges the services are having with achieving affordable operations and sustainment costs, learn about improvements being made to the problematic and very complex Autonomic Logistics Information System, or ‘ALICE,’ receive a progress update on Block 4 development and projected cost, and find out how the F-35 program office is working to establish greater capacity and effectiveness with supply chain management to support both new production and fielded units. The F-35 is a much-needed capability, but we don’t have an unlimited amount of resources that can be applied to the program. We need all stakeholders directly involved in the F-35 program to start achieving tangible, near-term results related to all the aspirational goals, targets, and objectives we continuously hear will manifest in later years.

We also want to learn more about how the Navy and Marine Corps are funding initiatives to address the past problems related to Physiological Episodes. This issue was a high-priority in the past for this subcommittee, and it will continue to be under my leadership until it’s resolved.

Before we begin with your opening statements, I would like to turn to my colleague from Missouri, Mrs. Vicki Hartzler, for any comments she may want to make.

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