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THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TACTICAL AIR AND LAND FORCES

STATEMENT OF

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BEFORE THE

TACTICAL AIR AND LAND FORCES SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

ON

DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY FISCAL YEAR 2024 BUDGET REQUEST FOR ROTARY
PROGRAMS

APRIL 19, 2023

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Chairman Wittman, Ranking Member Norcross and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to address the Department of Navy's (DON) Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 budget request for rotary aviation. A superior rotorcraft force remains a key component of our naval force and is essential to a full range of Navy and Marine Corps operations. Thank you to the Congress and this Committee for your continued support of these programs in the FY 2023 Authorization and Appropriation Acts.

The security of our country and preservation of our national interests remains reliant on a superior naval force, strategically postured to adapt to constantly evolving geopolitical challenges and threats. As ongoing aggressive action by Chinese and Russian militaries continue to threaten global peace and stability, the Navy and Marine Corps team must continue to provide credible combat power forward and a ready response force to global crises and disasters. The Navy and Marine Corps continue to lead Joint and Coalition forces in global integrated deterrence and remain postured to adapt to emerging threats as demand for our naval capabilities continues to increase. To maintain the maritime dominance of the Joint Force, the DON continues to invest in the modernization of our existing capabilities, as well as in the rapid innovation and streamlined acquisition of future capabilities, as guided by our force design initiatives.

The Department's rotorcraft capability is a key enabler of the Navy and Marine Corps team's ability to operate forward and conduct a broad range of military missions in support of the Joint Force, providing swift, lethal, and long-term sustainable capabilities that enable commanders' strategic agility and freedom of maneuver in a highly contested environment. The versatility of these aircraft is unparalleled. When coupled with air-capable ships, vertical lift aircraft provide speed, range and flexibility to give our Nation unmatched global reach and expeditionary agility. Rotorcraft aircraft operate from ships and ashore and support a broad depth of missions to include: Anti-Air Warfare; Anti-Submarine Warfare; Anti-Surface Warfare; Assault Support; Combat Search and Rescue; Control of Aircraft and Missiles; Electronic Warfare; Humanitarian and Disaster Assistance; Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance & Targeting (ISR&T); Offensive Air Support; and organic Airborne Mine Countermeasures (AMCM). They can fly these missions from practically anywhere, including ship decks, open water, expeditionary landing fields, roof tops, and the White House lawn.

The Fiscal Year 2024 President's Budget Request

The President's FY 2024 budget provides the resources necessary to continue implementation

of the 2022 National Defense Strategy and build and sustain the right mix of capabilities to keep sea lanes open and free, deter conflict, and defend against current and future threats. In alignment with the Secretary of the Navy's priorities, the budget request enables the One Navy-Marine Corps Team to continue strengthening our maritime dominance, building on our culture of warfighting excellence, and enhancing our strategic partnerships.

The Department requests \$17.3 billion in FY 2024 to support procurement of 88 fixed-wing, rotary-wing, and unmanned aircraft in FY 2024 to modernize our capabilities that can achieve lethal and persistent effects inside adversary weapon engagement zones. The budget includes funding for 15 CH-53K King Stallions in FY 2024 and 99 across the Future Years Defense Program (FYDP) to conduct expeditionary heavy-lift assault transport for the Marine Corps and the Joint Force.

This budget continues Research, Development, Test and Evaluation (RDT&E) investments in aviation enhancements and recapitalization efforts, such as Future Vertical Lift (FVL). The Department is working with our Service partners to support the FVL Family of Systems (FoS), including Navy's FVL Maritime Strike (MS) FoS and the Marine Corps' Vertical Take-off and Landing (VTOL) FoS - a portfolio of capabilities that will encompass logistics, attack, and assault support for the Marine Corps and ISR&T, Anti-Surface Warfare, Anti-Submarine Warfare, AMCM, and Combat Logistics Support for the Navy. FVL (MS) FoS and the VTOL FoS will close key warfighting gaps in support of Distributed Maritime Operations and Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations and provide transformative capabilities when legacy rotary wing platforms reach service-life limits beginning in the 2030s.

Summary

The Navy and Marine Corps team continues to meet challenges head on and deliver aviation platforms with the capability to address today's maritime challenges, while looking ahead to tomorrow's evolving security environment. With Congress' support, the Department of the Navy is focused on rapidly researching, developing, acquiring, and fielding the material solutions required to be more lethal, sustainable, resilient, survivable, agile, and responsive. We are committed to providing the Nation with a combat-credible, dominant, globally responsive naval force to keep the sea lanes open, deter conflict, and when called upon, decisively win our Nation's wars.

Programmatic details regarding Navy and Marine Corps rotorcraft capabilities are summarized in the following section.

ASSAULT SUPPORT AND LOGISTICS SUPPORT AIRCRAFT

CH-53K Heavy Lift Replacement Program

CH-53K is an optimized vertical, heavy lift, sea-based, long-range solution for the naval force, providing agile maritime logistical connectors with greater payloads and speed than any current or emerging rotorcraft. The CH-53K will complement connectors to enable littoral maneuver and provide logistical support to a widely disaggregated naval force. The Program of Record (POR) is 200.

The Marine Corps achieved Initial Operational Capability (IOC) for the CH-53K in April 2022, and in December 2022 the program was approved for Full Rate Production. This closely follows completion of a thorough Initial Operational Test and Evaluation period that resulted in over 3,000 mishap free hours flown in various challenging environments and terrain. In January 2023, Marine Operational Test and Evaluation Squadron demonstrated the CH-53K performance with an external load certification lift of a 22,000 pound F-35 airframe. A contract to procure the sixth Low-Rate Initial Production Lot of nine aircraft was signed in January 2022, and the DON has been granted the authority to enter a block buy contract for the first Full Rate Production lots - Lot 7 in FY 2023 and Lot 8 in FY 2024. A block buy contract leverages aircraft volume quantity to realize significant cost savings, providing stability to the industrial base and improved production efficiencies while supporting the Marine Corps' plans to deploy the first CH-53K Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) detachment in FY 2025.

The FY 2024 President's Budget requests \$222.3 million in RDT&E to continue the CH-53K development, test, and standup of organic test capabilities for follow-on improvements and \$2.2 billion in APN for procurement of 15 Full Rate Production aircraft, initial spares, and modifications.

CH/MH-53E

Operational demand for CH-53E will continue until the Service attains Full Operational Capability of the CH-53K in 2029. Continued execution of the H-53 Reset Initiative has mitigated challenges to the material condition of CH-53E. To date, 53 aircraft have completed Reset and accumulated over 41,000 flight hours. Reset returns fully mission capable aircraft to the fleet, reducing both the cost per flight hour and maintenance man-hours per flight hour as the H-53 approaches 30 plus years of service. Continued Reset and sustainment initiatives are critical to the

success of the CH-53E until its replacement, the CH-53K, is delivered to the fleet. Even as the Navy continues to modernize the Airborne Mine Countermeasures mission through the employment of capabilities on the MH-60S and MQ-8, the MH-53E will continue to perform as a dominant AMCM platform, as well as transport personnel and cargo.

The FY 2024 budget requests \$10.2 million in APN and \$2.6 million in RDT&E to keep both the CH-53E and MH-53E viable platforms through their remaining service lives. This includes continued funding for sustainment initiatives to remedy the top readiness issues, maintenance degraders, fatigue life limiters, and safety issues that impede the aircraft's ability to operate in the future. Addressing obsolescence issues within the cockpit, increasing overall situational awareness, expanding digital interoperability capabilities, and maintaining mission effectiveness are essential safety and avionics upgrades for these platforms.

ATTACK AND UTILITY AIRCRAFT

AH-1Z/UH-1Y

AH-1Z and UH-1Y platforms deploy globally within MEUs, providing essential attack and utility support to Marine Air Ground Task Forces (MAGTF), Joint Force Maritime Component Commander (JFMCC), and Combatant Commanders. In September of 2022 the service took delivery of its final AH-1Z, completing its POR of 349 H-1 aircraft, consisting of 189 AH-1Z and 160 UH-1Y. H-1 aircraft remain ready and relevant through readiness and capability improvements keeping in line with Marine Corps priorities and a comprehensive strategic plan. A focus on Digital Interoperability (DI), survivability and lethality has led to some of the highest mission capable rates among aviation platforms. Combining the Primary Active Inventory, Backup Aircraft Inventory, and Attrition Reserve number for five active component squadrons of 27 aircraft (15 AH-1Z and 12 UH-1Y) equates to a Total Active Inventory of 284 consisting of 158 AH-1Z and 126 UH-1Y. The POR of 349 aircraft provides flexibility and accessibility as we continue to refine H-1 requirements under Force Design's continuing campaign of learning.

The FY 2024 President's Budget requests \$118.6 million in APN and \$29.8 million in RDT&E. APN funding focuses on procurement of systems that improve DI, Survivability, Lethality, Position/Navigation/Timing, and Sensing. RDT&E funding focuses on continued efforts aimed at interoperability, aircraft safety and survivability, and air vehicle improvements that effectively increase capability, flexibility, range, and weapons employment. Development of these systems is both transformational and transitional to capability with VTOL FoS.

MH-60R/S

The MH-60 R/S continues to be one of the Departments most versatile rotary wing platforms providing multi-mission capability in support of operations including ISR&T, Anti-Submarine Warfare, Anti-Surface Warfare, AMCM, Personnel Recovery, Special Operations Support, and Combat Logistics among a variety of other mission sets.

The FY 2024 President's Budget requests \$106.5 million in APN to address critical safety related systems improvements, corrections of deficiencies, warfighter upgrades, and obsolescence issues. RDT&E funding in the amount of \$76.1 million is required to continue integrating transformational technologies including the Minotaur Family of Systems, and modernized tactical datalinks that enable strategic interoperable communications within the contested battlespace. Keeping the MH-60 family of aircraft operationally relevant is paramount. Requested funding provides for bi-annual System Configuration releases to address Common Aircraft Survivability Equipment, as well as addressing Diminishing Manufacturing Sources and Material Shortages.

EXECUTIVE SUPPORT AIRCRAFT

VH-92A Presidential Helicopter Replacement Aircraft

The VH-92A Presidential Helicopter replaces the legacy VH-3D and VH-60N and will provide safe, reliable, and secure executive transportation. The FY 2024 President's Budget requests \$35.4 million in RDT&E for VH-92A Helicopter Improvements and \$60.5 million APN for Executive Helicopter Series (VH-3D, VH-60N and VH-92A). RDT&E funding is required for continued VH-92A improvements and follow-on test and evaluation activities. These efforts include VH-92A Mission Communications System upgrades to both software and hardware, enhancements to required Wideband Beyond Line-of-Sight capabilities, test aircraft and facilities; and test and evaluation efforts for distributed network communications, high-hot aircraft performance enhancements and cockpit upgrades. APN in the amount of \$60.5 million is required for retrofit modifications to the VH-92A Mission Communications System and continued modifications to the VH-3D and VH-60N to ensure communications interoperability through the remainder of the lifecycle.

TRAINING AIRCRAFT

Advanced Helicopter Training System / TH-73A

The Advanced Helicopter Training System (AHTS) is a system-of-systems designed to meet Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and allied partner advanced rotary wing and intermediate tilt-rotor training requirements through 2050. AHTS includes the TH-73A Thrasher, a non-developmental, commercially available training helicopter with FAA Airworthiness and FAA Instrument Flight Rating certifications; Aircrew Training Services with availability for ground-based training on 18 Flight Simulation Devices; curriculum modernization and associated facilities; and contractor logistics support to meet maintenance and flight line support requirements. AHTS will replace the Navy's TH-57 fleet, which began a phased retirement in FY 2023 and is planned for complete sundown in FY 2027.

FY 2023 is the last year of procurement for AHTS, with 41 TH-73A Thrasher's delivered to the Navy as of April 1. While the program has experienced production delays, a mitigation plan is in place and the program is scheduled for a total of 48 deliveries in FY 2023, 48 deliveries in FY 2024 and the final four deliveries in FY 2025. AHTS was declared ready-for-training in September 2022 and achieved IOC in January 2023. The FY 2024 budget request includes \$5.2 million in APN to address correction of deficiencies that arise on aircraft accepted off the production line.

ROTARY WING AIRCRAFT INDUSTRIAL BASE

The health of the Rotary Wing Aircraft Industrial Base continues to be one of the Department's top priorities, and remains a critical enabler to meeting capability, readiness, and affordability objectives. Industry-wide inflation, workforce instability, and supply chain challenges are a significant concern, but we are making every effort to ensure that these issues do not deter our delivery of mission capable rotary platforms. While key platforms, such as H-60, H-1, and VH-92A, will end production over the next few years, full rate production of the CH-53K, aircraft modifications, and service life extension efforts will sustain key suppliers while the Department implements plans for FVL FoS capability. We are making every effort to preserve stability and affordability through Foreign Military Sales and use of Multi-year and Block-buy procurement authority which encourages longer-term industry investments in facilities and workforce. The Rotary Wing Industrial Base, although fragile, has production capacity to meet current and future requirements if we continue strengthen partnerships and send a consistent development and procurement demand signal.