

Readiness Subcommittee

Ranking Member Lamborn Opening Comments

Briefing on the Findings and Recommendations of the National Commission on Military Aviation Safety

Thank you, Chairman Garamendi. I would like to begin by thanking our briefers today for their distinguished public service and specifically for their work on this critical issue.

In reviewing your findings, I was struck by the scope of the problem. From fiscal years 2013-2020, aviation mishaps resulted in 224 lives lost, approximately \$11.6 billion in damages, and 186 aircraft lost. These statistics are highlighted on the cover of your report and the impacts to military families and to military readiness cannot be overstated.

Three issues in particular stand out to me. Two of these must be addressed by the Department of Defense and the other one can only be resolved by Congress. The first of these is lack of focus. The Military Departments simply are not focusing on fundamentals which is a common thread in many of the Commission's findings. This begins with the reduction of flight hours in initial pilot training. Units that are already overtaxed with requirements then have to compensate for the lack of training proficiency. Is it any wonder they are struggling in many cases?

The second issue is related to the first but is likely aggravated by external factors as well. The decline in overall aviation and maintenance experience is alarming. It would seem that the Services add to the problem by favoring nonaviation additional duties for promotion over the skills and duties that matter. This sends exactly the wrong message to the force because safety does not just happen. It begins with and is sustained by the men and women who maintain aviation systems. The Members of this Subcommittee know well that people are

the most valuable resource in our military. I look forward to hearing thoughts from our two briefers about actionable steps the Department can take to stop this negative trend and also to restore this experience to our ranks.

Some of this is culture, which takes time to address. Some of it also results from the persistent demand that Combatant Commands place on the Services. The Department must achieve a better balance of supply and demand for forces so that essential training and maintenance tasks do not fall to the bottom of a list of priorities that is already too long.

Finally, there is the issue that only we in Congress can address—consistent funding. Sequestration was a failed experiment in fiscal responsibility. It failed because we cut defense spending without any coherent plan to reduce requirements on the Department of Defense. This resulted in disastrous across the board cuts that gutted readiness and undermined any semblance of strategy. I believe that those of us who serve on the Committee understand the problems that sequestration created better than most. The more insidious way we undermine readiness is by stringing the Department along on continuing resolutions when we fail to pass the appropriations on time each year. I appreciate the Commission highlighting this issue in their report. We must do better.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.