

Opening Statement, Ranking Member Joe Courtney

Joint Readiness and Seapower and Projection Forces Subcommittees

Hearing: “Posture and Readiness of the Mobility Enterprise”

Mar 28, 2023

Good morning, and thank you Chairmen Kelly and Waltz, and Ranking Member Garamendi for conducting this joint hearing to examine the Posture and Readiness of the Mobility Enterprise.

I also want to thank the witnesses, General Van Ovost and Rear Admiral Ann Phillips, for being with us today. I’ve had an opportunity to speak with both of you recently and I thank you for your engagement ahead of today’s hearing. General, welcome back to the committee – a lot has changed since we had this hearing around this time last year.

Our mobility enterprise has had a busy and challenging year, as Russia’s continued incursion into Ukraine has highlighted increased uncertainty and instability for international rules-based order and logistics.

TRANSCOM has done a tremendous job in this effort – delivering over 377 million pounds of equipment and 16,000 troops to our allies and partners in Europe with over 1,000 flights, 64 vessels, 143 trains, and nearly 7,000 trucks.

This is a testament to the capability and capacity of our sealift and airlift fleets that have risen to the challenges of readiness shortfalls, obsolescence, and an evolving threat landscape. While supporting efforts to assist Ukraine, TRANSCOM continues to conduct global operations from Europe and the Middle East all the way to the Indo-Pacific region, ensuring that our mobility fleet is ready and able to respond worldwide.

I am proud that our subcommittees, working in a bipartisan way, have led the way in Congress to expand the capabilities and capacity of our mobility enterprise. In just the last few years, we have established the Tanker Security Program, National Security Multi-Mission Vessel program, and just last year authorized a domestic new-build sealift program to compliment the Navy’s used sealift acquisition

profile. I think all of us can be proud that these are not just talking points – this new capability is coming to life today, with real-world impact.

For example, in the Seapower Subcommittee we established the Tanker Security Program in the 2021 NDAA to address alarming gaps in at-sea logistics.

This last December, MARAD issued an interim final rule to solicit applications from eligible candidates for participation in the Tanker Security Program. I'm glad to see a strong response from industry on this and look forward to seeing this program start quickly.

I am most encouraged that MARAD expects the first National Security Multi-mission Vessel (NSMV) to deliver in June, with her first Summer Sea Term shortly after. The NSMV program originated in the Seapower subcommittee when we crafted authorizing language in the 2016 NDAA. At the time, all of the state maritime academies from Maine to Texas were training cadets on ancient boats with aging technology. The first ship "*THE EMPIRE STATE*" which is 525 feet long with the capacity to carry up to 600 cadets and 100 officers, faculty, and staff, or 1,000 emergency responders in a disaster response, will deliver on time and with less than one percent cost growth which is phenomenal on a lead ship.

Across Philly Shipyard, the once nearly defunct yard is now filled with 2000+ shipbuilders working on the next 4 ships in this program. It is important to note that these ships are multi mission. They can be quickly converted into large sealift vessels to transport military personnel and cargo if the nation calls.

The NSVM program clearly shows that a cost-effective new build program using private sector methodology works as we take on the task of recapitalizing our sealift fleet. That is exactly why this committee led again last year to authorizing a sealift construction program using this "vessel construction manager" model. While I am disappointed that the budget request this year does not fund this approach and relies on continued acquisition of used foreign built vessels, I will continue to work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to ensure that we bolster our prioritization of a domestic new build program.

When we met last year, the KC-46 platform was only certified to refuel 85% of aircraft in the fleet. The Air Force has taken the necessary steps to increase that rate and bring the program to a 99% air refueling capability rate. The Air Force also continues to upgrade the RVS system and provide operators with advanced refueling capability.

Lastly, we will continue to support the recapitalization of the C-130 fleet. This recapitalization remains urgent, underscored by the grounding of C-130H without upgraded propellers due to propeller cracks. Modernizing these platforms will make the Air Force, and Air National Guard more effective. Intratheater Airlift capability is vital in high-end conflict, and C-130s will be leading this capability. We must ensure the fleet can provide the capacity required for sustained operations during conflict.

I look forward to working with my colleagues in a bipartisan fashion as we develop the 2024 NDAA and our witnesses' testimony this morning.

With that, I yield back.