

**Statement of the Honorable John Garamendi
Chairman, Readiness Subcommittee
“F-35 Program Update:
Sustainment, Production, and Affordability Challenges”**

November 13, 2019

Good morning. I'd like to welcome everyone to this joint hearing of the Readiness and Tactical Air and Land Forces subcommittees on the F-35 program.

The hearing comes at a critical time for the F-35 program. After nearly two decades of development, the aircraft has entered its operational testing period, is actively deployed around the globe, and has seen its first combat missions.

Acquisition continues apace, and we've delivered over 450 F-35s to Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, and key international partners. By 2023, the fleet is expected to include more than 1,100 aircraft stationed at 43 operational sites.

As DoD's costliest weapon system, it goes without saying that the F-35 has been the subject of much criticism. With acquisition costs expected to exceed \$406 billion and sustainment costs estimated at more than \$1 trillion over its 60-year lifecycle, this scrutiny is warranted. In fact, sustainment activities will ultimately contribute to 70% of the program's total costs. So today's discussion, the first F-35 hearing led by the Readiness subcommittee, will rightfully focus on sustainment issues.

The F-35 sustainment enterprise faces formidable challenges. These include unacceptably high operating and support costs, inadequate repair capacity at the depots, spare parts shortages compounded by insufficient reliability of parts and components, and deficiencies in the platform's Autonomic Logistics Information System, or "ALIS." As a result of these problems, only about half of the F-35 fleet was available to fly at any given time in 2017 and 2018. The program has also had a complex relationship with its prime contractors, Lockheed Martin and Pratt & Whitney, who bear responsibility for some of this program's sustainment challenges and from whom we will hear on a second panel.

While the Department paid insufficient attention to sustainment in this program's early years, we have seen an increased focus on these problems resulting in measurable progress that we should acknowledge. Costs per flying hour are decreasing, and the aircraft's mission capability rates – while still too low – increased this year, partially as a result of the spotlight placed on improving mission capability by former Secretary Mattis.

Yet attention to these problems must outlast any particular leader or directive. As we look ahead to the next few decades of F-35 service, failing to create an effective and cost-efficient sustainment system would diminish readiness, squander taxpayer resources, and discourage the services and our partners from continuing to purchase the F-35. This would create unacceptable risk for the

program and would be an abdication of the trust and investment of the public and our allies.

The capabilities the F-35 brings to the battlefield are essential to the objectives of our new national defense strategy and to those of our international partners. I am not interested in dwelling on the mistakes of the past, but I do think we all agree that the stakes are too high for us to allow this program to fail. We must take a constructive and collaborative approach toward solving the F-35's sustainment challenges, and I look forward to discussing how we can do so today.