

SPF/RDY Hearing Opening Remarks
Chairman Joe Courtney
“US TRANSCOM and MARAD: State of the Mobility Enterprise”
7 March 2019

Good afternoon. The combined Seapower and Projections Forces subcommittee and Readiness subcommittee meet today to hear from the United States Transportation Command and the Maritime Administration on the state of the military’s ability to move our forces in peacetime and times of potential conflict. For the new members, the two subcommittees hold this joint hearing each year to receive testimony on the posture of USTRANSCOM and to oversee aspects of MARAD’s mission which fall under the jurisdiction of the House Armed Services Committee rather than the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

This year comes at an important moment for several of major mobility programs. The Department of Defense recently completed a new Mobility Capabilities and Requirements Study (MCRS-18), as directed by Congress in 2017. Members of the Seapower subcommittee have had the opportunity to review the strengths and significant weaknesses in that report as it guides future investment in our mobility forces. In addition, the Air Force has now accepted its first new tanker aircraft, but technical deficiencies and other issues continue to plague the program as our existing tankers advance toward near senior-citizen status. On the sealift side, we continue to face the challenge of recapitalizing an aging Ready Reserve Force as well as training ships for our State Maritime Academies.

Unfortunately, due the delayed budget submission this year, we do not have the benefit of reviewing specific proposals and funding levels with our witnesses today. However, I would remind our members that these two subcommittees have exercised independent judgment outside of the Administration’s budget proposals in the last two years in order to address these persistent obstacles for the goal of a high-functioning mobility enterprise.

For example, last year the Administration proposed cutting the Maritime Security Program by nearly 30%. The Maritime Security Program is a vital component of our military strategic sealift and global response capability. MSP is designed to ensure that the United States has the U.S.-flag commercial sealift capability and trained U.S. citizen merchant mariners available in times of war or national emergencies. And it is good value for money, providing a fleet of sixty cargo vessels for less than a third of the cost of just one Arleigh Burke Class destroyer. The Seapower Subcommittee rejected the proposed cut in the FY19 NDAA and the FY19 THUD appropriations bill also maintained the authorized level of funding.

The Administration also proposed insufficient funding for the National Security Multi-Mission Vessel program, which provides training vessels for use by the state maritime academies to prepare cadets for a career in the merchant marine industry while also standing ready to perform critical disaster response missions. It also proposed procuring used vessels for the NSMV program rather than building new vessels in US shipyards. This subcommittee rejected both proposals, authorizing sufficient funds for the procurement of one NSMV and including language restricting MARAD from procuring used vessels for the program.

Due to the imminent retirements of certain Ready Reserve Force vessels, the Administration initially proposed to recapitalize the RRF based on a strategy heavily reliant on foreign-built vessels. The Seapower Subcommittee rejected that proposal and required in law that TRANSCOM provide a plan to procure new sealift vessels built at shipyards in the United States. While I commend the Navy for exploring options to use a single hull form to replace multiple sealift missions, I believe that strategy will prove unaffordable. I think a more practical solution would be to take a proven mature design from the commercial market and begin building that in U.S. shipyards. This would not only be a quicker way to recap our sealift force but it would also have great benefits to our shipbuilding industrial base. I would be interested in hearing your opinions on that strategy.

Winston Churchill once stated "Victory is the beautiful, bright colored flower. Transport is the stem without which it could never have blossomed." I hope that the hearing today will be beneficial to the members and to the public as we review the importance and readiness of our logistics forces and their central role to the success of our armed forces in conflict. With that, I will yield to Ranking Member Wittman for any opening remarks.