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Subcommittee on Readiness and Management Support

STATEMENT OF

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ASSISTANT COMMANDANT
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

BEFORE THE

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SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS AND MANAGEMENT SUPPORT

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General John M. Paxton, Jr.
Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps

General Paxton was promoted to General and assumed the duties of Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps on December 15, 2012. A native of Pennsylvania, he graduated from Cornell University with a Bachelor and Master of Science in Civil Engineering and was commissioned through Officer Candidate School in 1974.

General Paxton's assignments in the operating forces include Rifle and Weapons Platoon Commander and Company Executive Officer, Co. B, 1st Battalion, 3d Marines; Training Officer, 4th Marine Regiment; Executive Officer, Co. G, 2d Battalion, 4th Marines; Company Commander, Co. L and Operations Officer, 3d Battalion, 5th Marines; GCE Operations Officer, II MEF, and Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, 1st Marine Division. He commanded the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines in support of operations in Bosnia and Somalia and later the 1st Marine Regiment.

Other assignments include Company Commander, Co. B, Marine Barracks Washington and Commanding Officer of Marine Corps Recruiting Station New York. He served as a Plans Division Officer, Plans, Policies and Operations, HQMC; the Executive Assistant to the Undersecretary of the Navy; and Amphibious Operations Officer/Crisis Action Team Executive Officer, Combined Forces Command, Republic of Korea.

As a general officer, he has served as the Director, Programs Division, Programs and Resources, HQMC; the Commanding General of Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego/Western Recruiting Region; Commanding General, 1st Marine Division; Chief of Staff, Multi-National Forces – Iraq; Director for Operations, J-3, The Joint Staff; and Commanding General, II Marine Expeditionary Force and Commander Marine Forces Africa. Most recently he served as the Commander, Marine Corps Forces Command; Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force Atlantic; and Commander, Marine Forces Europe.

General Paxton is a graduate of the U.S. Army Infantry Officer Advanced Course and Marine Corps Command and Staff College. He has also served as a Commandant's Fellow at the Brookings Institute as well as at the Council on Foreign Relations.

Introduction

Chairman Ayotte, Ranking Member Kaine, and distinguished members of the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Readiness: I appreciate the opportunity to testify on the current state of readiness in your Marine Corps and on our Fiscal Year 2016 budget request. We greatly appreciate the continued support of Congress and of this subcommittee in ensuring our ability to remain the Nation's ready force.

Since 1775 the Marine Corps, has been our nation's Crisis Response force. This was mandated by our 82nd Congress. Continuing to fulfill this role remains our top priority. Balanced air-ground-logistics forces that are forward-deployed, forward-engaged, and postured to shape events, manage instability, project influence, and immediately respond to crises around the globe are what we provide. Marine forces remain expeditionary and are partnered with the Navy, coming from the sea, operating ashore, and providing the time and decision space necessary for our National Command Authority. Ultimately, our role as America's 9-1-1 force informs how we man, train, and equip our force both for today and into the future.

This past year has demonstrated that the Marine Corps must be ready to respond, fight, and win more than just the last war. In 2014 the performance of your Marine Corps underscored the fact that responsiveness and versatility are in high demand today and that fact can be expected in the future.

- Your Marines – Operationally Responsive -

OEF – Afghanistan

In 2014, Marine Expeditionary Brigade-Afghanistan (MEB-A) concluded six years of sustained Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) operations in Afghanistan. Operations there focused on ensuring the success of the Afghanistan presidential elections in the summer of 2014 and transitioning security responsibilities to the Afghanistan National Defense Security Forces (ANDSF). With Marines serving in an advisory capacity, the ANSF in Helmand Province held control of all district centers. Regional Command (SW) also turned over operational responsibilities to the

International Security Assistance Force Joint Command (IJC). Today, a residual Marine presence of several hundred continues to support the Resolute Support Mission (NATO)/OPERATION FREEDOM'S SENTINEL (US) in Afghanistan.

Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force – Crisis Response (SPMAGTF-CR) Operations

While not as independent, flexible and responsive as our Marine Expeditionary Units (MEU) embarked and underway aboard Amphibious Ready Groups (ARG), two SPMAGTF-CRs are filling crisis response critical capability gaps for the combatant commanders in AFRICOM and CENTCOM. This past year SPMAGTF-CR units assigned to AFRICOM positioned forward in Moron, Spain and Sigonella, Italy safeguarded the lives of our diplomatic personnel and conducted military-assisted departures from the U.S. Embassy in South Sudan in January and our Embassy in Libya in July 14.

The Marine Corps SPMAGTF-CR unit assigned to CENTCOM (SPMAGTF-CR-CC) became fully operational on 1 November 2014 and deployed to the CENTCOM AOR. Since that time, SPMAGTF-CR-CC conducted embassy reinforcement, Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) exercises, and provided critical aviation and ground capabilities in the fight against ISIL. Most recently, Marines from SPMAGTF-CR-CC supported the evacuation of our Embassy in Sana'a, Yemen in February of this year.

Current Operations

Today, there are over 31,000 Marines forward deployed, conducting a full range of theater security and crisis response missions. Marines are currently conducting security cooperation activities in 29 countries around the globe. Over 22,000 Marines are west of the international dateline in the Pacific building partnership capacity, strengthening alliances, deterring aggression, and preparing for any contingency. Your Marines serving today in the operating forces are either deployed, getting ready to deploy, or have recently returned from deployment. Our operational tempo since September 11, 2001 has been high and remains high today. We expect this trend to continue.

- Institutional Balance -

The Marine Corps is committed to remaining the Nation's ready force, a force truly capable of responding to a crisis anywhere around the globe at a moment's notice. Thus, the American people and this Congress have rightly come to expect the Marine Corps to do what must be done in "any clime and place" and under any conditions. As our 36th Commandant recently published in his Commandant's Planning Guidance (CPG), "you expect us to respond quickly and win always."

This obligation requires the Marine Corps to maintain a high state of combat readiness at all times. Readiness is the critical measure of our Marine Corps' capacity to respond with required capability and leadership. We look at readiness through the lens of our five institutional pillars of readiness – **high quality people, unit readiness, capacity to meet the combatant commanders' requirements, infrastructure sustainment, and equipment modernization**. These pillars represent the operational and foundational components of readiness across the Marine Corps. We know we are ready when leaders confirm that their units are well trained, well led at all levels, and can respond quickly to the unforeseen. This capability helps to minimize operational risk and provides our national leaders the time and space to make reasoned decisions.

While we will always ensure that our forward deployed Marines and Sailors are properly manned, trained, and equipped, we must seek a balanced investment across the pillars to simultaneously ensure current as well as future (i.e. next to deploy) readiness. At the foundation of this readiness, we emphasize that all Marines and all Marine units (i.e. from home station) are physically and mentally ready, are fully equipped, and have sufficient time with quality small unit leaders in place to move and train whenever called upon.

We also fully appreciate that our readiness and institutional balance today, and the ability to maintain it in the future, are directly related to today's fiscal realities. During these fiscally constrained times, we must remain focused on the allocation of resources to ensure the holistic readiness of the institution (i.e. training, education, infrastructure and modernization), making every dollar count when and where it is needed most.

As the Marine Corps looks to achieve balance across the five pillars of readiness after thirteen years of uninterrupted war, our efforts have been frustrated by two clearly tenuous variables. First, the continued high operational tempo of, and high demand for, Marine forces, and second, the continued budget uncertainty surrounding annual appropriations (i.e. sequestration and impacts). Both of these variables have been keenly and repeatedly felt throughout the Marine Corps all this year as we have protected near-term readiness at the expense of our long-term modernization and of our infrastructure investments. This reality has forced the Marine Corps' to make the hard choice to underfund, reduce or delay funding, which threatens our future readiness and responsiveness.

As America's 9-1-1 force, your Corps is required to maintain an institutional capability, an operational balance, and an expeditionary mindset that facilitates our ability to deploy ready forces tonight. However, as we continue to face the possibility of sequestration-level funding for FY 2016, we may well be forced into adopting some short term or limited scope and scale variations for future unexpected deployments over the next few years. This means quite simply, that we will see increased risk in timely response to crises, in properly training and equipping our Marines to respond, and in their overall readiness to respond. By responding later with less and being less trained we may eventually expect to see an increase in casualties.

Readiness and the Capacity to Respond

With the support of Congress, the Marine Corps is committed to remaining ready and continuing the tradition of innovation, adaptation, and winning our Nation's battles. The challenges of the future operating environment will demand that our Nation maintain a force-in-readiness that is capable of true global response. America's responsibility as a world leader requires an approach to the current and future strategic landscape that leverages the forward presence of our military forces in support of our diplomatic and economic elements of power.

As stated in the 2012 President's Defense Strategic Guidance, "The United States will continue to lead global efforts with capable allies and partners to assure access to and

use of the global commons, both by strengthening international norms of responsible behavior and by maintaining relevant and interoperable military capabilities.” High-yield, relatively low-investment Marine Corps capabilities (ready and responsive air-ground-logistics forces) uniquely support this strategic approach.

- Current Readiness -

Maintaining the readiness of our forward deployed forces during a period of high operational tempo while amidst fiscal uncertainty; as well as fiscal decline, comes with ever increasing operational and programmatic risk. Today, approximately half of the Marine Corps’ home-station units are at an unacceptable level of readiness in their ability to execute wartime missions, respond to unexpected crises, and surge for major contingencies. Furthermore, the ability of non-deployed units to conduct full spectrum operations continues to degrade as home-station personnel and equipment are sourced to protect and project the readiness of deployed and next-to-deploy units. As the Nation’s first responders, the Marine Corps’ home-stationed units are expected to be at or near the same high state of readiness as our deployed units, since these non-deployed units will provide the capacity to respond with the capability required (leadership and training) in the event of unexpected crises and or major contingencies.

Despite this challenge and imbalance, the Marine Corps continues to provide units ready and responsive to meet core and assigned missions in support of all directed current operational, crisis, and contingency requirements. However, we continue to assume long-term risk particularly in supporting major contingencies in order to fund unit readiness in the near term. Consequently, the Marine Corps’ future capacity for crisis response and major contingency response is likely to be significantly reduced. Quite simply, if those units are not ready due to a lack of training, equipment or manning, it could mean a delayed response to resolve a contingency or to execute an operational plan, both of which create unacceptable risk for our national defense strategy as well as risk to mission accomplishment and to the whole-of-force itself. The following sections elaborate on some specific readiness challenges the Corps is facing today.

- Current Challenges to Readiness and the Capacity to Respond -

As the Nation's first responders, we firmly believe that the Marine Corps as a service, and in its entirety, is expected to be always in a high state of readiness. Today however, there are numerous challenges that have created a readiness imbalance, affecting our capacity to respond to future challenges with the required capability and leadership. For example, our home station unit's ability to train is challenged. Time is the essential component required to fix worn equipment and to train units to standard. A lower end-strength and unwavering and high unit deployment to dwell (D2D) ratios exacerbate time at home stations to prepare, train, and maintain. This, coupled with temporary shortages of personnel and equipment at the unit level, validate operational requirements that exceed resource availability, and a growing paucity of amphibious platforms on which to train, all contribute to degraded full-spectrum capabilities across the entire Service. As an example, a D2D ratio of 1:2 means your Marines are deploying for 7 months and home for 14 months before deploying again. During that 14-month "dwell," units are affected by personnel changes and gaps (duty station rotations, schooling, and maintenance), ship availability shortfalls and growing maintenance requirements, equipment reset requirements (service life extensions and upgrades), degraded supply storages, training schedule challenges (older ranges and equipment, and weather) and more. These collective challenges factor into every unit's compressed and stressing task to remain constantly ready. In some case, the D2D ratio is even lower than 1:2 (MV-22 squadrons, Combat Engineer units, and F/A-18 squadrons), placing considerable stress on high demand, low density units and equipment. Also concerning is the inability to assess the long-term health of the force at lower D2D ratios and the impact on overall force retention. Quite simply, despite OIF and OEF being "over," the unstable world and "New Normal" is causing your Corps to continue to "run hot."

As referenced earlier, just over half of Marine Corps home-stationed units are at unacceptable levels of readiness. For example, Marine Aviation contains some of our most stressed units. As operational commitments remain relatively steady, the overall

number of Marine aircraft available for tasking and or training has decreased since 2003. At that time Marine Aviation contained 58 active component squadrons and 12 reserve component squadrons for a total of 70 squadrons.

The Marine Corps has 55 active component squadrons today, three of which (2 VMM, and 1VMFA) are in transition. Of the 52 remaining squadrons, 33% are deployed and 17% are in pre-deployment workups to deploy. Our minimum readiness goal to deploy is T-2.0, which is simply the cut line between a squadron trained to accomplish its core mission and a squadron that is not. To attain a T-2.0 rating, a squadron must be qualified to perform at least 70 percent of its Mission Essential Tasks (METs) (i.e. tasks required to accomplish the multiple missions that are or may be assigned to a unit). Currently, our deployed squadrons and detachments remain well trained and properly resourced, averaging T-2.17. Next-to-deploy units are often unable to achieve the minimum goal of T-2.0 until just prior to deployment. Non-deployed squadrons experience significant and unhealthy resource challenges, which manifest in training and readiness degradation, averaging T-2.96.

The Marine Corps is actively and deliberately applying resources to maintain the readiness of deployed and next-to-deploy units. Our focus is to continue to meet all current requirements, while addressing the personnel, equipment, and training challenges across the remainder of the force. We are in the midst of a comprehensive review of our manning and readiness reporting systems and will develop a detailed plan to enhance our overall readiness during 2015.

We are also committed to meet the growing expeditionary requirements of our combatant commanders (COCOMs). To meet COCOM requirements, the Marine Corps will be required to sustain a D2D ratio in the active component force of 1:2 vice a more stable, and time proven, D2D ratio of 1:3. The Marine Corps also has some high demand/low density units that maintain a current D2D ratio of less than 1:2, such as the (VMGR/KC-130) community. These communities are closely monitored for training, maintenance, and deployment readiness as well as deployment frequency. The Marine Corps will continue to provide ready forces to meet COCOM demands, but we are carefully assessing the impact of reduced D2D ratios on our training and quality of life across all units and occupational fields. What we do know is that the optimal size of your

Marine Corps to meet the requirements of the Defense Strategic Guidance is 186,800 Marines. This optimal size gives the Marine Corps the capacity we need to meet current operational requirements demand with a D2D ratio closer to 1:3 which supports time for home station units to train and maintain. We continue to validate and support this assessment. Today, due to fiscal realities, the Marine Corps is adjusting its active duty end-strength to reach 182,000 Marines by 2017. As we continue to downsize, we must emphasize the enduring national mission requirement to provide forces that can always meet today's crisis response demands.

Another significant readiness challenge is the growing gap in the numbers of small unit leaders with the right grade, experience, technical skills and leadership qualifications associated with their billets. Specifically, our current inventory of Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) and Staff Non-Commissioned Officers (SNCOs) is not meeting our force structure requirements. The technical, tactical, and leadership demands on our NCOs and SNCOs has grown during 13 years of OIF and OEF. These Marine combat leaders have proven their mettle. We remain committed to fully and properly training them and their successors for the rigors of an unstable world with disaggregated operations against an asymmetric enemy in a distant and hostile environment. This dynamic directly affects our current and future training, maintenance, and discipline. We must train and retain adequate numbers of SNCOs and NCOs to preclude degraded crisis response readiness and ensure combat effectiveness. The Marine Corps' PB16 military budget funds a FY16 end-strength of 184,000 in our base budget and supports right-sizing our NCO ranks to provide our Marines the small unit leadership they deserve and which our Corps and nation need.

- Naval Expeditionary Force -

We share a rich heritage and maintain a strong partnership with the United States Navy. Sea-based and forward deployed naval forces provide the day-to-day engagement, crisis response, and assured access for the joint force in a contingency. The availability of amphibious shipping is paramount to both our readiness and to our overall ability to respond. The Marine Corps' requirement for amphibious warships to respond, for war

plans, and for contingencies remains at 38 platforms. The Navy's inventory today is 31 total amphibious warships. When accounting for steady-state demands and for essential maintenance requirements we are seeing that far fewer platforms are readily available for employment. Simply put we have a serious inventory problem and a growing availability challenge.

This is why the Marine Corps fully supports the Secretary of the Navy and Chief of Naval Operations' (CNO) efforts to increase the inventory and availability of amphibious platforms and surface connectors that facilitate our key concepts of operational maneuver from the sea (OMFTS) and ship-to-objective maneuver (STOM). The President's budget supports key investments in LPD-28, LX(R), and ship-to-shore connectors (SSC), and demonstrates our commitment to global maritime presence and to our Nation's mandate to sustain an amphibious capability that can respond to, deter, deny, and defeat threats on a global scale. We appreciate Congress providing a substantial portion of funding to procure a 12th LPD, and respectfully request that this committee continue to support full funding of that amphibious ship. The enhanced mission profiles of these new, improved and much needed platforms create operational flexibility, extended geographical reach, and surge capabilities for all our COCOMs.

Naval investments in alternative seabasing platforms expand access and reduce dependence on land bases, supporting national global strategic objectives and providing operational flexibility in an uncertain world. The naval seabasing investments in the Mobile Landing Platform (MLP), the Large Medium-Speed Roll-on/Roll-off (LMSR) strategic sealift ship, and the (T-AKE) Dry Cargo and Ammunition Ship as part of the Maritime Prepositioning Ship Squadrons (MPS), coupled with the Joint High Speed Vessel (JHSV), Afloat Forward Staging Base (AFSB) and ship-to-shore connectors provide additional lift, speed, and maneuver capability to augment, yet not necessarily replace or substitute for proven Navy and Marine Corps amphibious combat capabilities. Although never a substitute for amphibious warships, particularly in a contested environment, these alternative platforms will continually complement amphibious ships and can enhance national readiness and ability to answer COCOM non-combat demands.

While the President's Budget moves us in the right direction, it will take many years and a sustained effort to address the serious risk in the current inventory and

availability of amphibious ships. The Marine Corps will continue to work closely with the Navy and Congress to implement the 30 year ship building plan and to address the current amphibious availability and readiness challenges.

Building the Force of the Future

As challenging as it has been to prepare Marines for the current fight, our force must adapt to the ever-changing character and conduct of warfare to remain ready, relevant, and responsive. Innovation and adaptability will be required to build the force of the future. For the last 14 years, the Marine Corps has applied a small but key percentage of our resources to providing Marines what they need for today's fight. While individual Marines are our critical weapons system, we must outfit him with modern, reliable and useful gear and equipment. Because readiness remains our first priority in meeting our national security responsibility, our focus on an unrelenting demand for forces coupled with a declining budget has forced the Marine Corps to make difficult choices and to reduce investment in modernization in order to maintain current and near term readiness. We are consciously, by necessity, delaying needed modernization.

- Modernization Efforts -

Our declining budget has forced the Marine Corps to make difficult choices at the expense of modernization to maintain current and near term readiness. In the current fiscal environment, the Marine Corps is investing only in essential modernization, focusing on those areas that underpin our core competencies. Today, we have placed much emphasis on new or replacement programs such as our Amphibious Combat Vehicle (ACV), a Joint Light Tactical Vehicle (JLTV), our CH-53K Heavy Lift Replacement, and the critical fifth generation F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF). At the same time, our modernization resources are also necessarily focused on improving capabilities and extending the life of current systems in order to fill gaps that can be exploited by today's threats.

In order to balance modernization across the capabilities of the MAGTF and ensure a ready and responsive force of the future, our two top priorities remain the ACV, to include science and technology efforts toward high-water speed capabilities, and the JSF, both of which provide the technology required to dominate our adversaries in the future. Additionally, our investments in Network On-the-Move (NOTM), Ground/Air Task Oriented Radar (G/ATOR), and other additional aviation platforms such as the MV-22, CH-53K, and UH-1Y/AH-1Z programs are vital to the overall combat effectiveness and readiness of our future MAGTFs. We are also focused on and investing heavily in extending the service life and improving the interim capabilities of our legacy systems due to the time required to recapitalize needed capabilities while ensuring a smooth transition to future requirements.

For example, the need for recapitalization of our 42-year old AAV is critical and the nation cannot afford to gap this capability. Rising annual maintenance costs for the AAV and other legacy systems compete for resources against modernization efforts that seek to replace them with modern combat capabilities (i.e. ACV). This required allocation of precious resources works against our other investment and recapitalization efforts. Additionally, for our legacy aircraft platforms, the focus is on modernization to make them relevant in tomorrow's fight while simultaneously providing a bridge to rearrange our aviation recapitalization efforts. Rapid procurement of these new systems is critical to solving both our serious current and future readiness problems.

If we do not modernize, we will actually move backwards. Our adversaries continue to develop new capabilities exploiting any technology gaps associated with specific domains and functions. By under-resourcing equipment modernization we will ultimately fall behind. Increasing threats, the proliferation of A2/AD weapon systems, and the aging of key material capabilities present an unacceptable risk to forcible entry operations and our overall combat effectiveness if modernization continues to be diminished or halted.

Modernization and innovation are more than just procurement programs. We will re-energize our MAGTF experimentation and test new tactics, techniques, procedures, equipment and concepts that will allow us to meet every challenge. We are maintaining

our commitment to Science and Technology, and we continue to look for opportunities to expand our efforts in this critical area.

- Concept Development and Experimentation -

The current and future operating environment will remain volatile, unpredictable, and complex. To continue to deliver order from the chaos, we anticipate no lessening in the demand for Marine capabilities ranging from Amphibious Ready Groups with enhanced Marine Expeditionary Units (ARG/MEUs) and Special Purpose MAGTFs for crisis response as well as for more Marine Security Guards at our embassies and consulates (MCESG). Trends point to greater security challenges to our vital national interests almost everywhere. Therefore, as our Nation meets these future challenges, it will rely heavily on the Marine Corps to remain the ready, relevant, and responsive force of first resort. While there will be a degree of consistency in our missions, there is likely to be inconsistency in the operating environment, and we must be willing to experiment, take risk, and implement change to overcome challenges in those varied operating environments (threat, access, communications, etc.). As was the case prior to World War II, the quality and focus of our concept development, our expansion of science and technology, the frequency and significance of our exercises, and our constant experimentation efforts will remain critical to our overall readiness, relevance, and indeed our mission success. The end state of our efforts to link concepts and doctrine to exercises and experimentation will be to develop and nurture the intellectual energy and creativity of individual Marines and of units. This will enable the Marine Corps to continue to be a leader in both tactical and operational innovation.

A year ago we published *Expeditionary Force 21(EF-21)*, our Marine Corps capstone concept. *EF-21* establishes our vision and goals for the next 10 years and provides guidance for the design and development of the future force that will fight and win in the future environment. *Expeditionary Force 21* will also inform decisions regarding how we will adjust our organizational structure to exploit the value of regionally focused forces and provide the basis for future Navy and Marine Corps capability development to meet the challenges of the 21st Century. Developed in close

coordination with the recent update of our maritime strategy (i.e. *Cooperative Strategy 21 (CS21)*), *Expeditionary Force 21* describes how the Marine Corps will be postured, organized, trained, and equipped to fulfill the responsibilities and missions required around the world. This comprises four essential lines of effort: refining our organization, adjusting our forward posture, increasing our naval integration, and enhancing littoral maneuver capability.

- *All Volunteer Force* -

Our Marines and civilians are the foundation of who we are and of all that we do. We succeed because of our focus on recruiting, training, and retaining quality people. People are the primary means through which the Marine Corps remains ready and responsive in guaranteeing the defense of our great Nation. The resources we dedicate to recruiting, retaining, and developing high quality people directly contribute to the success of our institution. Thus, our commitment to attract, train, and deploy with the best quality Marines must always remain at the forefront.

Today, the Marine Corps does not have the proper level of personnel stability or cohesion in our non-deployed units. Having to move Marines between units to meet manning goals for approaching often accelerated or extended deployment cycles creates personnel turbulence, inhibits cohesion, and is not visible in our current readiness assessment tools. This personnel turbulence affects our combat readiness and our ability to optimally train, retain, and take care of Marines. Moving forward, we will improve cohesion by increasing our individual and unit preparedness across the force as well as emphasizing consistency of leadership and personnel stability across that same force.

Conclusion

On behalf of the Marines and Sailors and their families, all of whom provide this Nation with its versatile and reliable force-in readiness, I thank Congress and this subcommittee for your continued interest in and recognition of our operational and fiscal challenges and our key contributions to national security. We are proud of our reputation

for frugality and remaining one of the best values for the defense dollar. In these times of budget austerity, the Nation continues to hold high expectations of her Marine Corps, and our stewardship of taxpayer dollars. The Marine Corps will continue to answer the Nation's call to arms, meet the needs of the Combatant Commanders and others who depend upon our service, and operate forward as a strategically mobile force optimized for forward-presence and crisis response. Your continued support is requested to provide a balance across all five of our readiness pillars, so we can maintain our institutional readiness and our ability to remain responsive... as your predecessors wisely charged more than 60 years ago, "to be the most ready when the nation is least ready."