

Readiness Subcommittee Hearing
“F-35 Sustainment”
April 28, 2022

RANKING MEMBER WALTZ OPENING STATEMENT

Thank you Mr. Chairman. I want to welcome the team from DOD to discuss F-35 sustainment.

I also want to thank Ms. Maurer and her team at GAO for their continued engagement on the F-35 program. Your analysis and recommendations greatly assist Congress and the Department.

It is no secret that our adversaries like the Chinese Communist Party are advancing their military capabilities at an alarming pace.

The fifth generation F-35, and the ground attack and air superiority it brings to the table, are critical advantages that help outpace our threats.

The F-35 is the backbone of the future tactical air fleet, we plan to procure 2500, and fly them until almost 2080.

But persistent readiness, sustainment and affordability challenges threaten plans to employ the F-35 well into the future.

Availability and readiness metrics such as mission capable and fully mission capable rates remain concerning. While generally trending in the right direction, they are still below the warfighter's minimum performance targets, let alone objective targets.

I look forward to hearing updates about how the department is working to improve overall aircraft performance and readiness, particularly spare parts and depot capacity.

Engine sustainment strategy is a key piece to this puzzle.

Over the past year, non-mission capable rates because of the F135 engine have crept up. Last year Joint Program Office predicted an engine deficit by 2030 without considerable mitigating actions.

And GAO has stated simply that the sustainment strategy for the engine does not meet the needs of the services. We must do better.

Life-cycle sustainment costs are also deeply concerning. The services are off by an order of billions of dollars a year between projected costs to sustain their F35 fleets and their stated affordability goals. This forecasts an untenable and unacceptable situation where we will have invested in planes we cannot afford to fly.

Moving forward, we need to prioritize solutions to our sustainment challenges. We cannot delay critical decisions necessary to ensure affordability, and I do not support efforts

that might shift resources and place additional risk on sustainment or add additional long-term costs.

Timing is of the essence. Continued assessment of future sustainment concepts, combined with a rapidly growing fleet, will only compound affordability and readiness problems.

The F-35, when it has its full capabilities available to the warfighter, is one of our most advanced weapons systems, able to operate in highly contested environments. But we need to get the program on a sustainable path. Despite our challenges, I am committed to continuing investment into this 5th generation capability.

Thank you to the witnesses for their time. I look forward to today's discussion, and I yield back.