

**ADDRESSING OVERSIGHT AND SAFETY
CONCERNS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF
DEFENSE'S V-22 OSPREY PROGRAM**

HEARING

BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY,
THE BORDER, AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT
AND ACCOUNTABILITY
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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**ADDRESSING OVERSIGHT AND SAFETY
CONCERNS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF
DEFENSE'S V-22 OSPREY PROGRAM**

Wednesday, June 12, 2024

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY, THE BORDER, AND FOREIGN
AFFAIRS

Washington, D.C.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 11:39 a.m., in room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Glenn Grothman [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Grothman, Sessions, Biggs, Fallon, Perry, Garcia, Lynch, Porter, and Frost.

Mr. GROTHMAN. This hearing of the Subcommittee on National Security, the Border, and Foreign Affairs will come to order. Welcome, everyone.

Without objection, I may declare a recess at any time, and I will recognize myself now for the purpose of making an opening statement. Thank you. You can sit down.

Good morning and welcome. The goal of today's hearing is to examine the Department of Defense V-22 Osprey Program. We are all familiar because it seems to pop up in the news intermittently for the last 20 years. As an American deeply committed to the safety of our service members and the responsible stewardship of U.S. taxpayer funds, I believe it is imperative that we examine the challenges associated with this program.

The V-22 Osprey, a revolutionary tiltrotor aircraft, was designed to combine the vertical takeoff and landing capabilities of a helicopter with the long-range, fuel-efficient performance of a turbo-prop plane. Its promise was significant, enhancing the operational reach and flexibility of our armed services. However, as with any ambitious defense program, it has encountered substantial hurdles and tragically has been linked to dozens of fatalities. Since the V-22 became operational, it has been involved in multiple crashes during training exercises, resulting in the loss of over 50 service members' lives. These incidences have earned the Osprey the troubled nickname, "Widow Maker," highlighting the grave concerns revolving its safety and reliability. Most recently, last November, its failure led to the deaths of eight Air Force crew members, prompt-

ing the Department of Defense to ground the entire fleet for several months.

There have been several known issues throughout its history. The hard clutch engagement issue is a major mechanical flaw that has plagued the V-22. This program has been known since at least 2010, and has caused catastrophic losses of control, contributing to several fatal crashes. The Department of Defense has publicly claimed that the risk of a hard clutch engagement issue has been reduced 99 percent. However, the recent fatal crash and ongoing investigation suggest that more transparency and rigorous testing is needed to verify these claims, first, to understand whether all mechanical and operational issues are thoroughly investigated, and second, to demand transparency and accountability from the Department of Defense.

We have had hearings about the Department of Defense before on this Subcommittee, and it always seems to me like, you know, transparency, they view it as an enemy. Since the Committee's initial request last year, the Department has produced a very few responsive documents. The Department needs to produce the outstanding documents and information as soon as possible.

Finally, I want to ensure that taxpayer dollars are being spent wisely and efficiently in ways that do not subject the lives of our service members to unnecessary risk over and above what they already face. Every year the Department of Defense's budget continues to climb with no proper assessment of priorities, so we are not only losing people maybe by continuing this program, there are other more important programs that are being squashed. I have concerns that despite the monumental investment the taxpayers made in the Osprey Program, the Department has not prioritized long-term sustainability and operability of the program and has even cut operations and maintenance budgets.

This is not the first time the House Oversight Committee examined the Osprey. The Committee held a hearing in 2009. It is a shame that here we are over a decade later, and I am sure some of the questions will be the same questions that were asked 15 years ago, trying to understand these issues in light of even more crashes and loss of life. As we proceed with this hearing, let us remember our responsibility to the brave men and women who serve our Nation. Their safety and well-being must be at the forefront of our discussions and decisions.

To that end, I would like to enter into the official hearing record a written statement, which is really an incredible document, from surviving families, most of which are here today, of an MV-22B Osprey crash that occurred on June 8, 2022, during routine flight operations.

Mr. GROTHMAN. I would like to read one quote from Ms. Amber Sax of California, wife of Captain John Sax, who lost his life in that crash. "We seek accountability, answers, and change. Our goal is not to see this platform removed. It is to know that someday we will be able to save their lives, enable others to live, knowing what happened to them will not ever be repeated." I look forward to hearing from our witnesses from the Department of Defense today as we continue to work together to address these critical issues. I thank you for being here.

I now recognize Ranking Member Garcia for the purpose of his opening statement.

Mr. GARCIA. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I want to thank all of our witnesses, and thank you for your service. And to all the family members that are here also, we share your obviously incredible grief, and thank you all for being here and for your advocacy work on this important topic. Like the chairman, I think this is an important bipartisan hearing, and I think it is important that our Nation is always secure and that we have the best military readiness and capabilities possible.

Now, we know that the V-22 Osprey has been very important for the Air Force, Navy, and our Marine Corps, and has allowed our military to complete important missions in the past. With this unique capability to hover and land vertically without needing a runway, like a helicopter, we know the fast speed and long distance range that it carries. We really have a unique aircraft that has also had some challenges that we are going to talk about today. Now, the V-22 gives our troops important flexibility. This has been pretty made clear by our military. And if you look at the Osprey's major accident rate, which is the actual data that the military uses to judge safety, we know that per-flight hour over the past 10 years has been comparable to similar aircrafts. We know that the aircraft has some unique capabilities that it provides to our military. We also know that the Osprey has some really unique challenges.

It is not surprising, given how actually remarkable the tiltrotor technology is, which has been obviously the centerpiece of the capabilities of this aircraft, we know that when something goes wrong, the Osprey actually requires even greater pilot skill and experience to land safely. We also know that it has incredible speed, lift, and range, and when you think about delivering supplies to an aircraft carrier, we know how critical that work is and the important situation that can arise in all of our theaters.

We know that the Osprey's complicated technology creates unique procurement and development challenges as well. The Osprey requires tens of thousands of parts for completion made by many contractors and subcontractors. The Osprey has been delivered late and over budget. This is an all too familiar story, of course, when we talk oftentimes about the defense appropriation and acquisitions process, and we know that the concerns about the Osprey are real and they are not new. In its lifetime, we know that 16 Ospreys have actually been damaged beyond repair in accidents and 62 service members have tragically lost their lives.

Now, it is our responsibility to protect every person that serves our country. Congress has to hold both the Pentagon and our defense industry accountable, and so we look forward to the critical challenges that we can discuss. And I know that our witnesses are also very much interested in solutions and having honest and important conversations.

Investigations into a June 2022 crash showed a so-called "hard clutch engagement" that caused a catastrophic failure and crash, which killed all five marines aboard the aircraft. In 2023, two more Ospreys crashed last August in Australia, killing three marines, and most recently, last November, a crash killed eight airmen off the coast of Japan. These crashes, we know, are still under inves-

tigation and each one, of course, is incredibly tragic. And we know that following the November crash, the Air Force, Marines, and Navy actually grounded their entire Osprey fleets. This was an appropriate decision to protect our service members, and by March that order, of course, has been lifted and the Osprey is, of course, flying again, but it is required to stay close to a landing zone.

Now, I understand the military has put in place maintenance and design upgrades to address some of the issues. We know that more are needed, and that is part of what the hearing is about. Given this aircraft's history and ongoing safety issues, I do believe we need to hear more about why the DOD concluded that the Osprey can return to service and how we will keep our people safe in the future. I appreciate Chairman Grothman calling this hearing and hope we can work in a bipartisan way to ensure the highest degree of protection for our armed forces. Only through continued congressional oversight, can we protect the men and women who have chosen to serve our country.

Finally, I just want to remind everyone why we are here today, to honor the service and sacrifice of the men and women in uniform who put themselves in harm's way to protect our Nation, and specifically, the three marines lost in the Australia crash, the eight airmen lost in the Japan crash, and the many other service members that we have lost over the course of the last few years.

Now, Chairman Grothman, I ask for unanimous consent to enter each of those names into the record today. I have provided a list.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Yes, so ordered.

Mr. GARCIA. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I want to yield back.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. I am pleased to introduce our witnesses here today from left to right. Mr. Peter Belk, performing the duties of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Readiness, come over from the Pentagon. In this capacity, he is the principal advisor to the Secretary of Defense and Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. Next, we have Vice Admiral Carl Chebi, the Commander of Naval Air Systems Command. He is a skilled fighter pilot and has served in several operational capacities. He has also had an array of program management experience on various air platforms. And finally, Mr. Gary Kurtz is the Program Executive Director for Air Anti-Submarine Warfare, Assault, and Special Mission Programs. He oversees the acquisition and the total lifecycle support for a diverse range of programs, including the V-22 Joint Program Office. Thank you for all participating in today's hearing.

Pursuant to Committee Rule 9(g), the witnesses will please stand and raise your right hand.

Do you solemnly swear or affirm that the testimony that you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

[A chorus of ayes.]

Mr. GROTHMAN. Let the record show that all the witnesses answered in the affirmative. Thank you, and you may sit down. We appreciate you being here today and look forward to your testimony.

I will remind the witnesses we have read your testimony and will appear in full in the hearing record, but please limit your testi-

mony to 5 or 6 minutes. As a reminder, please press the button on the microphone in front of you, so that it is on and the members can hear you. When you begin to speak, the light in front of you will turn green. After 4 minutes, the light will turn yellow. When the red light comes on, the 5 minutes is up. I would like you to wrap up as soon as convenient.

I now recognize Mr. Belk for his opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF PETER BELK
PERFORMING THE DUTIES OF
THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF
DEFENSE FOR READINESS
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE**

Mr. BELK. Chairman Grothman, Ranking Member Garcia, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to testify today about the Department of Defense's safety oversight and our ongoing work to ensure the safety of the V-22 Osprey Aircraft.

I am proud to be here today to discuss how we are inculcating a culture of safety across the Department and specifically how our actions are driving the safe return of the V-22 Osprey to flight. Our partnerships across the Department are key to maintaining that culture of safety, and I am pleased to be here today with Vice Admiral Carl Chebi and Mr. Gary Kurtz to describe the Department's efforts to ensure the safety of the V-22 Osprey and our service members.

I also want to thank personally the family members of those who have suffered losses and tell them directly, you have my commitment on behalf of the Department to continue to drive the safest outcomes possible so we never have to and try to work to reduce any mishaps in the future. Thank you.

As a Department, it is our solemn duty to protect our greatest resource: our people. We continuously underscore the importance of safety at every level in the Department, from our newest recruit to our most senior commander, to ensure an environment where safety and risk management remain a core value ingrained as an essential and integrated part of our operations. The Department continues to proactively promote a culture of safety where there is a shared commitment, emphasis, and urgency placed on deliberate communications, consistent resourcing, and elevated ownership of risk decisions.

I am in the position of performing the duties of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Readiness in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. One of my office's primary responsibilities is in establishing and overseeing safety policies, plans, and programs to support all the Department's components in managing risk and preventing accidents and injuries to our military and civilian personnel.

We execute our safety mission through the Defense Safety Oversight Council, which is the Department's senior safety forum that provides governance on Department-wide safety efforts and addresses the most significant challenges facing the safety and health of our people. The Defense Safety Oversight Council brings together senior leaders from across the Department to elevate safety

decisions and guide our comprehensive and crosscutting efforts to drive behavioral change, review safety trends, improve awareness, share lessons learned, and confirm priorities, ensuring we are taking deliberate actions to reduce safety risk, enhance readiness, and protect our most valuable resource: our people.

The Defense Safety Oversight Council reports to the Deputy Secretary of Defense, who receives regular updates on safety and occupational health through the Deputy's Workforce Council. The Joint Safety Council is a key component of our departmental safety governance structure and it serves an essential institutional role in developing a common understanding of operational mishaps involving joint programs. It is also a key venue for collaborating to synchronize communications and share mishap lessons learned and best practices for mitigating risk.

From the moment the most recent Osprey mishap occurred, the Department's senior safety leaders, in partnership with the Defense Safety Oversight Council, the Joint Safety Council, and the military departments, were actively collaborating on all aspects of the V-22's return to flight. The Department will continue to collectively leverage our robust safety governance processes to maximize our collaborative approach for improving safety-focused outcomes. As a Department, we are working relentlessly and prioritizing solutions that minimize risks and other hazards to the well-being of our service members by understanding causal mishap factors, identifying mitigations, addressing exposures, strengthening policy, and incorporating actions to prevent both on and off-duty accidents.

The Department is committed to instituting an effective and enduring Department-wide culture of safety that yields safer workplaces, fewer mishaps, enhanced readiness, and that supports one of Secretary Austin's keen priorities, taking care of people. The Defense Safety Oversight Council and the Joint Safety Council are essential to our collaborative mishap reduction efforts to proactively identify trends and indicators, share best practice and lessons learned, and mitigate risks to ensure the safest possible operational training environments for our service members. We will continue to advocate for enhanced synergy, emphasis, and urgency on delivered communications, consistent resourcing, and elevated ownership of the risk decisions to preserve operational capabilities and protect our most vital assets, the service members, who defend our Nation and the civilian employees who support them.

We appreciate the opportunity to share with you how seriously we take our safety oversight responsibilities and how we are consistently and proactively striving to detect and mitigate risks before mishaps occur. Thank you for your continued support, and we look forward to your questions.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Admiral Chebi?

**STATEMENT OF VICE ADMIRAL CARL CHEBI
COMMANDER
U.S. NAVAL AIR SYSTEMS COMMAND
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE**

Mr. CHEBI, Chairman Grothman, Ranking Member Garcia, and distinguished members of the House Committee on Oversight and Accountability, Subcommittee on National Security, the Border,

and Foreign Affairs, thank you for the opportunity to address the status of the V-22 Osprey Program with you today. I am Vice Admiral Carl Chebi, and I currently serve as the commander of Naval Air Systems Command, a position I have held since September 2021. With me today to my left is Mr. Gary Kurtz, the Program Executive Officer for Air Anti-Submarine Warfare, Assault, and Special Mission Programs. The V-22 Program is part of his portfolio, and he, along with the V-22 Program Manager, are responsible for the overall acquisition lifecycle and risk management of the V-22 Program.

I, along with my team, am responsible for the development, integration, testing, fielding, and sustaining of naval aviation capabilities. Our focus is ensuring we deliver the warfighting capability that the fleet, that our sons and daughters need to execute their missions successfully and return home safely. This has been and continues to be our North Star for myself as the NAVAIR Commander, along with my teammates, Vice Admiral Dan Cheever, the Commander of Naval Air Forces; Lieutenant General Bradford Gering, the Deputy Commandant for Marine Aviation; and Lieutenant General Tony Bauernfeind, the Air Force Special Operations Commander.

Currently at NAVAIR, I have oversight of just over 4,000 aircraft across 40 different types. This includes the V-22 Program, which today operates as a joint program of 434 aircraft across the U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Navy, U.S. Air Force, and Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force. I am committed to ensuring the safety of the V-22 to perform its mission, just like the 40 other aircraft types that I am responsible for. As the Commander of NAVAIR, I serve as the airworthiness authority for naval aviation, somewhat akin to the role of FAA in a commercial parallel. I am responsible for implementing and maintaining the technical standards required to establish and maintain safe flight operations. If cases arise in which we can no longer maintain that standard, I will take the appropriate action, including grounding of aircraft until deemed safe for flight.

Since I arrived at NAVAIR in September 2021, we have grounded the F-18, the F-35, the T-45, the V-22, the P-3, and the H-53 aircraft due to safety concerns. The decision to ground these aircraft were not made lightly due to operational impacts. Our ability and responsibility to ensure continued safe flight operations is at the forefront of every decision we make.

Naval aviation is an inherently dangerous profession. Our objective is to provide aircraft that are safe to execute their mission while proactively managing every platform so as to prevent mishaps from ever occurring. Throughout the life of a program, we continuously assess program risks based on engineering and test data, quality reports, manufacturing data, fleet feedback, and mishap investigations. This process of reviewing our risks is continuous and considers manning, training, and equipment aspects of safety across the spectrum of how our platforms are designed, built, operated, and maintained.

In the event that a mishap does occur, which can range from a relatively minor ground incident to a catastrophic loss of life or aircraft, a safety investigation board is established to investigate the

mishap, determine the root cause, and make recommendations to prevent future incidents. The safety board is comprised of experts across all required technical competencies so that we reach a full understanding of what happened, how it happened, and what we can do to prevent the event from ever occurring again.

In the past 2 1/2 years, we have experienced four mishaps with the V-22 Program that have resulted in a loss of 20 of our service members and four aircraft. This has the full attention and support of USN, USMC, and U.S. Air Force leadership. I would like to take a couple minutes to walk you through what we have done to address this issue with a clear understanding there is still much work to be done. While I will address the most recent mishap, this same process is used for every mishap for all of our platforms.

On 29 November 2023, a CV-22 was involved in a crash that resulted in a loss of eight airmen and the aircraft. As a result, the AFSOC Commander immediately established a safety investigation board to investigate the mishap that included experts from the Navy, the Air Force, and industry. On 6 December 2023, data was presented to myself that indicated that the platform had experienced a catastrophic material failure that we have never seen before in the V-22 Program. Based on that data, I made the decision to ground all V-22s until we understood the failure mode and we could safely return the aircraft to flight.

Over the next couple months, service aviation leadership engaged with the Safety Board presidents to review the mishap investigation findings. The Safety Board was able to determine the sequence of events that occurred and we are confident we know the material root cause of the November mishap. Based on the Safety Board's findings, service aviation leadership developed a path to allow for a return to restricted flight operations through implementation of specific controls.

On March 8, 2024, the V-22 was returned to a flying status and has safely flown over 7,000 hours since then. Today, we are methodically looking at material and nonmaterial changes that we can make to allow for a full mission set without controls in place. I will not certify the V-22 to return to unrestricted flight operations until I am satisfied that we have sufficiently addressed the issues that may affect the safety of the aircraft. Based on the data that I have today, I am expecting that this will not occur before mid-2025.

In parallel, I have launched a comprehensive review of the V-22 Program. This effort is ongoing and will ensure we are holistically looking at all aspects of the program across manning, training and equipment, and proactively identifying additional actions outside of mishap reviews that enable safe, reliable, and affordable flight operations. As we have findings from the comprehensive review, I will take the necessary actions to ensure continued safe flight operations. This is an ongoing process, and my expectation is the full comprehensive review will take another 6 to 9 months.

The NAVAIR and V-22 joint program teams are committed to ensuring the safety, reliability, and operational effectiveness of these critical platforms. By the ongoing comprehensive review of the V-22 Program, we will continue to pursue safety improvements where needed. As a NAVAIR commander, I have a vested interest in the safety of this platform and all aircraft for which I am re-

sponsible, and I will not certify an aircraft to perform a mission unless confident in the ability of that aircraft to do so safely. Thank you. Both Mr. Kurtz and myself look forward to answering any of your questions.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Thank you. Mr. Kurtz, it is my understanding you do not have an opening statement, but I would like to give you the opportunity to make any opening remarks you want to.

**STATEMENT OF GARY KURTZ
PROGRAM EXECUTIVE OFFICER
AIR ANTI-SUBMARINE WARFARE AND
SPECIAL MISSIONS PROGRAMS
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE**

Mr. KURTZ. Yes, sir. Thank you, and good morning, Mr. Chairman, and as well, Ranking Member Garcia. It is truly my honor to be here today to testify. I associate my comments with Vice Admiral Chebi as a joint statement, and I look forward to your comments today.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. Mr. Fallon, we will go a little bit out of order today.

Mr. FALLON. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much, very gracious of you to do so.

In this room today, it looks like we have some Gold Star families and your presence here is recognized, and I am deeply sorry for your loss. I am a member of the Armed Services Committee and also a veteran myself, and I think it is incumbent upon us as Members of Congress to do everything we can to ensure that the military maintains the highest degrees and focus and prioritizes safety. Everybody says they do, but sometimes it is words, and we need actions to back that up.

I have had a fight with one of the branches on rollovers with Humvees and we are losing military members. And we have authorized the money, we have appropriated the money, and then we have to take them kicking and screaming to actually spend the money on safety, so I am very acutely sensitive to what we are talking about here. Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing.

Equipment sometimes fails, and it is oftentimes when equipment fails, tragedy is the result. As an Air Force veteran, I recall the T-37, which was a trainer they used to use, and it had an incredible safety record. I think when I was in the service, it was like 30 years plus where there had been no fatalities because of it, and that is a standard that needs to be followed so it is possible to operate equipment that goes very fast and do it in a safe manner.

Admiral, has the DOD been actively using information from the safety investigations in the Osprey crashes to determine modifications to improve the system?

Mr. CHEBI. Sir, thank you for that question. As I mentioned in my statement, we use data continuously through the life of a program to identify the risks that are for that platform, more importantly, to make sure we identify the controls and the mitigations that we can put in place to minimize or to eliminate that risk from ever occurring with the aircraft. So, yes, we use all sources of information, including the safety investigations, to determine the root

cause and to address the root cause through mitigations and controls.

Mr. FALLON. Two questions, Admiral. The first one is, have you collected data on whether or not these failures have increased or decreased since these modifications have been made, and second question is, will you commit to providing this data to the committee if it exists?

Mr. CHEBI. Sir, can you clarify your first question? I just want to make sure I answer it correctly.

Mr. FALLON. Sure. Have you collected data on whether the Osprey failures have increased or decreased since the modifications have been made, and if there is data that you have collected, will you share it with the committee?

Mr. CHEBI. OK. Since the modifications have been made, I just want to make sure I am addressing yours.

Mr. FALLON. OK.

Mr. CHEBI. So, we take all the information on. If there are repeat issues that are causing risk to our platform or to our aircrew, we take the appropriate actions to put the controls in place to minimize or to remove that risk from the platform.

Mr. FALLON. But there is no data? I am talking about just simply measures. You take actions, but we want to make sure those actions are effective, and I apologize because I only have a limited amount of time here. Admiral, how many deaths have occurred from accidents on the Osprey?

Mr. CHEBI. Sir, I will answer it in two different ways. Since I have been in the seat in the last 2 1/2 years, we have lost four aircraft and 20 of our service members. Many of the service members' families are right behind me right now.

Mr. FALLON. Do you know the total number?

Mr. CHEBI. The total number of the platform before it was IOC and after IOC, the total number that I am tracking is 64 service members.

Mr. FALLON. OK. And then I am guessing injuries as well. Have people survived these crashes?

Mr. CHEBI. The total number of fatalities that I am tracking is 64 fatalities total and 93 injuries.

Mr. FALLON. OK. I have one more question. The hard clutch engagement, which apparently is a fleetwide program that we have known about for years, the pilot shifts the gears and the clutch engages. And sometimes when this happens in this HCE, it causes complete loss of control in the aircraft, and apparently there is nothing the pilot can do about it. And on June 8th of 2022, Gold Star families were told that this was modified and this risk was limited, 99 percent chance that this would not happen. Where does that number come from, Admiral?

Mr. CHEBI. Sir, thank you for the question. For hard clutches, you know, through the life of the program, we have had 19 hard clutch events. In 2022, we had a sharp increase in the number of hard clutches. Based on the data that I had at that time, the first control that we put in place was we modified our air crew procedures, so that they would be in a safe environment should a hard clutch event did occur. Subsequent to that, there was additional hard clutch events, and we received data back from the Glamis

mishap that indicated that the controls that we had in place were insufficient.

The team executed a statistical analysis on all the mishaps that did occur with hard clutches and determined that the failure mode that we have seen, even though we have never been able to repeat the failure in test, the failure mode that we are seeing is called a wear-out mode. Over time, the clutch wears out and has a higher susceptibility to slipping, which will cause a hard clutch event. Based on that data, in March 2023, I grounded the fleet and mandated that all aircraft will remove clutches that have over 800 hours. That has been completed, and we have flown numerous hours since then without a hard clutch event.

I want to make this point clear though. That has not eliminated the risk, and I will let the PEO kind of talk about this. We are currently in testing of a follow-on design for the clutch not only to minimize the exposure, but to eliminate this risk from occurring again. I will let Mr. Kurtz kind of take over from there.

Mr. FALLON. So, there has never been an HCE prior to the 800 hours?

Mr. CHEBI. Sir, there have been no hard clutch events since we implemented the 800-hour time limit on the input cool assemblies.

Mr. FALLON. I yield back. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. Mr. Garcia.

Mr. GARCIA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, thank you to our witnesses. Admiral, just to make sure that we are on the same page, what is a Class A accident, and what is the current Marines' Class A accident rate per 100,000 flight hours?

Mr. CHEBI. A Class A mishap is determined loss of aircraft, loss of life, or a certain dollar amount to repair the aircraft is how it is defined. I do not have the dollar amount in front of me, but I can get that back to you.

Mr. GARCIA. And what is the accident rate per 100,000 flight hours?

Mr. CHEBI. Sir, I just want to make sure that I am answering your specific question. For the V-22 for Marine Corps? For the overall aviation for Marine Corps? Which one would you like?

Mr. GARCIA. For the V-22.

Mr. CHEBI. The V-22 overall mishap rate across all three services is 4.1 mishaps per 100,000 flight hours. For the U.S. Marine Corps, it is 3.29 mishaps per 100,000 flight hours.

Mr. GARCIA. And if you separate the current Marines' Class A accident rate and the current Air Force Class A accident rate per 100,000 flight hours, including the November 2023 crash, there is a difference. Is that correct?

Mr. CHEBI. Yes, sir. There is a difference between the Class A mishap rate between the U.S. Marine Corps and the U.S. Air Force.

Mr. GARCIA. And do you get a sense of why there is a discrepancy there or why that exists?

Mr. CHEBI. Sir, when we do mishap investigations, we look at all aspects across manning, training, and equipment to identify the root cause and put the corrective actions in place to minimize or to eliminate that risk from ever occurring again. With the specifics on why the U.S. Air Force V-22 mishap rate is higher than the

U.S. Marine Corps, I think that is a question the U.S. Air Force needs to take on.

Mr. GARCIA. Well, I just want to note, I think this is an important discrepancy, and I think it is one that should be investigated and discussed more openly. And there is clearly a difference in discrepancy between both the Air Force and the Marines, and so I understand. I appreciate your answer. But just for the record, Mr. Chairman, I think that that is something that needs to be addressed, and certainly I think I look forward to more answers on. Thank you for that.

Admiral, is there any reason to believe tiltrotor technology is any less safe than traditional fixed-wing or rotor aircraft?

Mr. CHEBI. Sir, thank you for that question. I will answer it from my capacity as airworthiness. More safe or less safe, my objective is to do an analysis of the data throughout the entire lifecycle of a program to make it as safe as you possibly can. So, whether or not one is more or less safe, it is interesting, but what I am focused on is increasing the safety posture across all of our platforms and eliminate mishaps to the max extent possible by proactively managing each one of our aircraft.

Mr. GARCIA. I appreciate that, and obviously, I am not an expert on the aircraft safety, but certainly I slightly maybe have a different perspective. I think that if there is a difference and something is more safe or less, if I actually think that matters, it should be taken into consideration as we are making these assessments.

Mr. CHEBI. Yes, sir.

Mr. GARCIA. Admiral, are you confident that the current restrictions on aircraft operations are adequate?

Mr. CHEBI. Sir, thank you for that question. Yes. It was a very deliberate, methodical, data-driven process that we went through. We fully vetted. We understood exactly what occurred on the most recent mishap. We fully vetted the controls that we put in place. I went and personally briefed all the Air Force, the Navy, as well as the Japanese crews so they had a full understanding of what happened in this mishap. We need to build trust with the air crews, and the Marine Corps did that on their side as well. I am confident that the controls that are put in place, based on the data I have today, allow for return to flight in a restricted flight envelope only.

Mr. GARCIA. OK, and I am just going back. Are you, like myself, concerned about the difference between the Air Force and the Marine discrepancy that exists? Is that a concern?

Mr. CHEBI. Sir, I have had direct conversations with the AFSOC commander, Lieutenant General Bauernfeind. He is addressing the issue and the discrepancy between the mishap rates between his V-22 fleet and the other V-22 fleets. From my perspective, I am trying to lower the overall V-22 mishap rate holistically.

Mr. GARCIA. OK. Thank you. Do you think that as it relates to the timeline for redesigning, testing, and deploying the new gearboxes, and to replace the current clutch system, how would you describe that process and where are we at?

Mr. CHEBI. Sir, I will start and I will hand it over to Mr. Kurtz to kind of followup. I mentioned the hard clutch. I mentioned the controls that we put in place to remove them at a certain time limit

to minimize the exposure of that risk. We modified procedures as well from the air crew perspective to give them good procedures to execute should that incident occur again, but we have not eliminated that risk. We will not eliminate that risk until we have a re-designed clutch. That is in testing right now, and I am pushing, from my seat as the airworthiness, the safety advocate, to get that out to the fleet as soon as we possibly can. I will hand it over to Mr. Kurtz.

Mr. KURTZ. Yes, sir. Just to followup on Vice Admiral Chebi's comments, we have understood through cause analysis that has allowed us to move forward very aggressively with a new design to that clutch. That clutch testing is expected to start in the next couple of months, and we anticipate that we will have a new design clutch fielding in the mid-2025 timeframe.

Mr. GARCIA. OK. And then I have other questions, but just to conclude, I know my time has run out. Admiral, I know that sometimes certain upgrades to craft and to mechanical concerns, oftentimes decisions are made about when to make an upgrade to a certain craft depending on when we are using certain aircraft in certain missions, and obviously safety is always, I know, a priority. But frequency of use, pace of use, I think, also obviously sometimes has an impact on certain types of equipment, vehicles that we may use. And I know that we try to be as selective as possible in prioritizing safety and what is used.

But do you have any reason to believe that mechanical, when we have tried to upgrade the V-22, or frequency of use has had or could possibly be any of the factors that have led to some of the concerns that we share about the V-22 and some of the accidents that we have seen?

Mr. CHEBI. Sir, I want to make sure I clearly understand your question. Can you just state that one more time? I just want to make sure.

Mr. GARCIA. Sure. Let me be more clear. Oftentimes we make decisions when we are going to actually make mechanical improvements to vehicle or to aircraft dependent on frequency of use. Do you think that that issue or those issues could have anything to do with any of the accidents or the concerns that we share about the V-22?

Mr. CHEBI. Sir, thank you for that question. Based on the data I have today, I would say, no, that has not been a causal factor. A key point of the comprehensive review that we are executing today is to holistically look across manning, training, equipment across all aspects of the program to ensure continued safe outcomes for the V-22 platform. That is going to take another 6 to 9 months to finish up. That will be very thorough, holistic, and it is a proactive measure we are going after to implement the necessary controls across manning, training, equipment to ensure continued safe flight operations of the V-22 Program.

Mr. GARCIA. Thank you, sir, and I appreciate the chairman for the extra time.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Sure. OK. I am going to call on myself.

To ensure we are getting fair, accurate, and transparent answers from each of you, I am starting off with a simple "yes" or "no" question. Has anyone within the Federal Government or outside the

Federal Government told you not to discuss any topic related to the Osprey Program that may come up today?

Mr. BELK. Mr. Chairman, no.

Mr. CHEBI. No.

Mr. KURTZ. No, sir.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. Good. Now we are looking forward to having this hearing being open and honest discussion.

Admiral Chebi, can you please explain why Class A aircraft mishaps are or what Class A aircraft mishaps are and what criteria is involved in determining if an aircraft crash qualifies as a Class A mishap?

Mr. CHEBI. Yes, sir. At a high level, a Class A mishap is loss of aircraft, loss of life, and there is a certain dollar threshold from a damage perspective. I do not have that number. I can take that one for the record.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK.

Mr. GROTHMAN. You have testified that there are many more mishaps in the Marines, in the Navy, in the Air Force, correct?

Mr. CHEBI. Sir, I have testified? I am sorry. I just want to make sure.

Mr. GROTHMAN. There have been many more mishaps, you know, per whatever, per hours flown in the Marines, in the Navy, or in the Air Force, correct?

Mr. CHEBI. Sorry. I just want to clarify I am answering your question. Are you asking if we had mishaps across the Navy, the Marine Corps, and the Air Force in the V-22?

Mr. GROTHMAN. You have. You have, correct?

Mr. CHEBI. Yes, sir. Yes, sir. We have had Class A's through D's across the different services with the V-22 Program.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Right, and many more in the Marines expectation than in the Navy, correct?

Mr. CHEBI. Sir, I would not characterize as many more. The reason we establish a mishap rate, it is per 100,000 flying hours.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Right.

Mr. CHEBI. Marines have many more aircraft, have flown many more hours than the Navy has so far. So, I would caution us all to make sure we are having apples to apples comparison, and that is why we try to normalize it per 100,000 flight hours.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. I would like to enter into record an email committee staff received from DOD personnel.

Without objection, so ordered.

Mr. GROTHMAN. The email says, "As for the command investigations, not all Class A mishaps have command investigations. Over the past 5 years, there have been two command investigations related to a V-22 Class A mishap." Admiral Chebi, can you explain what a command investigation is?

Mr. CHEBI. Sir, if you will allow, I would like to get Mr. Belk to kind of answer this question.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK.

Mr. BELK. Mr. Chairman, thank you for your question. So, a command investigation is unduly undertaken in different ways by the different military departments, largely to get after a set of facts and potentially determine what, if any, additional actions need to be taken at that point, whether that has to do with matters of ac-

countability or matters of remedy, given a particular set of circumstances.

Mr. GROTHMAN. I am going to jump in here. I am trying to understand how the Department can accurately determine issues with the Osprey aircraft maintenance or personnel that may have caused a mishap if there is not an investigation done with every single Class A mishap. Why is an investigation not done every time?

Mr. CHEBI. Let me jump in there. So, with that question, for every Class A mishap, there is a safety investigation board that is conducted where we have full, unfettered access to all the data so we can holistically look at the program, what caused this issue, and, more importantly, what controls can we put in place to minimize or eliminate this risk from ever occurring again in the future here. Every Class A has a mishap investigation.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. Now, you have command investigations and safety investigations. Can you give us an example of something that would be included in a safety investigation, not included in a command investigation?

Mr. CHEBI. Can I give an example of something that would be included in a safety investigation or not?

Mr. GROTHMAN. Right.

Mr. CHEBI. It would be privileged data, so it would be an analysis. It would be potentially some statements from witnesses. Those would be a couple of examples of things that would not be in a command investigation—

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK.

Mr. CHEBI [continuing]. But that we want access to during the safety investigation because we need to understand.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Right.

Mr. CHEBI. OK.

Mr. GROTHMAN. There is more stuff available in a safety investigation, right?

Mr. CHEBI. Yes, sir.

Mr. GROTHMAN. And they are not publicly made available, correct?

Mr. CHEBI. That is correct, sir.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. This is for Mr. Belk. As you know, the Committee sent a letter to the Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin, in December asking for documents and information related to all mishap investigations. To date, the Department has refused to share the safety investigations with this Committee despite numerous offers to review the safety investigations in a sanitized manner or in camera as an accommodation. Why has the Department refused to provide access to these reports?

Mr. BELK. Congressman, thank you for your question. So, the Department remains committed to being transparent in sharing information related to any of these mishaps, and we do so largely at the conclusion of our command investigations, which we do provide to the Congress upon request and on circumstances.

With respect to safety investigations, safety investigations are designed to maximize the fullest transparency possible with those who are participating in the investigation so we can maximize our opportunity to understand what went right and what went wrong,

and how to take remedial access to and understanding of those actions by providing those participants safety privilege. The content of those safety investigations relevant to how to get after the solution to a particular mishap event are then informed or provided to command investigations and then be able to be acted upon, which we then would be in a position to be shared with this committee.

Mr. GROTHMAN. We will come back to that later. I am just going to ask one more question. Mr. Chebi, I am curious about the rate of Osprey mishaps compared to other aircraft, and I am saying just mishaps non-combat related. Are the mishaps of the Osprey higher or lower than other military air platforms, noncombat?

Mr. CHEBI. Sir, we had this discussion yesterday about combat versus noncombat. Most of our mishaps occur in noncombat mission sets. We train like we fight, and so we train in very realistic environments. We want our air crew to train in that environment, and so, there is a higher likelihood that we are going to have a mishap in a training accident than we are in a combat mission.

With regards to your specific question, the overall mishap rate across all the systems, all the platforms of the V-22 is 4.1. The Marine Corps is slightly higher than their overall mishap rate, the Air Force is higher than their mishap rate, and the U.S. Navy right now is slightly lower than their mishap rate across the other platforms. Again, I just want to reiterate—

Mr. GROTHMAN. I am not getting the answer I want, but we are well over my time.

Mr. CHEBI. Yes, sir.

Mr. GROTHMAN. I will go to Mr. Frost.

Mr. FROST. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The V-22 Osprey, like all military aircraft, is only as good as it is safe. If maintenance issues or, even worse, significant mechanical failures endanger the life of our service members, then the United States military cannot rely on the Osprey's unique capabilities, no matter how unique those capabilities may be. In the last 2 years, the V-22s have been involved in four major fatal accidents, which have resulted in the deaths of 20 service members just in the last year. These are catastrophes where American service members lost their lives, and it is not just a problem with the Osprey. In military aircraft across the board, safety and readiness metrics are dropping.

So far this year, Army aircraft have experienced twice the rate of major incidents than any year in the last decade. Air Force major incidents hit a 5-year high in the Fiscal Year 2023, despite us continuing to raise our defense budget almost nearing a trillion dollars than the one we are currently debating. Mr. Belk, can you explain the reasons underlying this troubling trend?

Mr. BELK. Congressman, thank you for your question. With respect to some of the specific data you have shared, what I would like to do is come back with some additional context and response that we can get after some of the more specifics.

Mr. BELK. Generally speaking, what I would say is that as the force continues to transform and shift in the types of training and operations that it is doing to mitigate and address new and emerging threat contexts, this is placing additional stress on the force. Whether or not this translates into additional mishaps or not, we are still looking at very closely, but we are monitoring that very

closely to ensure that as we continue to transform as a force, we understand how we do so as we operate and train in the safest manner possible.

Mr. FROST. Recent data suggests that the military is relying on aircraft that are not meeting readiness goals. In 2022, the GAO released a report that studied readiness among 49 different aircrafts over the span of a decade. GAO found that only one of those aircrafts—one—met their mission readiness goals every year, and only four met their readiness goals a majority of the years studied, and 26 of those aircraft did not meet readiness goals in a single year between 2011 and 2001. This trend is both alarming and unacceptable. I understand that the V-22 has now been approved to return to limited operation, despite there being no clear conclusion of the investigation of the most recent crash.

So, Mr. Belk, what did the DOD learn about the accident and its return to flight assessment, and how exactly does that differ from the initial crash investigation?

Mr. BELK. So, Congressman, if I understand the question correctly, we learned, and I would say when I say “we,” we in OSD, we with the military departments, learned rather contemporaneously about the incident that we are talking about in November. In terms of the approach, we take a, and I will defer to Admiral Chebi to speak to some of the specifics on how we conduct upon notification of a mishap at a military department or service level.

What I would say is that, from my perspective, we approach this particular incident with the same level of rigor and care and consideration in terms of how to get after the fundamental understanding of the events that transpired and led to the incident; and then the mitigation steps that need to be taken as we learn information to ensure the continued safest environment, operating environment and training environment, for our service members; and then what, if any, steps to include the stand-down that Admiral Chebi alluded to, to continue the safest environment possible.

Mr. FROST. Lieutenant Colonel Eric Cranford, the squadron commander where the most recent crash occurred, stated, “We are looking at 750,000 flight hours of history making data-driven decisions,” and so, what we are looking for is more transparency in terms of this data. We want to know what you all are finding out from it because transparency equals heightened scrutiny, and we need the heightened scrutiny right now as we have lost 20 service members in 1 year. So, Mr. Belk, your job is to ensure the readiness of the total force. So, where does the fault lie for the mission readiness failures that GAO identified, and will you take responsibility for addressing them?

Mr. BELK. So, Congressman, I can assure you that the Department, at every echelon and every level, takes very seriously matters of accountability upon understanding the facts and circumstances around a particular event and then what, if any, steps need to be taken to either hold organizations or individuals accountable for errors or actions that need to be held accountable for. So, upon understanding those circumstances and learning those events, you have my commitment that we will continue to do those things that need to ensure that accountability is meted out and addressed upon learning about the specifics in these instances.

I think also, as Admiral Chebi alluded to, some of these investigations remain open. But what I can assure you is, as those close out, we will be in a position to maximize the amount of transparency about the information that we learn from those investigations to this committee and elsewhere within the Congress. Thank you.

Mr. FROST. Thank you, because the GAO report that found that 26 different military aircraft did not meet the readiness goals in any of the years that they were studied is of cause of great concern. We do not want to be in the same place a few years from now with a different aircraft with 20 new service members who lost their lives during a training mission. Thank you so much, and I yield back.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Mr. Biggs?

Mr. BIGGS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks for holding this committee, and I acknowledge Gold Star families who are here today. Thank you for being here. I appreciate you, and I am sorry that this is what brings us together. With witnesses, this is just a little thing. You do not need to thank me for every question. I do not think you mean it, and I think it is obsequious, so let us not play that game. So, let us just get right to it.

Mr. Belk, GAO, and I am going to dovetail what Mr. Frost said just a second ago, reported in 2022 that only 52 percent of Marine V-22s are ready to fly. Fifty-two percent. Why were only half of Marine Ospreys mission capable?

Mr. BELK. Congressman, I would defer that question to Admiral Chebi, who I believe will have more specific details to share.

Mr. BIGGS. Admiral?

Mr. CHEBI. Sir, for the readiness of all the platforms under NAVAIR, a couple of years ago we started a journey, and we started it with the F-18.

Mr. BIGGS. So, we are talking about the Osprey. We are talking about 2022. I do not need a long, drawn-out history. We only have 5 minutes. Please make your answer brief, concise, but accurate.

Mr. CHEBI. There are manning and training aspects and readiness aspects with the V-22 that keep the readiness levels where it is at the 50 percent that you quoted. There are actions in place today, and we are leveraging the learning we have had from all of our other platforms to increase the readiness levels across all of the type model service across naval aviation. We are on a good path. We will get there with V-22.

Mr. BIGGS. Mr. Belk, how often has the V-22 been grounded?

Mr. BELK. Congressman, I would defer again to Admiral Chebi.

Mr. BIGGS. Admiral?

Mr. CHEBI. Sure. In the last 2 1/2 years I have been here, I have grounded the V-22, from my recollection, at least 2 times. I am sorry, 3 times.

Mr. BIGGS. Three times. For how long? What is the extent to the period of being grounded?

Mr. CHEBI. Groundings can go from a day to what happened after the November 2023 incident where it was 3 to 4 months that they were grounded.

Mr. BIGGS. So, what is the total of the last 2 1/2 years, 3 times grounded, how long? Four months? Five months?

Mr. CHEBI. Four to five months, yes, sir.

Mr. BIGGS. And you were talking about the safety investigation, Mr. Belk and Admiral, that the Chairman was asking about. And I did not hear a commitment that you would give us access to the safety investigation results, Mr. Belk, and I would like to know if you will commit to give that access to members of this committee.

Mr. BELK. Congressman, it remains important to protect the safety privilege for those who participate in those safety investigations, to protect those investigations and ensure that the members who participate in them have the maximum amount of opportunity to know that the information that they provide in those safety investigations will remain confidential and not for further disclosure.

Mr. BIGGS. So, you are telling us you are not going to allow members of this committee to have access to the results?

Mr. BELK. Congressman, we will continue to maximize the fullest transparency possible on the information contained in those investigations.

Mr. BIGGS. So, here is the deal. You do not want to give us full transparency. You are going to give us whatever you managed transparency, but you want the money from the taxpayer to pay for this. You understand that that is ironic, and I do not mean to be disrespectful, but that is disrespectful to this body. It is our obligation to oversee. That is why you are here, and you do not want to give us full access.

I get it. You think somebody up here is going to leak, but the bottom line is you need to be held accountable. We need to see because we need to know what is going to happen next with the program because we are concerned about mission capability. We are concerned about the men and women, the personnel who operate, maintain, work on these aircraft. And so, when you tell us within range we will let you see some of it, it is disrespectful, and it makes me wonder how we are going to get the information, how will we make the policies that we need to make.

Admiral, when is the last time a comprehensive review was done across this platform?

Mr. CHEBI. Sir, I am not aware of a previous comprehensive review on the V-22 Program.

Mr. BIGGS. And is that normal not to do a comprehensive review?

Mr. CHEBI. Sir, this is the first comprehensive review that I have initiated since my 2 years at NAVAIR. Again, the purpose and intent is to improve our outcomes across safety, affordability, and availability of this platform by holistically looking and proactively looking at all aspects of the program across manning, training, and equipment, so we can improve the outcomes there.

Mr. BIGGS. So, it has never been done before and you are doing it now. We understand why you are doing it now because there is some apparent real problems. Mr. Belk, can you provide us with a breakdown of the \$134.5-billion lifecycle cost of the V-22 Program?

Mr. BELK. Congressman, I cannot, but I would be more than happy to take that back and get you the answer.

Mr. BIGGS. I would appreciate it.

Mr. BIGGS. I actually have additional questions. My time has long expired, but I would, again, Mr. Belk, urge you all to give us

access to the safety investigations. I think it is important for us to be able to make policy that way, and with that, Mr. Chairman, I will yield.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Thank you, Mr. Lynch?

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the witnesses for being here to help the committee with its work. I especially want to thank the Gold Star families who are in the audience here today. It is really, really important that you are here. I hope you realize that it is not only a demonstration of loyalty and love for your loved ones, but it is also important to others who serve and who may be put in an equally risky situation as your loved ones. So, I thank you doubly for you being here today.

Just to make sure we all understand, in March 2022, a Marine Corps V-22 Osprey assigned to Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 261 crashed during a training flight in Norway, killing four Marines. In June 2022, five U.S. Marines from Camp Pendleton were killed during a routine flight operation in California. In August 2023, three marines from Marine Rotational Force Darwin, a force that I traveled to Darwin, Australia, and met with them, they were killed in an Osprey crash in Australia. And in November 2023, a U.S. Air Force Osprey carrying eight airmen assigned to Yokota Air Base in Kadena Air Base crashed off the southern coast of Japan during a routine training mission, killing all eight service members on board.

Look, I understand the value of this aircraft. I understand especially the many CODELs I have done to Africa, the ability to what the few landing areas where we have there, few airfields that we have here, the ability for a rotor landing, I understand that, and the need to move personnel quickly, but this repeated drumbeat of fatalities is totally unacceptable.

And look, the lives of our young men and women that are perishing on this aircraft have long passed the level of which a comprehensive review should have been instituted. I am embarrassed. I am embarrassed as a member of this committee that this is the first comprehensive review we have done, given the fact that since the year 2000, we have had 54 U.S. service members killed and many, many more injured because of the structural deficiencies in this aircraft.

Mr. Kurtz, you mentioned earlier that we have a rework being done on the clutch—I think it is the sprag clutch on this aircraft—and that it might be ready for deployment by mid-2025. Is that correct?

Mr. KURTZ. Yes, sir. I said mid-2025, somewhere between the mid period of 2025 and the third quarter of that fiscal year. Yes, sir.

Mr. LYNCH. Admiral Chebi, let us think about this entire program. What do you think the consequences are going to be if we have a V-22 go down and we lose more brave Marines or our airmen between now and the time when Mr. Kurtz indicates that we might have this clutch situation figured out and deployed? Your whole program is done. It is done. If another Osprey goes down, we are done. This program is done. So, why do we not ground this now, do not allow any other brave marine or airmen to go down in one of these aircraft? Ground them now. We will bite the bullet

for the next year or so until we get this clutch figured out, but we have already had too much carnage. We have already lost too many good men and women that they have joined for all the right reasons to serve their country and then we have failed them by not providing them with safe aircraft. I do not believe this aircraft is safe.

Nothing you have told me today leads me to believe that. I think it is still very iffy situation. I think you have conceded that fact, so it is crazy to put more of our young men and women at risk. And I am asking you to ground this aircraft until we get the clutch figured out, and we will find alternative measures to service the needs that we have that this aircraft was serving.

So, I know my time has expired. I will yield back. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. Mr. Sessions?

Mr. SESSIONS. Chairman, thank you very much. Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for having not only this hearing, but our colleagues that are engaging, I think, properly and professionally in this manner.

Some conversation today has found itself where we are talking about this aircraft, presumptuously one could draw a conclusion it is dangerous. I think it is a 10-year average because we went back to 1992 a few minutes ago. If we just go back 10 years now, the 10-year average for mishaps is fewer than F-18s, F-35s, and Stal- lion CH-53E. Is that correct, Admiral?

Mr. CHEBI. Sir, I do not have that data in front of me.

Mr. SESSIONS. OK. That is fair. That is fair. Do you believe that it is higher than other averages in aircraft that are flown by the United States Military?

Mr. CHEBI. So, the data that I have in front of me, the overall mishap rate for the V-22 across the three services in Japan is at 4.1 mishaps per 100,000 flight hours, which is above the average rate of our other platforms across the military services on average.

Mr. SESSIONS. Is that a 10-year or what figure is that? I am sorry, I am referring to a 10-year. Mine shows 3.28 per 100,000 hours, but—

Mr. CHEBI. Yes, sir.

Mr. SESSIONS [continuing]. I am going to take your average, not mine.

Mr. CHEBI. For the Marine Corps, for the 10-year, the mishap rate is 3.29.

Mr. SESSIONS. OK.

Mr. CHEBI. Again, from my position and my authorities, my objective is to look across all of our platforms and to proactively manage those to reduce the risk of all of our platforms. So, I understand the characterization or the comparison to other platforms. I want all of them to go lower.

Mr. SESSIONS. Yes, sir, and my point is there might be other aircraft we need to look at also.

Mr. CHEBI. Yes, sir. So, we are—

Mr. SESSIONS. That would be my point, and so we tend to, whether it is right, wrong, or indifferent, to talk about averages. The families that are sitting here are not averages. They are reality, and we all do agree with your assessment of what your job

is and what you are attempting to do. I also look at how important the Osprey is. I have been on one downrange in Kuwait. I know that it probably is way preferred than other types of aircraft that do not have the same ability that it does, including in Afghanistan, some other places with quicker retrieval of people who might be injured, that it saves lives also.

My point is this, that as we look at this, I think a reality check needs to be done, and I am not sure. Have we decided it is a clutch problem? Have we decided it is a training problem? Something has happened in the last year as Congressman Perry has talked about. Something is happening. We did not know about the F-35. You remember they were grounded because there was some reassessment made. I do not know whether it was a light or whether it was a fixture or whether it was training, but someone was missing that technical advantage.

The question that I would ask you now, in your opinion, just your opinion, is it the machine or is it training? And I am not asking you to out anybody. I am just saying you have the facts of the case ahead of you, and I believe that it has been, in the past, the training, and that is why I think the numbers point to what they do. It is not the Navy's fault. It is not the people's fault. It is we are dealing with newer people who are operating in our aircraft with the lack of time in the aircraft, lack of hours, or is it that, and that fits under the training. No, maybe it fits under operational need.

We need to go, and we have to go, and we got to go with the people that we have got, just like what Mr. Perry brought up about the aircraft that are available for service today. I cannot imagine some crew chief or some commander saying, well, we know that is not ready to go, but go anyway. But maybe that happens. So, I hope that all of these are some conclusion that you are able to draw and at least come back to our young Chairman and offer an explanation because, I think it is terribly important that we have this hearing today. I think it is terribly important that the families that are involved in this and who have taken their time for their loved one, but also for others that are in the family, and I do not mean their family. I mean the Navy family, the military families that are here. And I would like to see that you would zero in on and at least give this Subcommittee an opportunity to know we have zeroed in, we think that here are the contributing factors, if not the answer.

So, I want to thank all three of you for your service today. I would like to followup with you and to find out in writing, yes, Congressman Sessions, Chairman, here is really the answer, we are zeroing in on the following factors that we think are important because you have already heard, if there is one more crash, someone believes we will quit using this. I think it is a workhorse that we need. I would like for us not to give up on the Osprey, but we do need to and you have that responsibility to give us insight into what you are zeroing in on as the conditions by which each are going down.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I yield back my time.
Mr. GROTHMAN. Thank you. Ms. Porter?

Ms. PORTER. The DOD plans to buy 2,456 F-35s, and the F-35 is one of the most egregious boondoggles in the history of the Pentagon, but if we are going to buy more of those planes, we should at least make sure that they work. Mr. Belk, if an F-35 engine were to break down at sea on an aircraft carrier, what aircraft would the Navy use to transport that F-35 engine ashore to be fixed?

Mr. BELK. So, I genuinely mean thank you for the question because I do believe in this Committee's oversight responsibilities, and I appreciate the opportunity to thank you for that.

Ms. PORTER. Mr. Belk, come on. What plane would the Navy use to transport the broken F-35 engine?

Mr. BELK. Congresswoman, I do not know the answer. I am happy to take it back and get—

Ms. PORTER. Thank you. Vice Admiral Chebi, do you know the answer?

Mr. CHEBI. Ma'am, the question of what aircraft the V-22 was designed is one of the requirements for the CMV-22 to—

Ms. PORTER. OK. So, the CMV-22 would be used. It is essentially one of the Navy's two kind of tow trucks. Can the C-2, the other kind of tow truck that the Navy flies, can it transport an F-35 engine?

Mr. CHEBI. To my knowledge, a C-2 cannot transport F-35 engine. In that case, we would put additional spares on the aircraft carrier, if we have to have it supported with a C-2. So, that is the—

Ms. PORTER. OK. You would put additional spares. OK. I am going to followup on that. So, the C-2 cannot pick up the F-35 engine because the engine is too large, so we would use the CMV-22. So, the military did not have the common sense to make F-35 engines transportable by all of the tow trucks it owns, so we are going to use only one of them, the CMV-22. So, Admiral Chebi, why did you not see this coming? Why did you buy F-35s that your infrastructure cannot handle?

Mr. CHEBI. Ma'am, I am here as the NAVAIR commander from an airworthiness perspective to talk about the safety of the V-22. I am going to have to direct that question back to the appropriate personnel to address the question.

Ms. PORTER. Mr. Belk?

Mr. BELK. Congresswoman, I will have to take that back to the Department.

Ms. PORTER. So, you do not know why you bought F-35s for billions of dollars, and you do not have any airplanes as we are about to see, that can actually pick up the broken engine and fix it. So, on the CMV-22, which is the one plane that we can use to go get this broken engine, let us say that the F-35 engine broke down in the South China Sea while F-35s are engaged in securing our national interests from an increasingly assertive China. Do you know how far it would be to a fully capable maintenance depot, Mr. Belk?

Mr. BELK. Congresswoman, I do not.

Ms. PORTER. Vice Admiral Chebi?

Mr. CHEBI. Ma'am, can you clarify your question, please?

Ms. PORTER. An F-35 engine is broken down on an aircraft carrier in the South China Sea. How far is it to get that F-35 engine to a place where we can fix it?

Mr. CHEBI. Ma'am, I am going to have to direct you to the F-35 Joint Program Office to kind of answer that question.

Ms. PORTER. OK. It is 7,200 miles to a small facility in Australia and 14,500 miles to a full-scale U.S. facility. And I am sure the CMV-22 would not fly all that distance, but it needs to be able to pick up the engine and get it to the next airport where it can then be flown for repair. Admiral Chebi, how often is the CMV-22 mission capable?

Mr. CHEBI. The overall mission capable rate, I do not have that in front of me. I am not sure. Gary, if you have—

Ms. PORTER. Mr. Kurtz?

Mr. KURTZ. I do not have that information in front of me.

Ms. PORTER. Mr. Belk?

Mr. BELK. Ma'am, I do not have that information.

Ms. PORTER. Guys, you are here for a hearing on this very aircraft. Now, you have been deferring on the F-35, but the CMV-22 is what we are talking about here today. It is the Navy's version of the Osprey. So, the data I have seen suggests that it can only fly 44 percent of the time. It costs \$85 million per aircraft, and it can fly 44 percent of the time. That is absolutely absurd. So, if the military has made fixing an F-35 engine that hard for itself surely you have, as you mentioned, Admiral Chebi, spare engines that you can swap in when something goes wrong. Mr. Belk, has the DOD purchased spare F-35 engines?

Mr. BELK. Ma'am, I do not know the answer.

Ms. PORTER. No, they have not, so it is going to be tough to put those on the aircraft carrier, Admiral Chebi, when you do not have any. So, the only plan we have when an F-35 engine breaks down is to fly it thousands of miles, but to do that, the plane only works part of the time. Mr. Belk, how long is the CMV-22 allowed to fly from the nearest airport?

Mr. BELK. Ma'am, I defer that to Admiral Chebi.

Ms. PORTER. Admiral Chebi?

Mr. CHEBI. Ma'am, the return to flight criteria was based on the data—

Ms. PORTER. All right, Admiral Chebi, 30 minutes. So often the CMV-22 does not work more than half the time. If it works, it is only allowed to fly 30 minutes from an airport, but these failures both leave the F-35 with broken engines stranded on aircraft carriers, and get this. We are still buying more of these incredibly expensive F-35 jets, and we are doing that knowing that we cannot fix those engines because the CMV-22 is a disaster. And by the way, you all want to buy more of those, too.

Admiral Chebi, do you stand by this state of affairs? Would you like to blame Mr. Belk or Mr. Kurtz?

Mr. CHEBI. Ma'am, the F-35 Charlie readiness levels aboard aircraft carriers is above 90 percent.

Ms. PORTER. OK. Ten percent of the time it is not ready, and the engine might be part of it. I am asking you, should we spend billions of dollars on F-35s that you cannot repair?

Mr. CHEBI. Ma'am, my objective as the NAVAIR commander is to make sure I deliver the warfighting capability the fleet needs to win at a cost we can afford. The service——

Ms. PORTER. OK. Admiral Chebi, my objective as a U.S. Congress person is to make sure that our tax dollars are being spent to actually keep us safe, not line the pockets of defense contractors for boondoggles. I yield back.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Thank you. Mr. Perry?

Mr. PERRY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Gentlemen, it is good to see you here. Thank you very much.

Got some questions for you. I guess I will start with you, Admiral Chebi, and I think I understand the limitations of what you can answer. However, I am concerned that you do not know the OR rate. I would think that anybody in your position would know the OR rate of every single aircraft within your command purview, but the V-22, as I understand, was added to the Marine Helicopter Squadron, HMX-1, to support the Presidential operations, heliborne operations, but the aircraft does not carry the President. Is there some reason that we do not know about or is there something obvious that we should know about that we will carry the President's support staff, but not the President?

Mr. CHEBI. Sir, from my position as airworthiness, the aircraft has been return-to-flight with controls in place. The decision of who flies on what airplanes is beyond my control.

Mr. PERRY. So, I understand maybe you did not make the decision, but do you know why it is? Like, we will fly the Presidential support staff, reporters, staff members, equipment in a V-22, but we will not fly the President in one, which would limit because V-22 is pretty fast compared to what the President is in. Who makes that decision, and I am just asking, do you know why it is that? Maybe Mr. Belk knows. Does anybody know on the panel?

Mr. CHEBI. Sir, I do not know.

Mr. PERRY. Anybody else? OK.

Mr. BELK. Congressman, I do not know.

Mr. PERRY. All right. I would love that answer if you can get back to us with that.

Mr. PERRY. Now, the gentlady from California asked a lot of questions about the F-35s engines and the V-22. It seems to me, I look at the sling load capability, the 22, 15,000, internal 20,000, and the F-35, I am going to be generous, I think, because it says 3,750 is the weight of the engine, so let us say 4,000 pounds. Does it cube out before it grows? OK. So, the Admiral said it. What about sling? Do we not sling load F-35 engines? Is there some policy not to sling load them?

Mr. CHEBI. Sir, I am not aware. It does cube out, so that is——

Mr. PERRY. OK. So, I have got another question for you. You know, all of us that flew various aircraft, we all know the CH-53 is the only heavy lift helicopter in the inventory. Even those who flew, like me, the 47, the 53 is it. I get it. Admiral, I will give you that, but the sling capacity is 30,000. The 36,000-pound payload, does it cube out in a 53 also?

Mr. CHEBI. Sir, I am going to hand that over to the PEO. I am unaware.

Mr. KURTZ. Sir, I am unaware of the specific cube out, but to your point, it does have that lift capacity as you have described.

Mr. PERRY. So, why are we not using 53s? You guys own them, right? The Army does not have them while the Air Force has some payloads, right? So, what is the problem? Is it interservice rivalry that we cannot use a 53 in the Navy to move a jet engine? What is happening? I am just asking. I do not know.

Mr. CHEBI. Sir, I will just answer. You are asking the equivalent of the FAA authority—

Mr. PERRY. Yes.

Mr. CHEBI [continuing]. What the operational commanders are doing with their assets. That is beyond the scope of our responsibility.

Mr. PERRY. OK. Fair enough. It is beyond your scope. And I understand, sir, you take orders. Yours is not to question why. I get it. But for the sake of those who have died, and their families are sitting here behind you, that signed up, wanted to go support and defend their country and everything we believe in, and probably looked at the Osprey and said this thing is awesome, man, I cannot wait to get in it, but there was a lot of us that looked at and said, Holy mother of God, how is this thing going to stay together in flight?

And when those nacelles start rotating after the whole wing has been put back to center and all the parts that have to come back together, and what Mr. Lynch was talking about, sprag clutches that have to let go when one engine quits, so that you can get the thing on the ground and stay alive. There are a lot of concerns. And for the sake of we got to retire the 46, we cannot bring the 22 online before it is ready to go because, well, we got to get rid of the 46 and we got a lot of money invested in this thing and the train is rolling. People's lives are at stake and have been lost.

I wonder why the Navy just will not buy 47s. Forty-seven was a big 46, right? Forty-six is, we call it, a baby Chinook. I know you would probably reverse to that, and I understand why, but that is what we called it, but the 47 is highly capable. It is not as fast as an Osprey, but nothing is as fast as an Osprey in the vertical arena because of the mechanics of it. But, when you got to get engines on the deck and keep people alive, use the damn thing that works, and the V-22 has got obvious problems, evidenced by the people sitting behind you, which leads me to my next and final question.

The Army is preparing to launch the V-280 Valor Program, and you know, I am talking about the Army program here, to replace the Black Hawk fleet. Now, we have learned a lot with the V-22, but apparently we have not learned enough. Whether it is like my good friend from Texas says, training or whether it is the mechanics; service members are dying, which is unacceptable. It is bad enough they die in combat, but it is unacceptable that they die either due to the lack of training, complexity of the aircraft, or the aircraft itself. What lessons can any one of you tell us that we have learned on the 22 that we are not going to replicate on the 280?

Mr. KURTZ. Sir, certainly, as you referenced, it is an Army program. It is not a program that I have insight into with regards to my portfolio, so I cannot speak to where we are with regards to the V-280 and what the Army is currently doing at this time.

Mr. PERRY. What is the 22 going to be replaced with?

Mr. KURTZ. Sir, I am not aware of at this point—

Mr. PERRY. Admiral?

Mr. KURTZ [continuing]. At this time the service and plans for replacement of the V-22.

Mr. CHEBI. Yes, sir. The CMV-22 is halfway through the production run, so it is a brand new aircraft. I am not sure any plans right now are in place to replace the CMV-22.

Mr. PERRY. Well, I will say this, Mr. Chairman, and then I will yield back, and it is expensive halfway through the lifecycle, but if we cannot get it right, at some point, we have to acknowledge we just cannot get it right. This thing should not fly because it is too dangerous. We got the concept, we would love to do it, it is awesome to look at. When it is working right, it is awesome, but it is not working right enough to accept.

And there are other acceptable alternatives, and oh my god, even though we are in the Navy, we will put a different coat of paint on this damn thing and call it some kind of Navy term and fly this 47 instead, or maybe even better, 53 highly capable in the Navy's program. Let us use that and just say, look, we are not going to get there quite as fast because we do not have an Osprey, but we are going to get there alive, which is really damn important to the mission. And it is really important to the people that want to serve in the United States uniform services do their service, protect their country, but then come home safely to their families.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Thank you. It looks like we have gone through everyone here, so I will now yield to Ranking Member Garcia for your closing remarks.

Mr. GARCIA. Thank you, again. Thank you to our witnesses for being here and for your service.

I think just a couple of things. First, I mean, I think it is clear that our witnesses, and again, I think you believe that there is use and an important mission for the V-22, and obviously, you are working trying to rectify the concerns and certainly assess opportunities to make the V-22, the safest possible vehicle, is clear from your testimony. And so, I do appreciate and I thank you for that.

It is also obviously a decision that had been made in keeping the Osprey in use even during this period of time where we are still looking at trying to make it even safer. It is a decision that you stand behind and that you have been vocal about here today, so I do want to thank you for that.

But I just want to also just reiterate some of the concern that has been shared by my colleagues. I think clearly, those of us here on this Subcommittee, I think many of us spoke to our concerns about the V-22, about its safety, certainly about its use during this time where we are trying to make it even safer and certainly, about not being having complete access to all the safety information that members of the Subcommittee would like to have. And so, I just want to highlight those real concerns.

This is an important function of this body to do this oversight and to work with all of you to have the absolute safest possible of vehicles and aircraft that we can have. And so, I want to urge the DOD and all of our partners to really work with us on ensuring

that we have all the information that we need to make the decision and the oversight that we are required to do. I also just want to add as well that I think the difference of the rate of discrepancy that exist between the Air Force and the Marines, I think is a real problem, and I think that is something that we deserve answers on, and I think that it would be important to have some followup as to why that difference exists in the rate of accidents. And I think that is something we discussed earlier and I would like to get more answers on that.

Finally, to the families, I really appreciate you all being here. I know how probably hard this is also for all of you to sit through. But I also know that not only do you want to honor your loved ones, but you also want a strong military that keeps every single person that serves safe, and I really appreciate that, so thank you all for being here. Mr. Chairman?

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. I would like to thank the families for being here again today. You being here is very important because I do not even want to drop this thing today. There were a surprising number of questions that I felt you guys did not have answers to. Mr. Garcia brings up the difference between accidents rates in the Marines, in the Air Force, and I do not see how we can really adequately address this unless we have a look at those safety investigations. So, we are going to do a followup in some fashion because I think we have to see that. You are not the first military group that has been before us. We have had the military before us in the past, and I always feel it should be a little more transparent. The Department of Defense has not done an audit, which is not your fault, in something like 30 years, which is kind of an insult to Congress. But in any event, I think we have established that we could get some more information.

I mean, whenever I hear about one of these things going down, as have been intermittently over the last 30 years now, I guess, it always bothers me because it is one thing to lose somebody in combat. But to lose somebody in a non-combat situation should be almost inexcusable, and it is something that you would never see in the private sector. I realized what your guys are doing is a lot more technical, a lot more difficult than that, but nevertheless, it always bothers me, and I think there is something wrong with it. And it would bother me a lot more if I was one of the folks sitting there behind you.

So, I will assure you folks that we are not going to let this matter drop. For whatever reason, they are not giving us the results of the safety investigations, and staff has contacted them before and they always turn them down on things that I think we should get. So, the ranking member and I are not going to let that drop.

And with that, I will have to say for this, without objection, all members have 5 legislative days within which to submit materials and additional written questions for the witnesses, which will be forwarded to the witnesses.

Mr. GROTHMAN. If there is no further business, without objection, the Subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:10 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

