

**Readiness and Seapower and Projection Forces Subcommittees
Member Hearing on “Posture and Readiness of the Mobility
Enterprise”**

Mar 31, 2022

Good Afternoon. I call to order today’s joint hearing to examine the Posture and Readiness of the Mobility Enterprise.

With us today are General **Jacqueline Van Ovost** and **Ms. Lucinda Lessley** for being with us today. I’ve had an opportunity to speak with both our witnesses recently and thank them for their engagement ahead of today’s hearing. General, as this is your first appearance before these committees, I’d like to welcome you and congratulate you as you finish your sixth month as the commander of USTRANSCOM.

I want to note that this is our first posture hearing following release of the 2023 budget. Its fitting that we are starting with a focus on the important role that our air and sea mobility capabilities play in our nation’s defense. We’re seeing right now the impact of the work that the mobility enterprise does – as General Van Ovost pointed out to me recently, our mobility forces have conducted over 200 missions in support of the effort to deliver weapons and supplies to the brave people fighting in Ukraine.

Today, the ships and aircraft that comprise our sealift and airlift capabilities are challenged by readiness shortfalls, obsolescence, and an evolving threat landscape. Congress has acted on a bipartisan basis to address some of these issues, and I fully expect that our panels will continue this work as we develop this year’s defense authorization.

I’ll note a few priorities as we begin our discussion.

First, with full authorization and funding now in place, the Tanker Security Program is now the law of the land. This effort has taken on new importance with the recent decision to close the Red Hill fuel facility, and we are eager to get this program underway. I look forward to an update on the stand-up of this program.

Second, I remain very concerned about the path forward on recapitalization our sealift fleet. In just a decade, nearly three-quarters of our fleet will reach the end of their service life. The 2023 budget requests funding to produce an additional two used ships, in addition to the seven already authorized and funded but not yet in place. I remain firmly committed to the three-pronged strategy of cost-effective life extensions for current ships, procure of a discrete number of used ships and the start of a domestic new-build effort.

Right now, we are seeing the first of five National Security Multi-Mission Vessels, or NSMVs, under construction today in the Philly Shipyard- revitalizing that shipyard and employing hundreds of new shipbuilders. Congress, led by this panel, initiated this program with flexible contracting authorities to enable the cost-efficient construction of these new boats – and we have done the same for a future new-build sealift program. We will continue to look at an ‘all of the above plan’ for sealift, rather than the either-or choice between used or new ships.

Third, we remain laser-focused on the requirements of our aerial refueling and tactical airlift fleets. In particular, the Congressionally-directed Mobility Capability Requirements Study 2020 (MCRS-20) outlined clear requirements for our tactical airlift fleet, comprised of our C-130s, underscored the need to extend and recapitalize this strategically critical fleet. We will closely examine the budget to ensure that these requirements are met.

Lastly, I want to note my appreciation to Actin administrator Lessley for her work on re-starting the Sea Year program at the US Merchant Marine Academy. The academy and the Sea Year program play a critical role in the support and training of our mariners. This is exactly why I and others feel so strongly about ensuring that it has the tools and policies in place to respond to serious concerns about student safety while at sea. We have more work to do, and I look forward to hearing more today about where we stand and how Congress, MARAD and the USMMA can work collaboratively to ensure the continued success of the academy and its students.

Now, before I finish, I want to take the opportunity to say a special thank you to the man sitting beside me, Phil MacNaughton. Phil has been a valued member of this subcommittee staff since 2014, and has assisted me as the Majority Staff Lead since 2019. Over the years, Phil has had a profound impact on the work we do here for the men and women who serve and defend our nation, and I'm deeply grateful for all he's done to help me and every member of our subcommittee. Today is his last hearing with us before he moves up to be Policy Staff Lead for the Full Committee, and we all look forward to his leadership in that important new role. I would also like to officially welcome our new staff lead, Jay Vallario, who will assume duties tomorrow.

Thank you again to the witnesses for being here, and I look forward to our discussion. I now yield to our ranking member, Rob Wittman, for any remarks he may have.