

070328 SAC-D Oral Statement As Delivered

Mr. Chairman, Senator Stevens, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to report to you on the status of our Marine Corps. In our recent meetings, as well as previous testimony before this Congress, I have pledged to provide you with frank and honest assessments; I come here today with that again as my watchword.

For the past five years, your Marine Corps has been immersed in the first battles of a Long War – a generational struggle against Islamic extremists. Our freedom is threatened...not by Nazis or communists as it was in the past, but by terrorists who are determined to destroy us and our way of life. Further, the full array of our security threats is daunting, but rest assured, this generation's young Americans are answering the call. Over two-thirds of our Corps enlisted or re-enlisted since 9-11, knowing full well what their Nation expects of Marines in time of war.

Our Marines are being pushed hard by the high operational tempo and frequency of combat deployments – they have all been operating at full bore for the past five years. Despite this, in fact, maybe because of it, I can report firsthand that their morale has never been higher. I attribute this to the fact that they believe they're making a difference. They see the evidence of your support everywhere – tangible support in the fielding of new materiel, the latest equipment to protect them while in harm's way, and your support of the proposal to grow our end strength.

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Increasing to 202,000 Marines will reduce the strain both on the individual Marine and on our institution as a whole. It will require additional infrastructure, but more importantly will gradually improve the deployment-to-dwell ratio in some of our most critical units. Currently, many of these units are deployed for seven months, then home for only seven months – some even less time than that – before they return to combat.

This end strength increase addresses much more than the current battles in Iraq and Afghanistan; it ensures your Corps will be able to deal with the uncertainties of the Long War.

Our Corps is, by law, *“to be the most ready when the nation is least ready... the nation’s shock troops.”* Additional Marines allow the dwell time needed to train and sharpen the skills that will be required of us in the next contingency – reducing our operational and strategic risks.

As over 70 percent of our proposed end strength increase is comprised of first-term Marines, we are making the necessary increases in recruiting and retention. This is a challenge, but our standards will remain high. We need your continued support for recruiting programs, such as advertising, which are essential for us to continue to bring aboard the best in America.

Our Nation has an enduring commitment to her Marines, long after they have returned from the battle, particularly if they are physically or mentally scarred. Our moral imperative is to ensure that this support is seamless, even as a Marine leaves our uniformed ranks. To this end, we

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have formed a Wounded Warrior Regiment, with battalions on each coast – that we will hold true to the maxim that we “never leave a Marine behind.”

Ladies and gentlemen, your Marines are honored to be serving this Nation during such an important time in our history. They are truly a special breed of patriots, and it is on their behalf that I come before you today to answer your questions, and to help all understand how we can best support these tremendous young Americans. I look forward to your questions.