

STATEMENT
OF
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DEPUTY COMMANDANT FOR MANPOWER AND RESERVE AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
BEFORE THE
DEFENSE SUBCOMMITTEE
OF THE
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
CONCERNING
PERSONNEL
ON
MARCH 19, 2009

Chairman Murtha, Congressman Young, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, it is my privilege to appear before you today to provide an update on Marine Corps personnel.

I. Introduction

We remain a Corps of Marines at war with over 22,000 Marines deployed in support of Operations IRAQI FREEDOM and ENDURING FREEDOM. The young men and women who fill our ranks today recognize the global, protracted, and lethal nature of the challenges facing our Nation, and their dedicated service and sacrifice rival that of any generation preceding them. The individual Marine is our Corps' most sacred resource.

Over the past several years, sustained deployments in Iraq, Afghanistan, and across the globe have kept many Marines in the operating forces deployed as much as they have been home. They have shouldered our Nation's burden and done so with amazing resiliency. Marines understand what is required of the Nation's elite warrior class — to stand up and be counted when the Nation needs them the most. For this, we owe them our unending gratitude.

Marines and their families know that their sacrifices are making a difference, that they are part of something much larger than themselves, and that their Nation stands behind them. Thanks to your continued support, your Marines will stay resolved to fight and defeat any foe today or in the future.

II. End Strength

Active Component End Strength. The Marine Corps grew by over 12,000 Marines in Fiscal Year 2008 and currently stands at over 201,000. We are on pace to reach an active duty end strength of 202,000 by the end of Fiscal Year 2009 – two years ahead of schedule. This historic growth can be attributed to three factors: quality recruiting, historic retention levels, and

reduced attrition. Based on building a robust Delayed Entry Pool Program, we expect these trends to continue into Fiscal Year 2010 allowing us to sustain a 202,000 end strength. While the state of the Nation's economy is a concern for all of us, we expect that it will positively impact both recruiting and retention this year.

We are currently ahead of Fiscal Year 2008 in first term enlistments and are on track with our career reenlistments; our recruiting standards remain high. Attrition levels are projected to remain at or below Fiscal Year 2008 rates. Sustaining the 202,000 end strength will enable your Corps to train to the full spectrum of military operations and improve the ability of the Marine Corps to address future challenges. This growth will also enable us to increase the dwell time of our Marines so that they are able to operate at a "sustained rate of fire." Our goal is to achieve a 1:2 deployment-to-dwell ratio for all of our active forces - for every seven months a Marine is deployed, he or she will be back at home station for at least fourteen months.

Funding. The Marine Corps greatly appreciates the increase in authorized end strength to 194,000 passed in the Fiscal Year 2009 National Defense Authorization Act. In Fiscal Year 2009, we are funding the end strength in excess of 194,000 through supplemental appropriations. The vast majority of our personnel budget is spent on entitlements including compensation, which is a double-edged sword.

Compensation is a principal factor for Marines when deciding whether to reenlist. Private sector competition will always seek to capitalize on the military training and education provided to our Marines. Marines are a highly desirable labor resource for private sector organizations. Competitive and flexible compensation authorities aid the Marine Corps in targeting specific areas and provide the capability to access, retain, and separate as needed. Your support for our Enlistment Bonus and Selective Reenlistment Bonus programs has made a

difference and will continue to be a key to sustaining our end strength and ensuring the right mix, right grades, and overall effectiveness of our Total Force. We appreciate the continued support of Congress in the creation of flexible compensation authorities that allow the Marine Corps to shape your Corps for the 21st Century.

Reserve Component End Strength. Our Reserves continue to make essential contributions to our Total Force efforts in The Long War, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan. As we accelerated our build to 202,000 Active Component Marines during the past fiscal year, we understood that we would take some risk with regard to obtaining our Reserve Component end strength of 39,600. As a result we came in under our authorized limit by 2,077. During the 202,000 build-up, we adjusted our accession plans and encouraged our experienced and combat-tested Reserve Marines to transition back to active duty to support these efforts. They responded in force. From 2007 to present, approximately 1,946 returned to active duty or are awaiting return.

As a Total Force Marine Corps, we rely heavily upon the essential augmentation and reinforcement provided by our Reserve Marines. We believe our authorized end strength of 39,600 is appropriate and provides us with the Marines we require to support the force and to achieve our goal of a 1:5 deployment-to-dwell ratio for our Reserves. With the achievement of a 202,000 Active Component force, we will refocus our recruiting and retention efforts toward our authorized Reserve Component end strength. The bonus and incentives provided by Congress, specifically the authorization to reimburse travel expenses to select members attending drill, will be key tools in helping achieve this goal.

III. Recruiting

Our recruiters continue to make their recruiting goals in all areas in support of our Total Force recruiting mission. Our focus in Fiscal Year 2009 will be to continue to recruit quality men and women with the right character, commitment, and drive into our Corps. To meet the challenges in today's recruiting environment, it is imperative that we maintain our high standards both for our recruiters and those who volunteer to serve in our Corps. The Corps must continue to be comprised of the best and brightest of America's youth. We must also remain mindful that the Marine Corps needs to reflect the face of the nation and be representative of those we serve. Our image of a smart, tough, elite warrior continues to resonate with young people seeking to become Marines.

The Marine Corps is unique in that all recruiting efforts (officer, enlisted, regular, reserve, and prior-service) fall under the direction of the Marine Corps Recruiting Command. Operationally, this provides us with tremendous flexibility and unity of command in order to annually meet our objectives. In Fiscal Year 2008, the Marine Corps achieved 100 percent of the enlisted (regular and reserve) ship mission (accessions). In terms of quality, Marine Corps Recruiting Command accessed over 95 percent Tier 1 high school diploma graduates and over 66 percent in the upper Mental Groups of I-IIIA's. In short, we accomplished our recruiting mission, achieved the Commandant's quality standards, and exceeded Department of Defense quality standards.

In Fiscal Year 2009, the Total Force accessions mission is 39,296 and, as of 28 February 2009, we have shipped (accessed) 14,785 applicants, representing over 104 percent of our Total Force mission fiscal year to date. Although recruiting is highly dynamic and fluid, we expect to meet our annual recruiting mission this fiscal year, to include all quality goals. Additionally, we

continue to exceed our contracting goals for this fiscal year which ensures we have a population of qualified individuals ready to ship to recruit training as we enter Fiscal Year 2010. Achieving this success, as always, is dependent on your support for our enlistment incentives. We thank you for this support both now and in the future.

Our Officer Selection Teams were also successful in Fiscal Year 2008, accessing 1,900 Second Lieutenants for 100 percent of their assigned mission. In Fiscal Year 2009, we are continuing efforts to attract Officer Candidates and commission Second Lieutenants commensurate with our end strength requirements. To assist our Officer Selection Officers in meeting their Officer Accession missions and attract prospective candidates we are continuing to leverage two programs that were introduced in 2007: The College Loan Repayment Program, which provides up to \$30,000 of undergraduate student loans for graduating college seniors upon commission as a Second Lieutenant, and the Officer Accessions Incentive, which provides \$4,000 to college graduates (Officer Candidate Course and Enlisted Commissioning Program) upon commissioning as a Second Lieutenant.

For the Reserve Component, the Marine Corps achieved its Fiscal Year 2008 reserve enlisted recruiting goals with the accession of 4,235 non-prior service Marines and 4,501 Prior Service Marines. As of 28 February 2009, we have accessed 2,070 non-prior service and 1,502 enlisted prior service Marines, which reflects 48 percent of our annual enlisted mission. Again, we expect to meet our reserve recruiting goals this year. Officer recruiting for our Selected Marine Corps Reserve units is traditionally our greatest challenge. To date, the Officer Candidate Course – Reserve has proven to be the most successful of our reserve officer recruiting programs, specifically focusing on ground-related billets tied to the Force Generation Model. Under this program, individuals attend Officer Candidates School, The Basic School, a

Military Occupational Specialty school, and return to a reserve unit to serve. We commissioned 56 Second Lieutenants in the Reserve in fiscal Year 2008, and we anticipate commissioning between 50 and 75 more this fiscal year.

IV. Retention

Retention complements recruiting as one of the vital elements of building and sustaining the Marine Corps. For enlisted retention, we seek to retain the best and brightest Marines in both our First Term and Career Force to provide the proven technical skills, experience, and Non-Commissioned Officer and Staff Noncommissioned Officer leadership needed to meet our demanding mission. In Fiscal Year 2008, the Marine Corps reenlisted 16,696 Marines including an unprecedented 8,243 First Term Marines. This achievement represented the highest retention rate, almost 36 percent, among the eligible First Term population compared to 31 percent in Fiscal Year 2007 and 22 percent in Fiscal Year 2006. Similarly, the Marine Corps achieved a remarkable 77 percent retention rate among the eligible career force compared with 70 percent in Fiscal Year 2007 and 65 percent in Fiscal Year 2006. This achievement contributed to exceeding the annual milestone in our end strength increase plan while maintaining all quality standards.

For Fiscal Year 2009, retention achievement remains exceptionally strong. As of 28 February 2009, we have achieved 7,227 First Term Alignment Plan reenlistments, over 98 percent of the 7,334 goal. Equally impressive, we have achieved 7,127 Subsequent Term Alignment Plan reenlistments, over 95 percent of the 7,464 goal. Altogether, we have achieved 14,354 total reenlistments, or nearly 97 percent of the combined goals. Our continuing retention success remains largely attributable to two important, enduring themes. First, Marines are truly motivated to “stay Marine” because they are doing what they signed up to do — fighting for and

protecting our Nation. Second, they understand our service culture is one that rewards proven performance and takes care of its own.

In regard to the Reserves, officer retention is above historical norms. Enlisted retention, however, remains below historical norms in part due to the priority of building an Active Component end strength of 202,000. For Fiscal Year 2009, we foresee continued higher retention in the Active Component, which will impact the number of Marines transitioning into the Reserves. We are no longer making a concerted effort to draw personnel from the Reserves to increase our active forces. We are refocusing our efforts on increasing Reserve end strength and are reviewing the best ways to accomplish this. In this regard, we appreciate the reenlistment incentives provided in the Fiscal Year 2009 National Defense Authorization Act.

V. Marine Corps Reserve

With the achievement of the 202,000 active duty force, we will refocus our recruiting and retention efforts to achieve our authorized Reserve Component end strength. One of the key recruiting elements and a focus is our Reserve junior officers and consequently meeting our company grade officer shortfalls. As previously noted, the Officer Candidate Course – Reserve (OCC-R) has proven to be the most successful of our three reserve officer recruiting programs. Our continued success in this area is a notable enhancement to the continuum of service for us and furthers the operational nature of our Reserve forces.

The departments within Headquarters, Marine Corps continue to work with the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of the Navy to develop implementation plans on the recommendations from the report of the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves (CNGR). We were represented in all working groups reporting to the CNGR Steering Committee and have participated in all aspects of developing the DoD response to the

recommendations. We believe the spirit and intent of the Commission was very helpful in identifying avenues to strengthen and improve the Total Force.

VI. Civilian Marines

Civilian Marines continue to provide an invaluable service to the Corps as an integral component of our Total Force. With a population of over 30,000 appropriated and non-appropriated funded employees and foreign nationals, Civilian Marines work in true partnership with the active duty and play an important role in supporting the mission of the Marine Corps and The Long War. Our vision for the future not only defines what the Marine Corps will offer to, but what it expects from, its Civilian Marines. The Marine Corps is committed to improving their leadership skills and opportunities for training and education. Civilian employees are afforded the opportunity to advance their career development through centrally-managed programs administered through Headquarters, United States Marine Corps. For example, the Marine Corps Acculturation Program provides our civilians with the opportunity to understand their roles in supporting the mission of the Marine Corps — specifically, learning the Marine Corps' culture and history while also concentrating on the strategic mission of local commands. The Civilian Marine Mentoring Program is part of the Civilian Career and Leadership Development program, which helps transform our civilian workforce to face the challenges of the future. A web-based Civilian Workforce Development Application was designed to assist the Marine Corps with managing our civilian workforce development activities.

The Marine Corps is committed to implementing the National Security Personnel System along with other Department of Defense and Department of Navy agencies. Since January 2007, the Marine Corps has converted 6,400 employees to the National Security Personnel System across all Marine Corps organizations including overseas and field activities. Through this new

pay-for-performance system, employees are able to align job objectives to mission. Ongoing performance feedback, both formal and informal, is an important component of the system and is essential to increase employee engagement and foster a high performance culture.

VII. Information Technology

Ensuring accurate, timely pay is supported by our continued efforts to transform our manpower processes by leveraging the benefits of the Marine Corps Total Force System (MCTFS), the Department of Defense's only fully integrated personnel, pay, and manpower system. MCTFS seamlessly serves our active, reserve, and retired members; provides total visibility of the mobilization and demobilization of our reserve Marines; and ensures proper and timely payments are made throughout the process. MCTFS provides one system, one record — regardless of an individual's duty status. According to the most recent Defense Finance and Accounting Service's "Bare Facts" report, MCTFS continues to achieve a pay accuracy rate of over 99 percent for both our Active and Reserve Components. MCTFS has enabled the Marine Corps to move its pay and personnel administration to a predominately self-service, virtually paperless, secure, web-based environment. In Fiscal Year 2008, individual Marines and their leaders leveraged MCTFS' capabilities to process more than 3.65 million paperless transactions.

VIII. Taking Care of Our Marines and Our Families

While the ideals of service to Corps and Country have not changed, the conditions of service are constantly changing, as are the needs of our Marines and their families. Marines have reasonable expectations regarding housing, schools, and family support, and it is incumbent upon us to support them in these key areas. Marines make an enduring commitment to the Corps when they earn the title Marine. The Commandant has made it clear that the Corps, in turn, must, and will, continue to make an enduring commitment to every Marine and his or her family.

Transitioning Marine and Family Support Programs To A Wartime Footing. Over the past year, the Marine Corps initiated a multi-year strategy to transition family support programs to a wartime footing. To achieve this, we conducted a series of assessments for the purpose of documenting service levels and evaluating the current state and efficiency of Corps-wide Marine and family support programs and services. We heard the concerns of our Marines and their families and implemented key reforms at every level of command and aboard each installation. We also discovered that our commanders needed more specific guidance and resources from us to appropriately take care of their Marines and families or to refer them to available internal or external support services.

We have also solidified support to families through the establishment of a School Liaison capability and enhancements to our Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP). As we continue implementing this transition, every program must contribute to the success of the Marine Corps. We can measure the effectiveness of programs through outcomes such as increased recruiting and retention, and evidence such as measurements of satisfaction in our Quality of Life Survey.

Family Support Programs. The Marine Corps Family Team Building Program (MCFTB) provides a strong support arm to the Unit Family Readiness Program and provides high-quality training that supports the life cycle of the Marine and family through mission, career and life events. We have expanded and enhanced our pre, during, and post-deployment training to address the increased demands and potential impact of multiple, sustained deployments on Marines and their families. We have developed an inventory of Lifeskills training courses that specifically address challenges of military life, but also personal and family life. Acknowledging the role extended family members play in fostering personal and family readiness, we have

expanded our family readiness support to include parents of single Marines. Finally, our MCFTB staff provides Unit Command Teams training on the roles, responsibilities and supporting tools that are available to foster personal and family readiness.

Central to our transformation efforts, we have expanded the depth and breadth of our family readiness training programs and established full-time Family Readiness Officer billets in more than 400 units, who serve as the focal point for families of our deployed Marines. As of 28 February 2009, we have filled nearly 400 of these positions and expect to be fully staffed by September 2009. The Family Readiness Officers will use the Mass Communication Tool, which enables simultaneous broadcast of communication via email, text messaging, or phone, and other technology enhancements to expand communications between Marines and their families.

We have completed assessments at our remote and isolated commands and initiated substantial improvements to infrastructure and quality of life programming with upgraded child care availability and support, playground equipment, youth sports equipment, fitness center equipment, bike paths, and facility improvements. These enhancements will further promote the sense of community required to form strong bonds among our Marine families that contribute so greatly to readiness.

We learned that effective communications with family members is of paramount importance, and for our families with deployed Marines, a critical quality of life requirement. In addition to the Mass Communications Tool described above, we have addressed this issue in a number of ways. To enhance our morale and recreation capability on installations as well as to better connect Marines and their families, the Marine Corps is installing wireless networks and access points at over 230 facilities across the Marine Corps. Full implementation is anticipated by August 2009. We are also testing a Morale-Portable Satellite Communications Suite (M-

PSC) that provides an internet and web-cam capability to Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) in Afghanistan where traditional “Internet Cafes” are unavailable. This not only provides Marines with an opportunity to connect with their families, but also provides a recreation outlet at these austere and remote locations. Two systems were delivered to our forces in Afghanistan in December 2008, and initial capability tests under these austere, combat conditions in the FOBs have been very encouraging.

These initiatives and others not only demonstrate the commitment of the Marine Corps to our Marines and their families, but also underscore the significance of Marine and family support to mission readiness. We have advanced the implementation of these initiatives through the use of much appreciated supplemental funding in Fiscal Years 2008 and 2009. Beginning in Fiscal Year 2010, the Marine Corps intends to sustain funding for these critical program enhancements in our baseline budget, not through supplementals.

Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) and Respite Care Program. Last year, I reported on our mission to establish a continuum of care for our Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) families. Recommendations from a rigorous internal functionality assessment have been implemented and we are actively helping nearly 6,200 families gain access to medical, educational, and financial services that may be limited or restricted at certain duty stations. The program is now fully staffed at both the installation and headquarters levels. A new Case Management System is on-line and allows the exchange of necessary information and provides a robust reporting capability to the Program Managers.

A Respite Care Program funded by the Marine Corps provides up to 40 hours of care per month to all enrolled families, and can be used in conjunction with the TRICARE Extended Care Health Option (ECHO) benefit. We are obtaining the help of the Bureau of Medicine and

Surgery and TRICARE to resolve access and availability to health care concerns at several bases, and legal counsel is now on staff to advise our exceptional family members on state and Federal entitlements and processes. Since expansion of the program, our EFMP families have frequently expressed their appreciation for the support provided by our Case Managers, who have helped them navigate the paths and nodes to obtain services.

Gaining access to services can be most challenging to families who have members diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. We sincerely appreciate the increased reimbursement rate for Applied Behavioral Analysis therapy that Congress approved for Fiscal Year 2009. More families will now be able to exercise their option to use the TRICARE ECHO program. However, the highly specialized services these families require are not always available. Additionally, we are evaluating how the Marine Corps can partner with other organizations to increase the availability of these specialized services in geographic areas where resources are currently lacking.

School Liaison. The education of over 52,000 school-aged children of Marine Corps parents directly contributes to the overall state of family readiness within our Corps. We recognize that our children, who are often as mobile as their military parents, face additional challenges associated with frequent moves between schools and educational systems of differing quality and standards. To address these challenges, we established School Liaison billets and are now fully staffed at each of our installations to help parents and commanders interact with local schools and districts.

The School Liaisons advocate for our school-aged children, and form partnerships with schools and other agencies, in an effort to improve access and availability to quality education as well as to mitigate education transition issues. School Liaisons are actively involved in efforts to

assist school districts in applying for available competitive and noncompetitive grants focusing on issues arising with military school-aged children. Complimenting these efforts, the Marine Corps is working with the Department of Defense to develop an “Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children” with states to enable reciprocal acceptance of entrance, subject, testing, and graduation requirements. As of 1 February 2009, 11 states have passed the Interstate Compact, and most others are in some stage of the legislative process.

Child Development Program and Meeting Potential Need. To ensure Children, Youth and Teen Programs continue to transition to meet the needs of our families, a Functionality Assessment was conducted in June 2008 to identify program improvements, such as the development of staffing models to improve service delivery, as well as recommendations to explore and redefine services to meet the unique and changing needs of Marines and their families living both on and off our installations. We will pursue initiatives in these programs in 2009 to improve the quality of life for the children of our Marines.

To address a wide variety of identified needs, we are using multiple strategies to increase our child care capacity, including expanded hours to address increased Operational Tempo, as well as through partnerships, on and off-base family child care, and Child Development Group Home spaces. We are now providing 16 hours of reimbursed respite care per month for families with a deployed Marine, and intend to increase respite care availability aboard our installations. In addition, the Marine Corps has expanded partnerships that provide long and short-term support for Marines and their families who are not located near our major installations. Through our partnership with the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, we have been able to provide an additional 798 child care spaces to geographically dispersed, deployed and severely injured service members’ children.

We are currently providing 11,757 child care spaces and meeting 63.6% of the calculated total need. It is important to note that the Marine Corps has initiated rigorous data collection and analysis improvements. As a result, it will be necessary to correct the 2007 annual summary due to identified reporting errors. Our reported rate of 71% of calculated total need last year is more accurately stated as 59.1%.

We are not satisfied with our progress to date and have made plans for 10 Child Development Center Military Construction projects. Two of these projects were approved in 2008, and one has been approved in 2009. These approved projects will provide an additional 915 spaces. We are also considering additional modular Child Development Centers, subject to more detailed planning and availability of funds. Continued Congressional support will help us provide these needed facilities. As the needs of our families change, our program is committed to grow and adapt to meet these needs.

Combat Operational Stress Control (COSC). Marine Corps commanders are fully engaged in promoting the psychological health of our Marines, Sailors and their families. To enable leaders, individuals, and families to prepare for and manage the stress of operational deployment cycles, the Combat and Operational Stress Control Program encompasses a set of policies, training, and tools to recognize stress reactions early on and to manage them more effectively within operational units. Marine leaders are trained by mental health care professionals, with assistance from chaplains in the operating forces, to detect stress problems in warfighters as early as possible, and are provided the resources to effectively manage these stress problems in theater or at home base. This training is also being incorporated into formal Professional Military Education schools for both officers and senior non-commissioned officers, such as the Expeditionary Warfare School and the Staff Non-Commissioned Officer Advanced

Course. Additionally, through enhanced training tools such as hyper-realistic combat training in environments engineered to simulate the sights, sounds, and smells of combat, Marines and Sailors are taught to be tough and resilient. We have staffed full-time COSC training coordinator positions at each of our Marine Expeditionary Force headquarters. To assist with prevention, rapid identification, and effective treatment of combat operational stress, we are expanding our program of embedding mental health professionals in operational units – the Operational Stress Control Readiness (OSCAR) Program – to directly support all active and reserve ground combat elements and eventually all deployed elements of the Marine Air-Ground Task Force. This year, we begin to formalize the OSCAR program by making mental health professionals organic to the Divisions and Marine Forces Reserve. By Fiscal Year 2011, full OSCAR teams will be fielded to the Infantry Regiment level.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The science of diagnosing and treating PTSD continues to evolve. Research studies are underway to identify risk and protective factors to prevent PTSD and other stress-related illnesses such as anxiety disorder or depression. Better screening and referral of at-risk Marines is underway via the OSCAR program and standardized pre- and post-deployment health assessments. This will improve access to care and reduce stigma associated with PTSD. The Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense have collaboratively established comprehensive guidelines, which are available to all services, for managing post-traumatic stress.

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). We continue to see TBI as a significant challenge, one we are meeting in coordination with the Department of Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center (DVBIC). Many new cases represent older injuries that are just now being diagnosed and our expectation is that, with the institution of the Automated Neuropsychological Assessment

Metrics (ANAM) for all Marines, we will discover mild Traumatic Brain Injuries more promptly post-deployment.

While the Marine Corps is providing leadership and resources to deal with this problem, we cannot solve all the issues on our own. The Marine Corps continues to work closely with the newly established Defense Center of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury to advance our understanding of PTSD and TBI, and to improve the care of all Marines. We are gratified by your continued support in this arena through funding of several research initiatives that explore ways to better treat our injured Marines.

Suicide Prevention. The loss of any Marine is a tragedy both for the family and for our Corps. We are actively engaged in prevention and early identification of problems that may increase the risk of suicide. Leaders at all levels are concerned about the increase in the number of suicides, up from 25 in 2006, 33 in 2007, to 41 confirmed or presumed incidents in 2008. Understanding that there is no single suicide prevention solution, we are committed to having an effect on the individual Marine through leadership and command involvement at all levels. As noted earlier regarding PTSD, we must reduce the stigma sometimes associated with seeking help. The Commandant has taken proactive action to address this issue. We are developing video messages on suicide prevention by commanders at all levels from Colonel and up, have established multiple web-based applications with information for use by leaders, Marines and their family members, have provided installation level training that encourages community involvement, and incorporated suicide prevention training into the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program.

In November, the Marine Corps Executive Safety Board, chaired by the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, reviewed the suicide awareness and prevention program and

directed the development of a high-impact leadership training program, targeted at non-commissioned officers, to provide them tools to identify and assist Marines at-risk for suicide. We will also explore development of a web-based resource to assist Marines and their families with relationship-related problems.

The Marine Corps will continue to aggressively pursue suicide prevention initiatives; reevaluate existing programs designed to reduce the stressors most correlated with suicidal behavior; develop and distribute new prevention programs; and refresh and expand training materials.

Sexual Assault Prevention and Response. Sexual assault is a crime and we take every reported incident very seriously. In addition to the impact on its victims, the corrosive effect on unit and individual readiness is a matter of great concern. The Marine Corps has adopted policy and, in accordance with DOD's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) program, issued guidance designed to prevent sexual assaults within the Marine Corps and to assist those Marines and sailors assigned to Marine Corps units affected by sexual assault. We will implement the newly-established DoD strategy to address sexual assault at all levels of the Spectrum of Prevention.

A 2008 Government Accountability Office study reported several shortcomings in our program. To address these findings, we are refreshing our training program and have committed to hire four full-time regional Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program coordinators. We have trained more than 3,000 victim advocates ready to provide assistance. All Marines receive sexual assault prevention and awareness training upon entry and are required to receive refresher training at least annually. The issue is also incorporated into officer and noncommissioned officer professional development courses and key senior leader conferences

and working groups. At the request of our field commanders, we have also increased the number of Marine Corps judge advocates who attend specialized training on prosecution of these crimes and have assembled a mobile training team to teach our prosecutors how to better manage these cases.

Personal Financial Management. In difficult economic times, our Marines and their families face challenges that are no different from the American population in general, such as taking on too much debt, incurring expenses of a new child, and increased housing costs. Our Marines also confront unique challenges because of their service, such as unexpected or short notice deployments, extended separations, and directed permanent reassignments, all of which can compound existing financial difficulties.

During July 2008, we conducted a Financial Quick Poll to help determine the level of financial stress on active duty Marines and their families as a result of the downturn in the economy. Of the over 9,000 Active Duty Marines who responded to the survey, 15% of enlisted Marines and 5% of officers classified themselves as being in financial distress. Respondents reported that the most frequent financial problems experienced within the past year were increases in utility, rent and insurance costs, and taking on excessive debt.

We appreciate the efforts of the Congress to address the payday lending problem. Following up on that positive legislation, we worked with the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society to establish a quick assist loan program that offers a \$300 interest-free loan for emergency basic living expense needs. We also conducted a functionality assessment of our Personal and Financial Management Program in October 2008, and found deficiencies and opportunities for improvement that we will pursue in 2009. Anticipating that economic impacts may have become more pronounced, we will continue to monitor the Corps' financial health and the success of our

efforts to improve the program. In addition, we intend to conduct another survey in August of this year.

Casualty Assistance. Our casualty assistance program is committed to ensuring that families of our fallen Marines are treated with the utmost compassion, dignity and honor. We have taken steps to correct unacceptable deficiencies in our casualty reporting process that were identified in Congressional hearings and subsequent internal reviews. Marine Corps commands now report the initiation, status, and findings of casualty investigations to the Headquarters Casualty Section, which has the responsibility to ensure the next of kin, receive timely notification of these investigations from their assigned Casualty Assistance Calls Officer. The Headquarters Casualty Section is a 24-hour-per-day operation manned by Marines trained in casualty reporting, notification, and casualty assistance procedures. These Marines have also taken on the additional responsibility of notifying the next of kin of wounded, injured, and ill Marines. In October 2008, we implemented a mandatory training program for Casualty Assistance Calls Officers that includes a Web-based capability to expand the reach of the course. This training covers notification procedures, benefits and entitlements, mortuary affairs, and grief and bereavement issues. We will continue to monitor the effectiveness of these changes and make adjustments where warranted.

Recreation for the Recovering Marine. Recognizing the importance of providing recreational opportunities for our wounded, the Marine Corps has partnered with Pennsylvania State University to train recreation professionals on Inclusive Recreation for Wounded Warriors. This state-of-the-art training program for military recreation managers ensures that Marines and their families can create a “new normal” as soon as possible. Some of the best practices in place at our installations include: bowling; golf; expanded personal fitness training; and alternative

activities for those who have been diagnosed with TBI such as yoga, meditation, deep and shallow aquatic classes, personalized swim coaches, wall climbing, nutritional counseling, and referral to the “Back on Track” program.

Obtaining Quality of Life Feedback. The Commandant regularly conducts town hall meetings at our installations to hear the concerns of our Marines and their spouses. This provides the opportunity to address not only individual concerns and issues, but also helps program managers identify systemic issues. Having had the opportunity to participate in some of these town halls, I am encouraged by the progress we are making in identifying and addressing real Quality of Life concerns. As an example, we are participating in a working group with the Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery and TRICARE to resolve health care access and availability issues identified at several bases.

In late 2007, the Marine Corps conducted its fourth Quality of Life in the Marine Corps Study (prior studies were conducted in 1993, 1998, 2002). This is the first study conducted since the start of OIF/OEF, and it measured Marines and their spouses' perceptions and satisfaction with the quality of life across a wide range of issues. As a statement of the morale and character of today's Marine, this most recent study found that despite the Overseas Contingency Operations and the high operational tempo, Marines and family members are generally satisfied with their mission and the support provided by the Marine Corps. In fact, a very important finding from the study was that Marines with a deployment history in support of OCO actually have a slightly higher overall QOL score than their counterparts without a deployment history.

Spouses in particular were another good news story from this study. We found that there was an increase in overall and specific satisfaction across the board for the spouses when compared with the pre-OIF/OEF results from the 2002 study. Spouses strongly appreciate the

medical care benefit provided by the Marine Corps and, specifically: treatment; out of pocket expenses; availability of appointments; and promptness of payments. Spouses reported that the educational opportunities for their children had a positive impact on their desire to remain part of the Marine Corps. Spouses also reported high levels of satisfaction with the quality of professional child care they were receiving. We will continue to evaluate the findings from this important study in an effort to sustain the many QOL improvements and transformation efforts outlined in my statement.

IX. Wounded Warrior Regiment

The Marine Corps is proud of the positive and meaningful impact that the Wounded Warrior Regiment is having on wounded, ill, and injured Marines, Sailors, and their families. Less than two years ago, we instituted a comprehensive and integrated approach to Wounded Warrior care and unified it under one command. The establishment of the Wounded Warrior Regiment reflects our deep commitment to the welfare of our wounded, ill and injured, and their families throughout all phases of recovery. Our single activity provides active duty, reserve, and separated Marines with non-medical case management, benefit information and assistance, resources and referrals, and transition support. The nerve center of our Wounded Warrior Regiment is our Wounded Warrior Operations Center, where no Marine or family member is turned away.

The Regiment strives to ensure programs and processes adequately meet the needs of our wounded, ill, and injured and that they remain flexible to preclude a one-size-fits-all approach to that care. For example, we have transferred the pay and entitlements auditing authority from the Defense Finance and Accounting Service in Kansas City directly to the Wounded Warrior Regiment, where there is a comprehensive awareness of each wounded Marine's individual

situation. We have also designed and implemented a Marine Corps Wounded, Ill, and Injured Tracking System to maintain accountability and will eventually be used to facilitate case management for the Marine Corps Comprehensive Recovery Plan. To ensure effective family advocacy, we have added Family Readiness Officers at the Regiment and our two battalions to support the families of our wounded, ill, and injured Marines.

To enhance reintegration, our Job Transition Cell, manned by Marines and representatives of the Departments of Labor and Veterans' Affairs, has been proactively reaching out to identify and coordinate with employers and job training programs to help our wounded warriors obtain positions in which they are most likely to succeed and enjoy promising careers. One example is our collaboration with the U.S. House of Representatives to establish their Wounded Warrior Fellowship Program hiring disabled veterans to work in Congressional offices.

The Marine Corps also recognizes that the needs of our wounded, ill, and injured Marines and their families are constantly evolving. We must ensure that they are equipped for success in today's environment and in the future. In May 2008, the Regiment stood up the Future Initiatives and Transformation Team to assess current capabilities and develop future programs to ensure the Wounded Warrior Regiment anticipates and meets emerging requirements. The Regiment has also stood up an Assessment Cell as part of the Future Initiatives and Transformation Team to conduct assessments of WWR programs and services to obtain actionable data for comprehensive program adjustment and improvement.

One of the Regiment's most effective accomplishments thus far is the "Sergeant Merlin German Wounded Warrior Call Center." Established in December 2007, the Call Center is available 24/7 for Marines and Marine Veterans for assistance with benefit information and

assistance, resources and referrals, and community reintegration needs. Our Wounded Warrior Call Center not only receives calls from active duty and former Marines but also conducts important outreach calls. In the past year, we have contacted nearly 8,800 Marines and Marine Veterans wounded, ill, or injured since September 2001 to assess how they are doing and to offer our assistance. Our Call Center has been critical to our success in helping wounded, ill, and injured Marines and in averting potentially tragic circumstances. Our trained Call Center staff is primarily former and retired Marines or family members of Marines. These dedicated individuals are not only skilled at providing help, but they also share a common bond with those they serve. This bond brings a sense of familiarity that enhances the help process. Our resident Call Center capability also gives the Marine Corps the flexibility to make outreach calls that target specific populations thought to be at higher risk for problems or requiring specific information. One example of this was our outreach to the Marines assigned to the Personnel Recovery Platoons whose mission is to recover the remains of fallen Marines and who have experienced the trauma of the battlefield to a degree and frequency that few others encounter. Additionally, we use our Call Center to keep wounded warrior Marines and families informed about benefits changes or other changes in laws or policies that will impact them. Now that the new Servicemembers' Traumatic Group Life Insurance policy changes have been implemented, we are using our Call Center to contact wounded and injured Marines and Marine Veterans to advise them of the enhanced benefits and relay to them the procedures for applying for the benefits. Our commitment to gaining and maintaining contact with all our wounded, ill, and injured Marines, including those that have returned to full duty, has prompted us to increase our Call Center capability by adding Call Centers at each of our Battalions located at Camp Lejeune, NC and Camp Pendleton, CA. "Once a Marine, Always a Marine" is not a recruiting slogan. It

is the philosophy that it is at the heart of our brotherhood and guides our efforts to care for wounded warriors.

It is this same philosophy that is behind our reinvigoration of the Marine For Life mission which assists the 27,000 Marines each year who leave active duty. This separate program falls under the Wounded Warrior Regiment and assists in the transition by connecting these Marines with “Marine friendly” employers and mentorship opportunities and providing educational assistance by utilizing Marine For Life HomeTown Links who are strategically located and working in communities throughout the United States.

The Wounded Warrior Regiment has made great strides in achieving a holistic approach to wounded warrior care. We are particularly dedicated to ensuring our Marines not only survive, but that they thrive – whether they return to duty or reintegrate to their communities. Supported by the passage of the Fiscal Year 2008 National Defense Authorization Act, the Marine Corps is aggressively moving forward in our efforts to institute improvements to the care, management, and transition of recovering Marines and their families. Recovery Care Coordinators have been hired, trained, and detailed to support our wounded, ill, and injured. Working with others currently providing care support and services they will oversee the development of a Comprehensive Recovery Plan for each wounded, ill, or injured Marine that will serve as their individual roadmap whether they are focused toward a return to duty status or separation and community reintegration. These caring and dedicated professionals monitor the execution of services across the continuum of care from recovery through rehabilitation to reintegration.

The network of support provided by the Wounded Warrior Regiment will continue to the Marine’s hometown via our District Injured Support Cells. Manned by active duty Marines,

these cells are established throughout the country to conduct face-to-face visits and telephone outreach to reserve and veteran, wounded, ill, and injured Marines. The Wounded Warrior Regiment will continue to develop those relationships that allow us to care for and advocate for our Marines and Marine Veterans. Our Nation has a reasonable expectation that her Marines will receive the care and support they need and deserve, whether this support is provided by the Marine Corps, the Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Service Organizations, or the many local and state governmental and non-governmental agencies.

As we continue to improve the care and management of our Nation's wounded, the Marine Corps is grateful to have the support of Congress. In addition to the support provided in the Fiscal Year 2009 National Defense Authorization Act, I would like to thank you for your personal visits to our Wounded Warriors in the hospital wards where they are recovering and on the bases where they live. The Marine Corps looks forward to continuing to work with Congress in ensuring that our wounded, ill and injured Marines receive the best care, resources, and opportunities possible.

X. Conclusion

As we continue to fight the Long War, the Marine Corps will be required to meet many commitments, both at home and abroad. While we have, to date, made impressive strides toward our Fiscal Year recruiting, retention, and end strength goals, we must remember that this is a Total Force effort. It is individual Marines who are our most precious asset, and we must continue to attract and retain the best and brightest into our ranks.

Marines are proud of what they do. They are proud of the "Eagle, Globe, and Anchor" and what it represents to our country. With your support, a vibrant Marine Corps will continue to meet our Nation's call. Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.