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SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE SENATE
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

STATEMENT OF
MICHAEL D. STEVENS
MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER OF THE NAVY
(AVIATION WARFARE/NAVAL AIRCREW WARFARE)
BEFORE THE
PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE
OF THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

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Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy

MCPON (AW/NAC) Mike D. Stevens



Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Mike D. Stevens was born and raised in Montana. He graduated from Arlee High School in May 1983 and immediately entered the U.S. Navy attending basic training in San Diego in June 1983.

Stevens attended Aviation Structural Mechanic Apprentice School in Millington, Tenn., and his first duty assignment was with Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron Two in Rota, Spain.

In October 2002, he was advanced to Master Chief Petty Officer and assigned to Fleet Composite Eight in Roosevelt Roads, P. R., as the Maintenance Master Chief and Command Master Chief. In October 2003, Stevens reported to Naval Air Station Pensacola and shortly thereafter assumed the duties as the Command Master Chief. In August 2006, he became the Command Master Chief for Helicopter Mine Countermeasure Squadron 14 in Norfolk, Va. In September 2007, he was selected by Commander, Helicopter Sea Combat Wing Atlantic to serve as the Wing Command Master Chief for the largest Helicopter Wing in the U.S. Navy. In January 2009, Stevens was selected as the Command Master Chief for Commander, U.S. 2nd Fleet. Following 2nd Fleet, he served as the 16th Fleet Master Chief for Commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command from August 2010 to September 2012.

Stevens' academic achievements include an Associate's Degree in Administrative Management Studies; Senior Enlisted Professional Military Education; Senior Enlisted Joint Professional Military Education; Harvard John F. Kennedy School of Government "Leadership in Crises"; and the National Defense University Keystone course. He is an honor graduate and the recipient of the prestigious Peter Tomich Award for exceptional military excellence from the Senior Enlisted Academy.

Stevens' personal awards include the Legion of Merit, Meritorious Service Medal (four awards), Navy Commendation Medal (five awards), Navy Achievement Medal (six awards), the Coast Guard Achievement Medal with operational "O", Enlisted Aviation Warfare Specialist Insignia, and Enlisted Naval Aircrew Wings.

Stevens became the 13th Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy on September 28, 2012.

Chairman Gillibrand, Ranking Member Graham, and distinguished members of this subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to address you today. As the Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy, I am honored to represent more than 380,000 active and reserve Sailors in the United States Navy. During the past 18 months, I have visited tens of thousands of Sailors and their families in the United States and overseas. Today, I am prepared to deliver you a summary of the quality of life that sustains our Sailors and their families.

Overall Quality of Life

In today's Navy, quality of life is high overall; however, today's Sailor is concerned about the many quality of life issues that carry a burden of uncertainty, especially in the current fiscal environment. Chief among these concerns are:

- Potential Pay and Benefit changes;
- Family Programs and Support Services; and
- Predictability with Respect to Deployments.

As I navigate through the various commands and units of our Force, I am always inspired by their work ethic and dedication, and I am honored to serve with and represent these amazing men and women – your Sailors. I have no doubt that these issues of concern will be addressed with the utmost regard for their well-being.

Your Navy

The Navy understands that a budgetary reformation is fast-approaching, and we are working hard to implement policies that will meet end strength controls and planned budget execution. Such budgetary decisions will continue to be carefully monitored for impacts to fit,

fill, and tone, the health of the Force. Navy Active and Reserve Components continue efforts to stabilize, balance, and distribute the Force to ensure that Sailors are assignable, deployable, and distributable in support of the Chief of Naval Operations' (CNO) tenets: Warfighting First, Operate Forward, and Be Ready.

The overall health of the Force is “good,” and morale is reasonably high; however, we continue to closely monitor the tone of the Force and personnel readiness. Areas by which we measure these controls include:

- Physical, mental, family and financial stress;
- Morale, alcohol and substance abuse;
- Misconduct; and
- Recruiting, Retention, Operations Tempo (OPTEMPO), Personnel Tempo (PERSTMEPO), safety, training, and manning (Personnel Readiness).

Additionally, and in order to secure a healthy balance in quality of life and work, the Navy is committed to a two part obligation that we call “quality of service”:

1. To ensure Sailors receive the finest training and equipment possible so they can deploy ready to accomplish their mission and return home safely, and
2. To ensure they and their families are properly compensated and cared for.

Recruiting

To ensure the Navy is prepared to meet future operational requirements, the Force must recruit Sailors in the right combination of ratings (jobs). For fiscal year 2014, through January 2014, the Navy met numerical goals with a total of 10,443 accessions. Because quality of life

and service are fundamental features to recruiting new Sailors, we hold an obligation to provide Sailors with the best equipment and training possible. From the time a Sailor steps into basic training, we begin to develop and mold them into a leader who is prepared to serve and sustain the Force. Recruiting efforts are supplemented by an element of job security that extends into a career-long training continuum that will enhance a Sailor's personal and professional development. As we work with Congress, we hope to continue to provide the necessary tools to recruit the right Sailors, with the right skills, in order to meet current and future mission requirements.

Retention

Officer and enlisted inventory gaps remain in several critical specialties where operational tempo is high or pay disparities exist between the military and the private sector. Targeted special pays have a strong impact on reenlistments. Selective Reenlistment Bonuses (SRBs), in particular, are essential to retaining personnel in critical skills, such as the Nuclear Field, Information Dominance, and Special Warfare ratings. We continue to use SRBs as a quality of life initiative to address these shortages, and we appreciate your continuing support for these important incentives.

End Strength

As of January 2014, our total Force is 323,561 active duty and 61,499 Reserve. This is on track with Navy's FY15 budget submission of 323,600 active and 57,300 Reserve. We are focused on maintaining the right number of Sailors to adequately man the Fleet and to ensure Sailors are in the right positions to accomplish our operational commitments. We strive to

provide the Fleet with the right fit and fill – assigning Sailors with the right skills and experience level to perform and fill the most critical sea duty jobs.

As the Navy has had to adapt to an ever-changing fiscal environment, I have watched our Sailors continue to complete their missions with a dedicated, goal-oriented approach. I have seen the evidence of their hard work and been a witness to their determination. They are indeed, the driving Force of our Navy.

Women in Submarines

Retention of women in the Navy has been historically challenging. Averages for female submarine officer retention will not be well known until FY19 when the first several year groups of female submarine officers are making decisions on whether to serve as a Department Head.

Naval Sea Systems Command recently conducted a habitability study that examined design modifications for: (1) enlisted female sailors/officer integration on all submarine platforms and (2) officer female integration on Virginia (VA) and Los Angeles (LA) class SSNs. The study revealed that ship design modifications will be required for enlisted female sailors' integration on all classes of submarines. Study assessments also indicate that there are no obstacles for female officer integration on VA class SSNs supporting Navy's goal to provide equal career opportunities for women to the greatest extent possible.

The Navy intends to integrate female officers aboard two VA class submarines starting in FY15; and, as publically announced in January 2013, the Navy intends to assign enlisted women to Virginia class submarines. Although enlisted women have not yet been assigned in submarines, a task force was established last year to coordinate and synchronize these efforts.

Housing

Family Housing and Single Sailor Housing is a crucial element in supporting Navy readiness and quality of life. By providing Sailors and their families the opportunity for suitable, affordable, and safe environments in the community, whether privatized or Navy-owned, we are ensuring a critical component to the overall well-being of Sailors and their families. Thanks to the support of this committee and members of Congress, we have improved, and continue to improve the housing available to our Sailors and their families.

In FY13, the Navy renovated a total of 28 barracks at 11 bases, and in FY14 we will prioritize renovations to ensure units meet health and safety standards. However, to resource critical warfighting requirements, Navy has taken risk in our shore infrastructure and we have found ourselves with a significant number of unaccompanied housing buildings in “Inadequate condition.” It is critically important that we fully fund efforts in this area.

Family Support Programs

The Navy has extended strong resources to our Navy families, providing our Sailors with the reassurance that their families are being supported. This allows our Sailors to effectively focus on the mission at hand with peace of mind. Fleet and Family Support Centers offer a number of personnel and family support programs to reduce life stressors throughout the training and deployment cycles. Family Support Programs provide support to military members and their families whether the member deploys as part of a unit or individually. In addition, military members and their families may contact the Department of Defense sponsored Military OneSource program for confidential assistance and comprehensive information or materials on a variety of military life topics. Military OneSource, available worldwide 24/7/365 by telephone

or online for both active duty and reserve members, provided more than 885,000 services to military and family members in Fiscal Year 2013.

Navy Ombudsmen and Family Readiness Groups (FRG) are other essential components in our efforts to foster effective relationships between family members and commands.

Ombudsmen function as an intermediary between commands and families to better prepare both Sailors and their families for the challenges associated with training and deployment.

Ombudsmen also serve as liaisons between commands and families on a wide range of issues including pay and compensation, deployment schedules, child care, housing, etc. They keep the command informed regarding the overall health, morale, and welfare of command families.

For our Reserve Sailors, the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP) and the Psychological Health Outreach Program (PHOP) have been tremendously successful in caring for service members and their families before, during, and following deployment. The YRRP provides reserve Sailors and their families with information, services, referral, and proactive outreach opportunities via informational events and activities. PHOP services include psycho-educational briefings, behavioral health screenings, and phone/email follow-up to ensure Sailors have received the information, resources and services they need to enhance their state of wellness and readiness.

It is imperative that in today's fiscal environment, we protect these programs and services that promote a thriving and healthy family unit, and, in essence, the viability of our Force.

Navy Child and Youth Programs

Navy Child and Youth Programs (CYP) deliver services that help meet mission requirements and reinforce strong military families through activities that promote cognitive,

social, emotional, and physical development of children from ages infant through twelfth grade. Navy CYP also provides School Liaison Officers to support the transition needs of school-aged children and families by facilitating communication with local school authorities on the impacts of a military lifestyle on children. The Navy remains dedicated to ensuring our Sailors and their families are provided with adequate choices based on their respective needs and/or requests.

Sailor and Family Readiness

Deployments are a necessary part of Navy life, and as we have deployed our Forces throughout times of peace and conflict, it is imperative that we never underestimate the incredible strain that deployments impose on our Sailors and their families. The stresses associated with being a part of a Navy family have significant impact on the overall readiness of the unit, the readiness of the individual Sailor, and the readiness of their families.

One stressor that I briefly addressed above is the unpredictability of deployments. It is understood that real world events coupled with the strain of maintaining material readiness are factors that contribute to uncertain deployment schedules.

Once a deployment assignment is delivered to the command, along with a predicted timeline, personnel are made responsible for properly preparing themselves and their families. They immediately begin to make important life decisions via their family care plans, automobile arrangements, household goods placement, financial accounts, and many other facets of their personal lives. When a change in length of a deployment or a delay in deployment is announced, it results in a significant strain on the morale of the Force which, in turn, negatively impacts quality of work. I believe it is paramount that the Navy is provided with adequate capacity, or

the proper manning, to support mission demands and ensure deployment predictability to the largest extent possible.

Sailors choose military service for many different reasons: loyalty to country, family and service tradition, and dedication are all undoubtedly significant factors. Sailors also recognize that with this commitment, comes great opportunity. I appreciate Congress' historical support of pay and benefit increases and quality of life initiatives that have sustained our Navy.

In past years, Congress has provided the Navy with competitive pay, allowances, housing, support programs, and educational opportunities that support Sailor and family readiness; this support helps to explain why many Sailors and their families decide to "Stay Navy." It is my hope that we can continue to work together to ensure that investments in quality of life and in quality of work combine to produce a quality of service that helps the Navy continue to attract and retain high quality Sailors.

Continuum of Care

Health care is extremely important to mission readiness and is incredibly appealing for the recruiting and retention of our Sailors and families. I am often made aware of our Sailors' families' future concerns in regards to health care. As we improve the process by which we provide for the health needs of our Sailors and families, I believe we should also direct attention toward severely injured Sailors. We must apply the same level of attention to those who return from deployments whose medical needs may not be immediately apparent.

We have continued to encourage leaders to be vigilant for service members who may be suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or Traumatic Brain Injury, and to encourage those afflicted with these conditions to seek help. We must also be able to provide care and support to

address the physical and psychological toll that multiple deployments have on our Sailors and their families. The Navy continues to work hard to dispel the stigma often associated with mental healthcare.

Recently, Navy has embedded mental health providers in primary care settings and operational units in order to identify and manage issues before they manifest as psychological problems. Navy Medicine continues to provide timely and comprehensive physical and mental health care for Sailors, Marines, and their families throughout the training and deployment cycle.

21st Century Sailor and Marine

Navy's 21st Century Sailor office was established in June 2013 and is responsible for integrating Navy's efforts in equal opportunity, Sailor personal and family readiness, physical readiness, alcohol and substance abuse prevention, suicide prevention, sexual harassment prevention, sexual assault prevention and response (SAPR), hazing prevention, and transition assistance. The 21st Century Sailor Office captures all these programs under one umbrella and provides top level attention and support to ensure critical resilience programs continue to grow and thrive. We provide resources to our Sailors and families to ensure they can take the challenges of a military lifestyle in stride.

Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR)

Sexual assault is a crime and is counter to our core values. It directly impacts operational readiness and unit cohesion and I have aggressively challenged enlisted leadership to impose a daily influence on their Sailors that is consistent with ensuring every Sailor is treated with dignity and respect. By identifying the disrupting factors that contribute to sexual assault, such

as alcohol abuse and poor command climate, we may better focus on ways in which the Navy should implement improvements to our leadership training. Leadership development programs will better prepare leaders for efforts to keep their Sailors safe and further shape a proper command climate.

Because many victims and offenders are junior Sailors, our training is targeted to those Sailors, and we actively support peer groups such as Coalition of Sailors Against Destructive Decisions (CSADD) who train, mentor and sponsor awareness-raising events for fellow junior Sailors. We are also working to create a culturally-aware, educated, total Force environment intolerant of sexual assault, supported by a well-defined prevention, reporting, investigation, military justice, and victim advocacy program. The Navy is committed to reducing sexual assault with the goal of eliminating it from within our ranks.

In compliance with Department of Defense (DoD) initiatives and the guidance from the DoD and Department of the Navy Sexual Assault Prevention Response Offices (SAPRO), the Navy follows and supports the five Lines of Effort for eliminating sexual assault:

1. Prevention;
2. Investigation;
3. Accountability;
4. Advocacy and Victim Assistance; and
5. Program Assessment.

Tailored SAPR training has been given to all Officers and Chief Petty Officers focusing on leadership's role in setting the correct tone and climate to prevent and eliminate sexual assaults. All E6 and below Sailors receive training that focuses on Sailor responsibility for

positive changes in their command and in their Navy, with emphasis on bystander intervention and responsible decision-making.

We will continue to use a metrics-based approach to evaluate our progress, and improve our prevention efforts.

Safe Harbor & Wounded Warriors

We provide a lifetime of individually tailored assistance designed to optimize recovery, rehabilitation, and reintegration of Sailors and Coast Guardsmen. Navy Safe Harbor is the Navy's sole organization for coordinating the non-medical care of all seriously wounded, ill, or injured Sailors, Coast Guardsmen, and their families.

Non-medical care management support includes, but is not limited to, support services for TBI/PTSD, pay/personnel issues, invitational travel orders, lodging/housing adaptation, child/youth programs, transportation needs, legal/guardianship issues, education/training benefits, commissary/exchange access, respite care and transition assistance. Safe Harbor enrollment includes Sailors with combat-related wounds or injuries, those from shipboard accidents, and off duty accidents, and serious medical and psychological conditions, such as cancer and severe PTSD.

100% of Wounded Warrior enrollees are briefed by the Safe Harbor program on child care as part of their portfolio of support services available to them. If a Wounded Warrior requires child care, installation child care programs adapt to accommodate the individual family's needs. All Wounded Warriors have priority access into all Navy Child and Youth Programs. We continue to strive to improve the continuum of care and explore all avenues that may more effectively meet the needs of our severely injured Sailors and their families.

Suicide Prevention

Suicide prevention in the Navy is an all hands evolution, all of the time. The Navy Suicide Prevention Program manages policy and programs to help Sailors live life fully, promote psychological and emotional wellness, and reduce barriers that discourage seeking help. A comprehensive four-prong approach includes training, intervention, response, and reporting to ensure we're providing all Navy personnel the support network and skills needed to thrive, not just survive.

The Operational Stress Control (OSC) program is the foundation of the training effort, supporting the fleet with resources to navigate the stressors and challenges commonly associated with Navy life to help Sailors build resilience and maintain readiness—a major tenet of the Chief of Naval Operations' Sailing Directions.

We encourage proactive measures that Sailors, leaders, commands and families can take to mitigate stressors before they become crises, while identifying those who may be reacting to stress and need assistance. While our efforts focus on actions “left of the event,” post-vention is a critical component of our program, providing psychological first-aid support to commands that have experienced a suicide tragedy.

The NavyTHRIVE communications campaign was launched last year, focusing on providing Sailors, leaders and families with the tools and knowledge to thrive; the next step in the resilience ladder. “Thrive in your Community”, the 2013 Suicide Prevention Month theme, added a new dimension to NavyTHRIVE by emphasizing the importance of cohesion and togetherness when dealing with adversity. The Thrive During the Holidays campaign addressed the various components of a physically and psychologically healthy lifestyle to reduce holiday stress.

Beginning January 1, 2014, Navy commands are now required to complete Operational Stress Control skills training within six months of deployment. This provides units tools to build Sailor resilience and command readiness.

Transition Assistance Program (TAP)/Transition Goals, Plans, and Success (GPS)

Transition GPS replaced the 20-year-old Transition Assistance Program (TAP). The development and implementation of this initiative to extend the continuum of care to retirement, and well beyond, was a collective effort involving all military services. Created by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, with full participation by the Department of Veteran's Affairs, Department of Labor, and the Small Business Administration, Transition GPS increases Sailors' abilities to overcome challenges they may face in pursuit of their chosen civilian career path. Transition GPS is a reinvestment in our citizen-Sailors, and by providing ready, skilled, and service-oriented workers, we become a stronger nation.

The Navy Transition Assistance Program is currently executing a strategic shift that vastly increases the resources, training, and professional assistance to those personnel who are transitioning out of the service. This program is focused on a common set of life skills and then tailored to an individual's plan for a civilian job, higher education, or entrepreneurship. It is important, as we assist our personnel in a life transition, that we ensure they are receiving the information and opportunities that better assist them as they shift into civilian life.

Conclusion

Today's Sailor is perceptive, intelligent, and devoted to our country. I am confident that these outstanding men and women will continue to ensure the strength, power and worldwide

presence of our Force. As a result, your Navy will continue to play a pivotal role in worldwide security. Sailors and their families endure the challenges of multiple deployments and household moves all over the world. They miss anniversaries, births of children, funerals, and countless holidays, all while balancing the struggles of operational demands and putting life and limb at risk in service to the Nation.

It is my hope that the decisions of the Congress will continue to ensure that our Sailors' pay and benefits remain competitive to sustain the all-volunteer force, today and into the future. Such efforts, once executed, will enable us to continue to provide a quality of service commensurate to the sacrifices our Sailors and families make daily.

On behalf of the men and women of the United States Navy and the families who so faithfully support them, I sincerely thank you.