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Before the

COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES SENATE

HEARING TO CONSIDER THE NOMINATION OF: LIEUTENANT
GENERAL ROBERT B. NELLER USMC TO BE GENERAL AND
COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS

Thursday, July 23, 2015

Washington, D.C.

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1 HEARING TO CONSIDER THE NOMINATION OF:
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3 GENERAL AND COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS
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7 U.S. Senate
8 Committee on Armed Services
9 Washington, D.C.
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11 The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:34 a.m. in
12 Room SH-216, Hart Senate Office Building, Hon. John McCain,
13 chairman of the committee, presiding.

14 Committee Members Present: Senators McCain
15 [presiding], Inhofe, Sessions, Wicker, Ayotte, Fischer,
16 Cotton, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan, Graham, Reed, McCaskill,
17 Manchin, Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Donnelly, Hirono,
18 Kaine, and King.
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1 OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN McCAIN, U.S. SENATOR
2 FROM ARIZONA

3 Chairman McCain: Good morning. The Senate Armed
4 Services Committee meets this morning to consider the
5 nomination of Lieutenant General Robert Neller to be the
6 37th Commandant of the Marine Corps.

7 General Neller, we thank you for joining us this
8 morning. We are grateful for your many years of
9 distinguished service to our Nation and for your continued
10 willingness to serve.

11 We also welcome members of your family joining us this
12 morning, and thank them for supporting you and our Nation.
13 As our tradition, at the beginning of your testimony, we
14 invite you to introduce any family members that are joining
15 us.

16 As our Nation confronts the most diverse and complex
17 array of global crises since the end of World War II, the
18 next Commandant will be responsible for ensuring that the
19 Marine Corps remains the Nation's expeditionary force in
20 readiness. After more than a decade of war in Afghanistan
21 and Iraq, our marines have remained in high demand,
22 performing the full range of theater security and crisis
23 response missions across the globe. With instability
24 spreading across the Middle East and North Africa, and
25 tension gripping the Asia-Pacific, more than ever our Nation

1 is counting on the forward presence, strategic agility,
2 power projection, and rapid response that are the Marine
3 Corps hallmarks.

4 But, as we confront the realities of a more dangerous
5 world, drastic reductions in defense spending are forcing
6 our marines to take on a growing set of missions with fewer
7 and fewer resources. Over the last few years, the Marine
8 Corps has been cut from 202,000 Active Duty marines in 2012
9 to 184,000 today. Over the next 2 years, the Marine Corps
10 will fall to 182,000; and, if sequestration returns again,
11 we will be left with 174,000 marines, a force ill-prepared
12 and ill-equipped to respond to a crisis or major
13 contingency.

14 The combination of budget cuts, force reductions, and
15 rising demands on our marines has reduced readiness,
16 lengthened deployments, cut training and time at home with
17 families, and put the Marine Corps under considerable
18 strain. This madness must stop. And, as I said earlier
19 this week, this is not just about reversing the effects of
20 sequestration. We must replace the arbitrary spending caps
21 on defense that were imposed under the Budget Control Act of
22 2011. That's the only way that we will get back to a truly
23 strategic -- strategy-driven defense budget.

24 As General Dunford emphasized in his most planning --
25 recent planning guidance, the Marine Corps is a naval

1 expeditionary force. Over this past decade, as the United
2 States was focused on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq,
3 America's potential adversaries were investing billions in
4 so-called anti-access area denial capabilities that threat
5 the Marine Corps ability to fight from the sea. At the same
6 time, budget constraints have left the Marine Corps short of
7 its requirements for amphibious warships. On the current
8 path, the Marine Corps will not have the correct mix of
9 amphibious warships until 2024. This is particularly
10 concerning in the Asia-Pacific, where the Marine Corps plays
11 an essential role in our rebalance policy. Despite growing
12 tensions in the region, our marines still lack sufficient
13 sealift and airlift capabilities to respond to a major
14 contingency in the Asia-Pacific. We must do better if the
15 United States is to accomplish a rebalance that successfully
16 reassures our allies and deters our adversaries.

17 General Neller, if confirmed, another significant
18 challenge you will face is shortfalls in aviation readiness.
19 As you well know, high operations tempo over a decade of
20 sustained combat has degraded readiness of -- in marine
21 aviation. Today, nondeployed marine aviation squadrons are
22 20 percent short of the number of aircraft needed to train
23 or respond in a crisis. As you will surely agree, the
24 Marine Corps aviation bench is simply too shallow to be
25 ready for future challenges. We will be interested to hear

1 your views on putting the Marine Corps on track to restoring
2 aviation readiness.

3 Finally, General Neller, if confirmed, you will be
4 responsible for recapitalizing and modernizing for future
5 challenges. In the air, the Marine Corps is rapidly
6 approaching a significant milestone with the initial
7 operational capability, or IOC, of the F-35B joint strike
8 fighter. Concerns remain about the warfighting capability
9 of these aircraft reaching IOC. We will be looking to you,
10 General Neller, to ensure our marine aviators have safe and
11 reliable aircraft that will allow them to effectively carry
12 out their missions. On the ground, the amphibious combat
13 vehicle remains the Marine Corps top acquisition priority.
14 Given the importance of replacing our aging fleet of
15 amphibious vehicles, the Marine Corps must learn the lessons
16 of past failures, such as the expeditionary fighting
17 vehicle, and deliver this needed capability on time, at
18 cost, and up to expectations. We will be relying on you,
19 General Neller, to make sure the job gets done.

20 Thank you. And we look forward to your testimony.

21 Senator Reed.

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1 STATEMENT OF HON. JACK REED, U.S. SENATOR FROM RHODE
2 ISLAND

3 Senator Reed: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4 I want to join the Chairman in welcoming Lieutenant
5 General Neller to the confirmation hearing regarding his
6 nomination to be the 37th Commandant of the United States
7 Marine Corps.

8 And, General Neller, welcome to the Armed Services
9 Committee. Thank you for your many years of extraordinary
10 service to the Corps and to the country. And also, thank
11 your family for their service right alongside you every step
12 of the way.

13 General Neller, you have an exemplary record of
14 service, and you're highly qualified for the position which
15 you've been nominated. You have commanded marines from the
16 platoon level to the division level, and are -- you are
17 currently the commander Marine Corps Forces Command and
18 commander Marine Corps Force Europe. Before this current
19 assignment, you also commanded U.S. Marine Corps Forces for
20 Central Command.

21 General Neller, as Commandant of the Marine Corps, you
22 will be tasked with the recruiting and retraining of quality
23 force and ensuring that force contains the necessary
24 structure and readiness levels to meet our Nation's current
25 challenges and the posture to respond to tomorrow's crises

1 and contingencies. These responsibilities are demanding
2 enough on their own; however, you will also be asked to
3 assume control at a time of immense financial and fiscal
4 challenge, particularly because of sequestration. And I
5 know we will discuss a number of these challenges this
6 morning.

7 Again, thank you for your service and the service of
8 your family. And thank you for your great marines, who make
9 us all proud every day.

10 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

11 Chairman McCain: Thank you.

12 General, in order to exercise its legislative and
13 oversight responsibilities, it's important that this
14 committee and other appropriate committees of the Congress
15 be able to receive testimony, briefings, and other
16 communications of information. So, would you answer the
17 following questions:

18 Have you adhered to applicable laws and regulations
19 governing conflicts of interest?

20 [The witness answered in the affirmative.]

21 Chairman McCain: Do you agree, when asked, to give
22 your personal views, even if those views differ from the
23 administration in power?

24 [The witness answered in the affirmative.]

25 Chairman McCain: Have you assumed any duties or

1 undertaken any actions which would appear to presume the
2 outcome of the confirmation process?

3 [The witness answered in the negative.]

4 Chairman McCain: Will you ensure your staff complies
5 with deadlines established for requested communications,
6 including questions for the record in hearings?

7 [The witness answered in the affirmative.]

8 Chairman McCain: Will you cooperate in providing
9 witnesses and briefers in response to congressional
10 requests?

11 [The witness answered in the affirmative.]

12 Chairman McCain: Will those witnesses be protected
13 from reprisal for their testimony or briefings?

14 [The witness answered in the affirmative.]

15 Chairman McCain: Do you agree, if confirmed, to appear
16 and testify, upon request, before this committee?

17 [The witness answered in the affirmative.]

18 Chairman McCain: Do you agree to provide documents,
19 including copies of electronic forms of communications, in a
20 timely manner when requested by a duly-constituted
21 committee, or to consult with the committee regarding the
22 basis for any good-faith delay or denial in providing such
23 documents?

24 [The witness answered in the affirmative.]

25 Chairman McCain: Thank you.

1 Welcome, General. Please proceed. And perhaps you'd
2 like to introduce your family.
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1 STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL ROBERT B. NELLER, TO
2 BE GENERAL AND COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS

3 General Neller: Thank you, Chairman, Ranking Member
4 Reed.

5 My wife, Darcy, is here. Our 40th wedding anniversary
6 is next month. I already have the present, so I'm in good
7 shape.

8 [Laughter.]

9 General Neller: Our three children are not here:
10 Kurt, Brett, and Claire. They are off -- Kurt lives in
11 Traverse City; Brett lives in Houston; and Claire and her
12 husband, Jim, and the most important member of our family,
13 grandson Connor, are in Austin, Texas. And I'll talk a
14 little bit about all of them in my statement.

15 Chairman McCain: Thank you.

16 General Neller: Our parents -- our mothers both live
17 in East Lansing, Michigan, and both our fathers are deceased
18 and both veterans. My brother is a retired Navy captain.
19 My dad served in the Army. Darcy's dad and her -- his three
20 brothers are all World War II vets, served in the war. And
21 so, we have a history of service in our family.

22 So, with that, I would like to present my opening
23 statement.

24 Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed, and distinguished
25 members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to

1 appear today.

2 Before I offer my brief remarks, I do want to express
3 my condolences to the families of the marines and sailor
4 lost in the tragic shootings in Chattanooga. Our thoughts
5 are with the families as they struggle to cope with this
6 incomprehensible loss. And, for Gunnery Sergeant Sullivan,
7 Staff Sergeant Wyatt, Sergeant Holmquist, Lance Corporal
8 Wells, and our shipmate, Petty Officer Smith, you will not
9 be forgotten.

10 I'll begin by thanking the President and the
11 Secretaries Carter and Mabus for their confidence in
12 nominating me for this office. I would also like to thank
13 this committee and the Congress for your faithful support
14 for our men and women in uniform under your leadership. The
15 Marine Corps today is a much different and better force than
16 the one I joined 40 years ago.

17 I also want to recognize my partner, friend, and
18 strongest supporter, who sits with me today, Darcy. We
19 started our Marine Corps journey at the same time, although
20 she didn't sign up; she just went with it.

21 [Laughter.]

22 General Neller: She has an unconditional love for
23 marines and their families. She understands the
24 difficulties and stresses of military families, and serves
25 as a strong advocate for their support. And, while I was

1 off doing what was required, she ran the house, worked
2 outside the home, volunteered, raised three kids, who all
3 have their own lives and careers and are doing very well,
4 thankfully -- moved 26 times, to include three times
5 overseas, and allowed me to think that I was contributing to
6 the effort. Now that we have our first grandson, Connor, I
7 have moved down in the pecking order in the Neller
8 household, beneath him, the children, and the dogs. And, as
9 I said, we'll be celebrating our 40th anniversary, and I'm
10 thankful that she's here with me today.

11 I accepted a Reserve commission in the Marine Corps in
12 June of 1975 out of the University of Virginia because I
13 wanted to get married and I needed a job. And when I
14 joined, we had just come out of Vietnam. Discipline was not
15 good, equipment was in poor condition, and training was
16 poorly resourced and rudimentary. And, though we were well
17 led and we trained hard, we were not ready. So, in those
18 early years, I learned to expect little and to get less.
19 But, more importantly, I soon realized that being a marine,
20 and an officer marines, was much more than just that job
21 that I was looking for; it's a profession, it's a mindset,
22 it's a life. I came to realize that the marines and sailors
23 we serve, and their families, are special people. And if
24 they are well led by those willing to share the hardship and
25 the risk, led by those who firmly but fairly coach, teach,

1 and mentor them, and by those willing to ensure they have
2 what they need for the mission and for their families, that
3 they could accomplish incredible things.

4 I had many teachers in those early days, but the best
5 were the Vietnam-era staff NCOs who, for whatever reason,
6 took the time to keep me out of my own way, mold me, and
7 advise me when those were -- when those times were tough.

8 And I also learned the hard grind of life in the
9 infantry, how to operate, move, and survive in every clime
10 and place, how to lead those that were not always willing,
11 and how to build a team. I learned why the Marine Air-
12 Ground Task Force, a team of teams, is the way we fight and
13 why we win. I learned that we are most effective as a
14 maritime force using the sea as maneuver space, and, as
15 soldiers of that sea, we hold an advantage over our
16 adversaries when we came from our Navy ships both on the
17 surface and in the air. And I learned that the support and
18 well-being of our families is just as important as the ammo,
19 food, and water we need to keep ourselves focused and
20 successful in the fight.

21 So, over these past years, through the efforts of great
22 leaders, like Commandants Wilson and Barrow and those that
23 followed, to include our current Commandant, General
24 Dunford, and his wife, Ellen, who have set the conditions
25 for our future success. And, with the support of the

1 Congress and the Nation, we've kept at it. We've gotten
2 better -- better people, better equipment, better
3 facilities, better training, better education, better
4 leadership -- and we were put on a path to where we are
5 today -- a high-quality corps of men and women who are
6 smart, fit, disciplined, trained, experienced, take care of
7 each other, and are ready to fight tonight and to provide
8 what America expects of her Marine Corps: an expeditionary
9 crisis response force in readiness. And, although material
10 readiness, fiscal and other challenges do exist, and which
11 must be addressed, I am immensely proud of where the Corps
12 is today.

13 All that said, we cannot rest on our laurels and become
14 complacent. I don't have to tell this committee that the
15 complexity of the global security environment creates a
16 level of uncertainty that increases risk to our Nation, from
17 violent extremism across the globe and Cold War-like
18 aggression in Eastern Europe, cyberthreats and contested
19 waters in the Pacific. Because of the security environment
20 we face, the President and our national leadership expects
21 its military to be able to provide the military options and
22 capabilities to meet these challenges and to protect the
23 security interests of the American people. Among those
24 military options they expect to have is a Marine Corps that
25 can respond to crisis across the full range of military

1 operations. They expect the Marine Corps to be the Nation's
2 force in readiness. And they demand that, when the Nation
3 is least ready and needs us most, the Marine Corps will be
4 the most ready, will answer the call, and win.

5 And in order to be that Marine Corps, we must be
6 willing to not just be good, but to get better, be able and
7 willing to look at new and different ways of performing our
8 craft that maintain an operational edge every day. Every
9 marine we recruit and reenlist, every decision we make, all
10 the equipment we procure, all the training we do must make
11 us operationally better. Flexibility, innovation, dealing
12 with change, uncertainty, thinking out of the box, all these
13 things have to be commonplace and something that is expected
14 from marines. It has been in the past, and it must be so in
15 the future.

16 Finally, if confirmed, I promise to dedicate myself to
17 sustaining and providing the Nation that kind of Marine
18 Corps, a Marine Corps of the highest-quality young men and
19 women our Nation has to offer, the most disciplined, best-
20 trained and -equipped and operationally-capable Marine Corps
21 we can afford, and the best -- to the best of my ability, to
22 ensure the health, well-being, and opportunities for success
23 of the men and women who accept the challenge to be a U.S.
24 marine.

25 Thank you once again for the opportunity to appear

1 before you this morning. I'm ready for your questions.

2 [The prepared statement of General Neller follows:]

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1 Chairman McCain: Well, thank you, General.

2 Recently, General Dunford stated to this committee,
3 quote, "We cannot execute the 2014 Quadrennial Defense
4 Review with the budget cuts as a result of the Budget
5 Control Act." He continued, stating that ongoing cuts will
6 threaten our ability to execute the current defense
7 strategy. Do you agree with that statement of General
8 Dunford's?

9 General Neller: Chairman, I do believe, if we are held
10 to the sequestration level this year and in the following
11 years, we will not be able to execute the strategy.

12 Chairman McCain: And would this continued
13 sequestration and its effects put the lives of the men and
14 women serving in the Marine Corps in greater -- at greater
15 risk?

16 General Neller: Senator, if our readiness is degraded
17 because we can't resource the training and we can't
18 modernize the force, if we had to commit that force, there
19 would be increased risk.

20 Chairman McCain: You know, in the 1970s, you referred
21 to General Wilson and General Barrow, and you referred to
22 the really terrible situation that existed. Do you see a
23 parallel to that today with continued sequestration?

24 General Neller: Chairman, anytime we come out of
25 conflict, there is always risk to this effect. But, they're

1 all different. We've -- some -- we've been able, after 12
2 years of war, to keep a very qualified and capable force.
3 And, because we've been resourced and supported by the
4 Congress, I don't believe we're near that place that you and
5 I remember from the '70s. There's always risk that things
6 could happen that could take us there. And I believe that's
7 what many of us are concerned about. But, right now, we're
8 not there. And, if confirmed, I give you my personal pledge
9 that we'll do everything in our power to never go back to
10 that place again.

11 Chairman McCain: We've spent a lot of billion dollars
12 on acquisition, as you know. And, at least in my view, the
13 ongoing scandal is the cost overruns, the F-35B, complete
14 testing of the CH-53 heavy-lift helicopter -- the list goes
15 on and on of cost overruns. Will placing service chiefs in
16 a greater position of responsibility of service acquisition
17 programs help fix -- address this problem, in your view?

18 General Neller: Chairman, I don't think any of us who
19 are on the receiving end of the acquisition process are
20 totally pleased. I'm not a acquisition professional, but I
21 think we all wonder why it takes so long, costs so much
22 money, why there's delays. So, if confirmed, I would look
23 forward to working with this committee and then the
24 Secretary of Defense to improve this --

25 Chairman McCain: Do you believe that --

1 General Neller: -- process and involve the service
2 chiefs in the process.

3 Chairman McCain: Do you believe that we could make
4 this process more efficient if you played a role in that
5 process -- if the service chiefs played a role in that
6 process?

7 General Neller: I would like to believe, if confirmed,
8 that I could provide value-added to the process and make it
9 more effective, Chairman.

10 Chairman McCain: Thank you.

11 I'm sure you've observed the ongoing situation in
12 Ukraine. Would you favor providing defensive weapons to
13 Ukraine?

14 General Neller: Chairman, it's my military opinion, if
15 we provided additional weapons to the Ukrainians, that they
16 would be more capable of defending their territory.

17 Chairman McCain: I want to go back, just a second, to
18 the budget situation, because there is great controversy on
19 that issue. And I'm not sure my colleagues on both sides of
20 the Capitol understand the consequences, not only for our
21 ability to defend the Nation, but the greater risks to the
22 people that we ask to defend us. And maybe you could talk
23 to us a little bit about that and the impact on retention
24 and morale, and of the -- of our All-Volunteer Force.

25 General Neller: Well, Chairman, in my current role as

1 commander Marine Forces Command, I try to get out and speak
2 to marines and sailors as often as I can. This force is
3 very smart. They are informed. And so, they are aware of
4 what's going on with the funding. I believe they're
5 concerned, they're watching. They want to know what's going
6 to go on with compensation. They want to know what's going
7 to go on with the modernization and training. This Congress
8 and this Nation has been very generous to them in the last
9 12 years, so they've created a very high -- they have a high
10 expectation in their mind of what's -- you know, what's
11 supposed to be right. They don't have the context I had.
12 They don't understand what it is to go short. They'll
13 learn, if they have to.

14 So, I do have some concerns about retention. I do have
15 marines ask me, "Hey, what's going to happen about pay and
16 our gear and our training and our bases, our housing, and
17 those things?" They know there's choices to be made. But,
18 I believe, whatever those choices are -- and we can explain
19 them to them, and they are reasonable, rational people, and
20 they'll make the decision -- and I believe that they'll
21 stay. But, that remains to be seen.

22 Chairman McCain: Senator Reed.

23 Senator Reed: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

24 Again, thank you, General, for your service.

25 The Marine Corps continues to test, develop, and

1 evaluate gender-neutral occupation standards. I think the
2 expectation, the goal, is that every MOS would be available
3 to qualified female in Marines, as well as males. And
4 you're just opening up the base infantry course to company-
5 grade female officers. Can you comment upon the
6 expectations and your commitment to making sure that this is
7 accomplished?

8 General Neller: Senator Reed, first off, just let me
9 say, as I said in my statement, that whatever we do, it's
10 got to at least maintain, if not improve, our operational
11 capability. Since the Secretary made the decision to open
12 up these MOSs, we've done a number of things. First, we
13 assign women in MOSs that they already held to previously
14 restricted units to begin the process of integration. We've
15 opened up other MOSs that were previously closed to female
16 marines, like maintenance MOSs and light anti-air defense.
17 Right now, there's -- 94 percent of all MOSs in the Marine
18 Corps are open to females. We sent women to Infantry
19 Training Battalion as enlisted marines. They volunteered.
20 And we ran them through the training, developed data, and
21 see what their ability was to pass through -- pass that
22 curriculum. We also allowed women -- have continued to
23 allow women to compete in the infantry officers corps. And
24 the last thing we did, in a measured, deliberate way, was to
25 form a task force -- an integrated task force to put

1 together men and women in teams, in units -- infantry,
2 artillery, tanks, light-armor Amtracs, and run them --
3 prepare them, train them, and run them through an evaluation
4 to get some data, because we found there was not a lot of
5 data. And so, we're still assessing that data, and that
6 data will drive, along with operational views, what the
7 recommendation to the Commandant will be on opening up those
8 remaining MOSs.

9 Senator Reed: Thank you, sir. This is a challenge for
10 the -- not only the Marine Corps, but the Army. Just, as we
11 speak, there are three women candidates in the mountain
12 phase of Ranger School to see if we can validate and create
13 a -- in the Army, a pathway for Ranger qualifications for
14 females as well as males. But, thank you, and I -- for your
15 commitment to that.

16 Last year, the Personnel Subcommittee had a hearing,
17 and the former senior enlisted advisor to the Commandant,
18 Sergeant Major Richard Barrett, stated -- and I've always
19 listened to sergeant majors, they're pretty smart people --
20 but, I thought it was remarkable what he said. And, in his
21 words, "If we do not get hold of slowing down the growth of
22 personnel costs, if we do not pay a little more attention to
23 the healthcare that we so generously have received in my 33
24 years, I have never seen the level of quality of life, ever
25 -- this level. We have never had it so good. And I make

1 that point because, if we do not get a hold of slowing the
2 growth, we will become an entitlements-based, healthcare-
3 provided-based Marine Corps, and not a warfighting
4 organization." He further stated, I am told, in colorful
5 tones, that marines care most about the next fight,
6 training, and modernization. And that, I think, is the
7 dilemma that we all face. Can you comment upon that?

8 General Neller: I'm not going to speak for Sergeant
9 Major Barrett. I've heard the comments. I know Sergeant
10 Major Barrett. I think his concern is, is that we created,
11 because of the generosity of the Congress and the fact that
12 we were at war, and from -- for rightful, proper reasons, we
13 did a lot of things with medical care, and we had some
14 shortfalls.

15 Senator Reed: Right, absolutely.

16 General Neller: I mean, our facilities are the best
17 I've ever seen. And so, we've taken advantage of the
18 situation and the money that was available. So, a young
19 marine coming in today, when he walks around, or she walks
20 around, they see what they see; they don't see what it used
21 to look like. You know, Senator Tillis will attest to that
22 down at Camp Lejeune. I mean -- and the same thing at Camp
23 Pendleton -- it's very nice. Not perfect. It's good
24 enough. But, it is -- it's new. And we're going to have to
25 sustain that.

1 So, I think Sergeant Major Barrett's concern is, How do
2 we sustain it? Have we created an expectation that we can
3 meet? And if we can't meet that, what are the marines going
4 to do? At the same time, that's important, but it's as, if
5 not -- to me, it's more important that the training we give
6 them and the equipment we give them has parts, it's
7 maintainable, the training is challenging, demanding,
8 interesting, and it's going to improve our operational
9 capability. So -- and we've done that -- so, maintaining
10 that level, I think, is what his concern is, and much of
11 that is tied to resources.

12 Senator Reed: Now, my impression has always been that
13 quality-of-life issues, access to childcare, access to
14 medical facilities, are critical, but soldiers and marines
15 understand that, if they're not well-trained, well-equipped,
16 and ready to go, that's the big quality-of-life issue,
17 because that means they survive or they don't survive and
18 the mission gets accomplished or doesn't get accomplished.
19 So, we'll have to work with that.

20 My time is expired. One other issue I'll just put on
21 the table. We had a brief chat in the office. The sense
22 that the next battle we fight, the first phase will be
23 cyber-dominated, so we'll be fighting in the dark. So,
24 perhaps there'll be an opportunity for other questions later
25 this morning about how marines will relearn some of those

1 old things, like maps and onzaddic compasses and -- you
2 know, that might be very critical in the next fight, even
3 though we have the most sophisticated equipment in the
4 world.

5 Thank you very much for your service.

6 Chairman McCain: Senator Inhofe.

7 Senator Inhofe: The Chairman asked you the question
8 about the Ukraine. And I was glad he did. I was over there
9 when they had the parliamentary elections. For the first
10 time in 96 years, they only had one Communist on their
11 Parliament. I mean, that's -- that's for us, that's for the
12 West, that's their allegiance to us.

13 Your answer was very similar to General Dunford when
14 you said, "Yeah, we -- they should have defensive weapons
15 over there." What would be your choice, in looking at them,
16 as to what priorities, what types of weapons they need the
17 most right now?

18 General Neller: Senator, I've never been to Ukraine.
19 I've been to Georgia. And they've made similar requests. I
20 think what they're -- what I've heard, at least from the
21 Georgians, they're looking for defensive weapons -- antitank
22 guided-missile-type weapons.

23 Senator Inhofe: Okay, why don't -- for the record, why
24 don't you just, kind of, send your suggestions, your -- in
25 looking and making those evaluations.

1 [INFORMATION]

2 Senator Inhofe: I know that they've just finished the
3 B-model testing in -- of the F-35 out in Yuma. And you
4 haven't had a chance to go over and review it. Now, I
5 understand you will -- you are in the process of doing that
6 now, but what is your opinion so far? Have you developed
7 any yet?

8 General Neller: Senator, as you said, VMFA-121 is the
9 first F-35B squadron out at Marine Corps Air Station in
10 Yuma, Arizona. We -- our plan was to declare IOC with them
11 this month. That's still the plan. They did an operational
12 readiness evaluation. From what reports I have received,
13 but I have not seen "the report," they did very well. That
14 report is with the Commandant, and he's going to take a look
15 at that and make a recommendation as -- to the Secretary, as
16 far as them being IOC. I'd -- I'm hopeful that they passed.
17 I think they passed. I think one of the concerns we have
18 with any new system is the number of spare parts that are
19 available to keep the aircraft at the requisite level of
20 readiness. But --

21 Senator Inhofe: But, you're in the process of making
22 that evaluation now, or they are.

23 General Neller: The evaluation --

24 Senator Inhofe: You'll be inheriting that
25 responsibility.

1 General Neller: Sir, the -- General Dunford, I
2 believe, is going to make the recommendation on IOC soon.

3 Senator Inhofe: General Dunford has forecasted that
4 next decade will be characterized by small-scale crises in
5 and around coastal areas. And I understand that the Marine
6 Corps is changing its plans for development of the next-
7 generation armored combat vehicle from a self-deploying
8 vehicle to a wheeled vehicle. I always wonder, when that
9 happens, and when things are as tight as they are now,
10 although what we're facing now is unprecedented, was that a
11 budget-driven decision or do you think it's the right
12 vehicle?

13 General Neller: Senator, we had hoped to buy a high-
14 speed planing vehicle. It became too expensive and it
15 didn't have the reliability. We have not given up on high
16 water speed. We're continuing to do research and
17 development.

18 In the meantime, we need a new vehicle. The current
19 amphibian tractor is over 40 years old. There's not a lot
20 of room left to improve it. It's not very survivable on a
21 modern battlefield. It has a flat bottom. It's made of
22 aluminum. So, we're pursuing off-the-shelf vehicles from
23 vendors, and we're going to continue to keep the Amtrac or
24 the amphibian alive, and we're going to select down to two
25 vendors, this fall, build -- take 16 of their vehicles and

1 test them, and then down-select. So, we believe this
2 vehicle will not only swim -- I believe it will swim --
3 it'll improve our mobility and survivability on land.

4 Senator Inhofe: You know, the tragedy in Chattanooga
5 was one that we're all -- you already expressed your
6 sentiments about that, and we all share your sentiments --
7 there is a lot of reaction -- political reaction. Different
8 people are talking about different levels of security that
9 they should be able to use, whether it's private weapons,
10 issued weapons. Do you have any thoughts on that?

11 General Neller: Senator, I know that there's a number
12 of studies and investigations ongoing about increasing the
13 force protection for those servicemembers of all our
14 services that are outside the wire, if you will, outside the
15 major posts and stations where we have law enforcement and
16 armed security. There's some things we can do right away,
17 just more physical protection, protection of glass, glass
18 that you can't see inside. Now, that could include arming
19 individuals. There are some potential consequences to that.
20 But, I think we need to take a look at it. And so -- but,
21 at the same time, we have recruiters out there, and they're
22 out to recruit. And the story in the media this morning is
23 that they got interviewed and then they went back to work.
24 They had to go --

25 Senator Inhofe: Yeah.

1 General Neller: -- recruit. And so --

2 Senator Inhofe: Well --

3 General Neller: -- I don't want anything that we do
4 that's going to -- we need to stay connected to the American
5 people. And so, whatever we do has to ensure that we
6 continue to go to schools and go out there and find those
7 good young men and women that want to be marines.

8 Senator Inhofe: Yeah, I understand that. But, in
9 terms of protection, I think most of up here would look to
10 you -- to the military, to the uniforms -- for advice along
11 these lines. So --

12 The last thing I wanted to mention is, we -- our
13 schedules didn't get together, because of a bill that I'm
14 involved in right now. Would you make a point to come by so
15 we have a personal visit?

16 General Neller: Absolutely, Senator.

17 Senator Inhofe: Thank you very much.

18 Chairman McCain: Senator Manchin.

19 Senator Manchin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

20 And, General Neller, thank you so much for your service
21 to our country, your family's sacrifice, because I know it
22 goes hand in hand.

23 Sir, with that being said, I've asked this question to
24 everyone who's come through this committee for their
25 approval, and that would be, What do you assess as the

1 greatest risk -- or, threat the United States of America
2 faces from another country?

3 General Neller: If you're asking me about a country,
4 Senator --

5 Senator Manchin: Who poses the greatest threat to the
6 United States?

7 General Neller: -- I would say another nation-state.
8 I would agree with General Dunford that Russia has the most
9 increasing-capable force, and their actions and the fact
10 that they have strategic forces make them the greatest
11 potential threat, although I don't think they want to fight
12 us. Right now, I don't think they want to kill Americans.
13 I think violent extremists want to kill us. And their
14 capability is not that great, but their intent is high. And
15 the fact that they have a message that seems to resonate
16 around the world, not just in this country, but in other
17 countries in the Western world, they concern me equally.

18 Senator Manchin: Your overall view, basically with
19 that. So, Russia seems to be the one who has the greatest
20 capability of doing harm to us, if they would desire that.
21 So, we have to keep our eye on the ball. But, we don't seem
22 to have any relations with them, or, if they are, they're
23 just -- I've been told that the Cold War is colder today
24 than it was when it was declared. So, I don't know how you
25 would interact, as far as trying to build that relationship

1 or communicate with your equals in Russia, or do you have
2 open lines of communications with them?

3 General Neller: I've met with Russian officers in
4 previous places, in previous times. I've never met with --
5 they have a naval infantry or a marine corps. If there were
6 opportunities to meet with them, like there are with any
7 other country, it's -- there's always a -- it's always good
8 to talk, even if you disagree. I met with Chinese officers,
9 and we didn't agree on very much, but we had a nice lunch.

10 Senator Manchin: I appreciate that.

11 Second, I would say that, you know, I think all of our
12 hearts go out to the families of the marines who lost their
13 life in Chattanooga. We hope that never repeats itself
14 again. What's your plan of doing that, to make sure that
15 the Reserve offices and recruiting offices are safe and
16 secure around the nation?

17 General Neller: Well, Senator, this -- whatever we do
18 as a military, it's going to have to be consistent. And
19 Admiral Gortney is the Commander of Northern Command, so
20 he's ultimately responsible for the force protection, and we
21 provide advice. And we have a Marine component with
22 NORTHCOM. And so, we would work with them to implement
23 whatever policies or procedures that we could do. But, in
24 the immediate moment, they've increased certain levels and
25 measures that they've put in place, which I'm not going to

1 discuss here, that I believe are prudent at this time.

2 There are some more physical things that they're going to
3 look at.

4 Senator Manchin: You know there's a lot of discussion
5 here on the Hill, basically about those who work in that
6 type of an environment should be armed to protect themselves
7 with government-issues. They've even talked about their own
8 private-issues, they're bringing them on in for protecting
9 themselves. So, that seems to be the dialogue that's going on
10 right now. And I don't know if you have an opinion on that,
11 if you would like to see those who work -- or, if you worked
12 in a recruitment office, would you want to have government-
13 issue arms to protect yourself?

14 General Neller: Senator, I think we need to take a
15 look at it, but I have some concerns about the second- and
16 third-order effects of that, particularly on the recruiting
17 -- the recruiters and their access and things they need to
18 do. There are some practical matters that have to be worked
19 out. But, I believe that'll all come out in the
20 investigations and the planning that's going on right now.
21 So, I'm going to -- I would -- I'm not going to discount it,
22 but I think that's probably at the end and the most extreme
23 measure that we could take to do what we need to do, which
24 is protect those servicemembers out there doing their
25 mission.

1 Senator Manchin: And if I could ask you, just your
2 view, because marines always seem to be the first ones in
3 when we have a conflict. And, with that being said, over in
4 the Middle East is Afghanistan and Iraq. What's your
5 feelings about a three-state solution in Iraq, versus trying
6 to continue to keep a one-state Baghdad solution to the
7 problem that we have over there? Seems like that we're not
8 getting very much traction on going down the same path we've
9 been down. So, I don't know what your thoughts would be on
10 a Kurdistan, a Shi'itestan, and Sunnistan, and have Baghdad
11 basically have three separates so they would have the desire
12 to fight, where we don't have the Sunnis' desire to fight
13 right now, it seems.

14 General Neller: Senator, I would respectfully say
15 that's way out of my lane, to talk about a three-state
16 solution, but I do believe --

17 Senator Manchin: But, do you think we have -- I'm so
18 sorry, sir, because my time is running -- but, do you think
19 we have a problem with getting the Sunnis the will to fight
20 in that area?

21 General Neller: I was in Anbar for a year. They'll
22 fight. But, they have to believe, like any person who's
23 fighting, that the government that supports them is going to
24 support them. So, if the Iraqi government can convince the
25 Sunni tribes in Anbar, in Saladin, in Diyala, it is my

1 personal, professional opinion, they will fight. If they
2 can't do that, they will continue to have a hard time.

3 Senator Manchin: Thank you so much, sir, appreciate
4 it.

5 Chairman McCain: Senator Sessions.

6 Senator Sessions: Thank you.

7 And thank you, General Neller, for your service, and
8 Ms. Neller, for your service and your family's commitment to
9 defending America.

10 I think you answered well when you said, "Right now, we
11 don't think the Russians want to kill us, but the ISIS --
12 ISIL does," and actually taking action to that end.

13 I had the opportunity to be with a wise member of
14 parliament of one of our allies recently, and his comment
15 was that our number-one achievable priority now should be to
16 defeat ISIS before it grows and becomes even stronger, and
17 that there's a danger that it could grow stronger. How
18 would you think about that, in terms of our immediate
19 achievable priority? Should we be taking more effective
20 action to confront the rise of this extremist group in Iraq
21 and in the Levant?

22 General Neller: Senator, I believe that the actions
23 we're taking now in support of the Iraqi government, the
24 effectiveness remains to be seen. Right now, I mean,
25 they're in the process of trying to regain control of

1 Ramadi. So, I believe that -- I believe the Iraqis can do
2 this. I believe they have the capability, and, if well led
3 and supported, they have the will.

4 So, to your bigger question of, Do we need to go after
5 ISIL and make sure that they are not able to create a safe
6 haven and to continue to foment their violent theories of
7 how life is supposed to be? -- yes, sir, I do. And, if
8 confirmed, I would be -- look forward to offering potential
9 other options that we could possibly be more effective.
10 But, right now, I think -- I think we're going to see some
11 success, here. I may be wrong. But, it's not going to be
12 overnight. It's going to take some time.

13 Senator Sessions: Well, a key area is al-Anbar region.
14 And you were there for a year. And were you there when the
15 transformation took place -- and the marines, I know, were
16 involved in that -- when they -- the tribal leaders reacted
17 against al-Qaeda and basically ran them out of the area?

18 General Neller: Yes, Senator, I was.

19 Senator Sessions: So, you've seen that. And how did
20 we help them? What did we do to convince them that they had
21 the kind of support that they could be successful and throw
22 out al-Qaeda? And do you believe that we can do that again?
23 And are they capable of throwing out ISIS, which I also
24 believe they do not favor, and oppose, and wish were not
25 there?

1 General Neller: We supported, as we are now, the Iraqi
2 Security Forces. The situation was not as -- there was --
3 the adversary didn't actually hold as much ground then as
4 they do now. I'm not aware -- I have not been there since I
5 left, in 2007. I was back in 2011, right at the end, when
6 the U.S. forces pulled out. So, my knowledge base is aged,
7 and I would hope to go back and see it with my own eyes, if
8 confirmed as the Commandant, to get a better understanding
9 of what's going on. But, similar to what we're doing now,
10 we provided capability, we provided support, we provided
11 training. And, at the end of the day, our goal was that
12 they would own it, because, at the end of the day, they have
13 to fix this.

14 Senator Sessions: Well, they were successful, to a
15 degree that many of us didn't expect. And it was a decisive
16 moment in the creation of a stabilized Iraq. There's no
17 doubt about it. And I remember, I believe General Stewart
18 -- was it Colonel -- I don't know if was colonel or general
19 at that time; now he's a defense intelligence commander --
20 but, he was there, and we did a lot of things that supported
21 them and gave them confidence. Without putting large
22 numbers of forces on the ground, without leading in combat
23 operations and conducting those operations, do you think
24 that providing embedded soldiers with the Iraqi forces, with
25 communications systems, with the ability to call in

1 airstrikes, resupply, evacuation, those kind of things that
2 an embedded American soldier might provide, and the
3 confidence it provides -- could that be a positive factor in
4 helping the Iraqi forces have the confidence necessary to
5 get on the offensive and once again throw off these
6 extremists?

7 General Neller: Senator, it's been my experience that
8 if we have Americans with foreign militaries providing those
9 capabilities, that they do perform at a higher level. But,
10 there have to be other things in place so that the force
11 protection of those forces, those soldiers, sailors, airmen,
12 and marines, is also guaranteed.

13 Senator Sessions: Well, I thank you, and I trust that
14 you will provide the best military advice you can to the
15 President, to your superiors, and to the Congress. And I'll
16 ask you, Will you, when asked, continue to give your best
17 advice?

18 General Neller: Yes, Senator, I will.

19 Senator Sessions: Thank you.

20 Chairman McCain: Senator King.

21 Senator King: Senator Sessions, that was a great
22 series of questions, because they were the same ones that I
23 had.

24 [Laughter.]

25 Senator King: So. I appreciate it.

1 I just want to touch -- refine a couple of those
2 points.

3 You're not only being nominated to be Commandant of the
4 Marine Corps, you'll be a member of the Joint Chiefs of
5 Staff, National Security Council Advisor to the Secretary of
6 Defense, Advisor to the President. You don't strike me as a
7 guy that's going to be shy about speaking up when you feel
8 it's necessary, but I want to urge you to do so. Your
9 value, your experience, your wisdom, your judgment is why
10 you're in this position. And if you don't provide it in an
11 unvarnished way, then you're not fulfilling this job. I
12 deeply hope that you will be forthcoming and as
13 straightforward as you have been today with the highest
14 levels of the administration, because that's just vitally
15 important. The President isn't well served if he doesn't
16 have people who tell him the straight truth. Are you
17 committed to that mission?

18 General Neller: I am, Senator.

19 Senator King: Thank you.

20 Again, to follow up on Senator Sessions' questions
21 about our role in Iraq. You were there, as you've
22 mentioned. How do we -- what are the elements of a
23 successful advise-and-assist mission? How do we convey the
24 will to fight, other than simply providing weapons and
25 supplies? What are the pieces? What did you learn from

1 your experience in Iraq that we -- because we are going to
2 -- we have to have these people fight for themselves. If
3 they don't, this battle is lost.

4 General Neller: Senator, there's -- there is the
5 material piece. You have to give equipment that's reliable
6 and works, and then you have to train the force to use that
7 equipment, and they have to have confidence in it, they have
8 to be competent in its use. They have to be able to shoot,
9 use the radios, drive. And then they have to be willing to
10 go out and confront their adversary. That requires
11 leadership. And the most difficult part, I believe, will be
12 -- there are leaders there. Every -- there's leaders in
13 every unit. You've just got to find them. And, you know,
14 one of the frustrations we had previously, back many years
15 ago, was, there were Iraqis there, and we had to make sure
16 that the right Iraqi was leading the unit. And that wasn't
17 always the case.

18 So, again, I have not been there. I have not met the
19 officers in charge. The marines that are there -- from time
20 to time, I hear from them. They are not discouraged.
21 They're pressing. And so, they need people to train. They
22 need the equipment. They need the ability to train them.
23 And then they need -- the Iraqi need -- Iraqis need a
24 leadership.

25 So, it's kind of a stew of things that have to be put

1 together. And I think we're trying to help them make that
2 stew. And we'll see, here -- as they go toward the Ramadi
3 objective, we'll see if they're effective or not.

4 Senator King: Well, the discussion today has centered
5 on Iraq, but we've also got the problem of Syria, where we
6 don't have a security force to be training and working with.
7 And my concern is that time is running out, in the sense
8 that ISIL is not only gaining ground, they're gaining ground
9 organizationally. There have been reports recently that
10 they're looking more and more like a state. They are
11 governing, they are talking about succession of their
12 leadership, and they are consolidating in many of the areas
13 where they are. And I understand the limits of American
14 force, and that we can't do it all with airpower, but how do
15 we deal with Syria? We're doing some limited training
16 there, but it seems very insignificant, given the nature of
17 the threat. We could be very successful in Iraq, but you've
18 still got that large ungoverned area of eastern Syria that
19 is a potential home base for this group.

20 General Neller: Syria, in my mind, is much more
21 complicated than Iraq, although -- and they are -- but they
22 are linked. So, if Iraq were able to reestablish their
23 borders, in my military opinion, it would facilitate what we
24 would do in Syria. But, right now I think the objective to
25 train Syrian opposition fighters against ISIL is -- with the

1 ability to protect themselves -- is a prudent move. It
2 hasn't been as successful as I believe any of us had hoped.
3 But, right now, I'm -- I think that's as good as we're going
4 to get right now. But, the Syria situation, again, I follow
5 it, but I don't -- I'm not there, I don't live it every day.
6 It is exponentially, in my mind, more complicated than Iraq.

7 Senator King: I agree.

8 Thank you, General. Thank you, again, for your
9 service.

10 Chairman McCain: Senator Fischer.

11 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

12 And thank you, General, and your wife, for the service
13 you and your family have given to this country. We look
14 forward to your continued service in the future. Thank you,
15 sir.

16 When it comes to recruiting and retaining your marines,
17 what's the most important thing? Is it modernization? Is
18 it having that up-to-date equipment? Is it operations
19 tempo? Is it compensation? What's the most important to
20 these young people?

21 General Neller: Senator, we've done a lot of surveys
22 to try to find out, you know, what is the one thing that
23 convinces a marine to stay. It -- there is not one thing.
24 It's -- could be duty station, it could be a chance for
25 special training, it could be opportunity to go overseas,

1 could be education, it could be just quality of life and the
2 experience that they've had. So, every marine is different.
3 And so, we have to offer kind of a -- you know, find out
4 what it is, and, if we want to keep them, convince what it
5 is we have to offer them to keep them. So, they're -- we're
6 fortunate that we've had a lot of marines, we have not had
7 problems either recruiting or retaining. I'm not naive
8 enough to think that that'll always be the case. But, right
9 now, we have sufficient tools, if you will, to convince
10 people to stay. I would say, though, for married marines, a
11 lot of them, it's housing and childcare and medical.

12 Senator Fischer: How are you able to fulfill the
13 combatant commanders' requirements? You're looking at
14 reductions as we move forward, here, and there are some
15 risks involved with those reductions, I think. Are you
16 able, right now, to fulfill those requirements? Do you
17 think you will continue to be able -- and do you think you
18 may have to change your role in the future in order to meet
19 there requirements required by those commands?

20 General Neller: Senator, right now, we believe we are
21 meeting the combatant commanders' requirements. The
22 combatant commanders have a lot of requirements. And our
23 concern right now, as a service -- as the Marine Forces
24 Command, my task to the Commandant is to help generate the
25 force to meet those requirements. So, we are working -- you

1 know, we're trying to keep the force at a 2-to-1 deployment
2 ratio. And if the force gets smaller and the requirements
3 don't go down, we're going to be inside that, which is of
4 concern to us. So, you're always balancing risk to the
5 force versus risk to the mission.

6 So, we'll work with the combatant commanders to see if
7 we can't figure out new, different, innovative ways to give
8 them the capability they need to meet the mission and, at
9 the same time, buy us a little more depth-to-dwell relief.

10 Senator Fischer: What's the mission of the Marines?

11 General Neller: The mission of the Marine Corps is to
12 provide the Nation's force in readiness as crisis response
13 and to seize and secure advanced naval bases as part of the
14 naval campaign, and to do those things as the President may
15 direct.

16 Senator Fischer: And have you seen that mission change
17 during your time in the Marines?

18 General Neller: No, ma'am, I have not.

19 Senator Fischer: As we look ahead at different threats
20 that are coming up in the future, do you see the development
21 of the anti-access weapons, like the long-range anti-ship
22 missiles -- is that going to impact the Marines' operations
23 at all?

24 General Neller: Clearly, the increasing capabilities
25 of potential adversaries and the anti-access area denial

1 battlespace is of concern. We talk about this. We exercise
2 it. We train it. As we've gotten our forces off the
3 battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan, and gotten back on
4 ship, we're working that with our naval partners as part of
5 the naval campaign. There's both a technical piece to this
6 and also a tactical piece to this. We have to be a little
7 more artful and skillful in how we approach this, because
8 they have capability. So, the days we could sail where we
9 wanted to sail without consideration of that, those days are
10 gone.

11 Senator Fischer: So, you think that will have a
12 strategic impact, then, on how marines are going to be
13 deployed in the future?

14 General Neller: We're going to have to be very wary of
15 these capabilities, and we're going to have to part -- as
16 part of a Joint Force and a naval campaign, there will have
17 be the conditions set so that we can safely project that
18 Marine Corps power ashore.

19 Senator Fischer: Thank you, sir. It's an honor to
20 meet you.

21 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

22 Senator Fischer: Senator McCaskill.

23 Senator McCaskill: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

24 I know we had an opportunity to discuss, General,
25 sexual assault and the problem around it, and the progress

1 that we see in some of the numbers, but the stubborn and
2 cultural issue of retaliation. And you have certainly made
3 a commitment to me that that is going to be a priority for
4 you to figure out the best way to get at that, in terms of
5 the culture within the Marine Corps.

6 I also want to take a moment to acknowledge that the
7 Marines have work to do, in terms of recruiting women. As
8 you know, only 7 percent of the marines are women. And if
9 you're confirmed -- when you're confirmed, you'll have to
10 make a really important decision on whether to recommend
11 that any positions remain closed to female marines. What
12 I'm worried about is the pipeline. If we are not recruiting
13 more women, you are not going to get women in the various
14 positions that will allow the kind of integration that's
15 going to ultimately make the Marine Corps stronger and
16 better, and make our Nation more secure. And so, I would
17 love to have some feedback from you, after you're confirmed,
18 about any ideas that you have as the chief on how we can do
19 a better job of recruiting more women marines.

20 General Neller: Absolutely, Senator.

21 Senator McCaskill: Let's talk about your audit. I'm a
22 former auditor. I'm big on audits. You all -- you've been
23 under audit longer than any of the other services. And
24 you've had the opportunity to gain the most from this
25 process. It's my understanding that, through the audit

1 process, the Marine Corps identified that it, historically,
2 was requesting too much annual funding for permanent changes
3 of station, and was able to reallocate about 100 million in
4 the 2012 Future Years Defense Plan to make better use of
5 those funds. I mean, this is a great example. I think
6 people think an audit is like going to the dentist; you
7 know, you know you've got to do it, and it's going to be
8 painful, and, when it's over, you're not sure that it really
9 was worth it. But, audits aren't like that, because audits
10 reveal a lot that help you allocate resources more
11 effectively and figure out where your needs really are and
12 maybe, like you've found with the FYDP, that there was an
13 ability to move money around in a way that was important to
14 the Marines.

15 In 2017, all of the services are supposed to have -- be
16 audit-ready. I've been on this, and on this for as long as
17 I've been sitting on this committee, and I'm skeptical that
18 we're going to get there by 2017. And I'm also concerned
19 that it's the last statutory deadline the services and the
20 DOD must meet. I would like to have your commitment to make
21 the audit process within the Marines a permanent priority,
22 going forward, so we never again get to this place where we
23 have a massive amount of resources with no transparency.

24 General Neller: Senator, you have my commitment, if
25 confirmed, that we will work this as hard as we can and get

1 a clean or a qualified audit that shows that we can account
2 for every single penny we spend.

3 Senator McCaskill: Let's talk about -- thank you for
4 that commitment, and I will be like a broken record on the
5 audit thing until we get audits from all of our branches and
6 we can begin -- it would really help us in our jobs. It
7 would help us make the case, if we were able to have the
8 transparency that an audit provides.

9 Let's turn to readiness just for a moment. In response
10 to the advance policy questions for this hearing, you noted
11 that the current 1-to-2 deployment-to-dwell ratio is
12 unsustainable. And I want to talk about the fact that the
13 challenges posed by ISIS in the Middle East and an
14 aggressive Russia, neither one of these were planned for.
15 So, what would the effect be on the force if a significant
16 Marine Corps response was required to address an unplanned
17 contingency overseas in the near future?

18 General Neller: Well, Senator, you'd have to do one of
19 two things. You'd have to either grow the force -- we
20 believe the optimal size force for the Marine Corps is
21 186,000 marines. We can't afford that. So, if we had an --
22 a commitment elsewhere, we would take forces that are
23 currently forward deployed, such as in the Far East, in
24 Okinawa, and we would have to reposition them to wherever
25 that contingency was. We did that during the combat in

1 Iraq, and it's only through the past few years we've been
2 able to reestablish our presence that we've had,
3 historically, in the Pacific. So, we have some options.
4 The other option, the least favorable, is, we go all-in. We
5 activate our Reserves, and we go and do what needs to be
6 done. We've done that before, too. That -- you can do that
7 for a short period of time, but, as you mentioned, it's not
8 sustainable.

9 Senator McCaskill: And what is the short period of
10 time? I mean, in your best estimate -- and I don't want to
11 hold you to anything here, but -- I mean, what I'm trying to
12 get a handle on is, we are wrestling with very difficult
13 decisions about the Middle East and Iran's nuclear
14 capability. And there are some in the Senate that I believe
15 are tempted by the idea that we could go in and bomb Iran
16 and set off what could be a war much bigger than any that we
17 have been trying -- any contingency that we've been trying
18 to fight in over the last decade in the Middle East. What
19 -- I mean, how soon would we have to do emergency spending?
20 And is that, in fact, the most efficient way and best way to
21 do it?

22 General Neller: Senator, I -- it's a difficult
23 question. I'd have to get back to you, as far as the
24 details, without knowing the exact size of the force, what
25 the exact mission was, what the combat ratios were, and what

1 we would need to do, what we have to accomplish, militarily,
2 to achieve whatever the political objective was.

3 Senator McCaskill: I -- and I know it was kind of a
4 dumb question in that regard, because it's very hard for
5 that question to be answered without more specifics. I
6 guess I'm just trying to get out into the conversation that
7 talking about things in the abstract sometimes sound a lot
8 better than what it is in reality. And the more we are
9 informed about what the reality would be, I think, the
10 better job we can do making sure you have everything you
11 need.

12 I appreciate you. I enjoyed meeting your wife. I
13 understand that she and I almost share a birthday. And I
14 think, with -- we are born when we're born, that you're
15 supposed to be really strong and capable of being mean and
16 capable of taking no prisoners.

17 [Laughter.]

18 Senator McCaskill: And so, I am pleased --

19 Chairman McCain: Senator McCaskill knows about that.

20 [Laughter.]

21 Senator McCaskill: Yeah. I am pleased that she and I
22 might share some of those traits. And I think she will be a
23 terrific addition to the barracks and to the hosting that
24 you do there for so many. And I know how proud she is of
25 you and how proud we all are of your family.

1 Chairman McCain: Senator Sullivan.

2 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3 And, General, congratulations on your nomination.

4 I also want to echo -- I know that many of my
5 colleagues on the committee want to echo -- what you talked
6 about, in terms of our shock and sense of condolences to the
7 families and friends of the marines from Chattanooga. We've
8 got to make sure that kind of activities don't happen again.

9 I wanted to go back to the issue of readiness. You
10 see, from this committee's questions, you're going to get a
11 lot of different questions from the committee on a whole
12 host of different subjects. But, I wanted to ask about the
13 primary mission of the Marine Corps infantry, which is the
14 heart and soul of the Marine Corps, and it's the mission to
15 close with and destroy the enemies of our Nation. Sometimes
16 we don't talk about that, that what we're really focused on
17 doing in the Marine Corps is being ready to kill the enemies
18 of our country. Does that remain the highest priority, in
19 terms of Marine Corps training, particularly infantry
20 training, or do you see the Marine Corps being pulled in a
21 variety of different areas, different missions, different
22 mandates, in terms of training?

23 General Neller: Senator, our -- you know, we train for
24 a variety of missions. I believe -- I can only speak for
25 myself, but my professional opinion always been is, if I can

1 do the high end of the mission, the most high-risk, the most
2 dangerous, the most kinetic, that -- and I've trained the
3 force to do that, and they're disciplined -- that I can
4 bring them back down to the other end. There are specific
5 things. So, we do practice HADR things. We do NEOs. We do
6 training of foreign militaries. But, our primary mission is
7 to be a force in readiness that can fight at all parts of
8 the range of military operations, but particularly at the
9 high end.

10 Senator Sullivan: And, you know, you and the Chairman
11 were talking about the 1970s. As you know, infantry
12 officers in the Marine Corps are often encouraged to read a
13 -- this book, which I think is a great book. It's called
14 "This Kind of War," by T.R. Fehrenbach, which actually
15 focuses on the 1950s and the Korean War and an example of
16 what you mentioned earlier about the Marine Corps being a
17 force in readiness when the country was least ready. But,
18 do you worry about levels of readiness and training, that we
19 could have another Task Force Smith in the next 5 to 10 or
20 15 years if we don't get our funding and training levels in
21 readiness, properly adjusted?

22 General Neller: Senator, that's also one of my
23 favorite books, not because it's a good story, just because
24 it's a good lesson.

25 I think that's always in the back of our minds. And I

1 think the current fiscal situation kind of brings it a
2 little bit more to the forefront. But, at the same time, as
3 long as we can recruit and retain good marines, and our gear
4 is functional, I don't see us going to the point of where --
5 of what happened, historically, to that force when it was
6 put on the Korean Peninsula. Could it happen? I'm not
7 going to speculate on that. All I can tell you is, if
8 confirmed, I will give every ounce of effort I possibly can
9 to not ever allow that to happen, just as I know -- not to
10 speak for General Milley or any other service chiefs -- I
11 know General Duvern -- that's our job. That's why, if
12 confirmed as the Commandant, I'm responsible to you that
13 that doesn't happen.

14 Senator Sullivan: Thank you.

15 Let me turn -- the Chairman mentioned that the -- in
16 his statement, the importance of the Pacific rebalance and
17 the critical role that the Marine Corps is playing in that.
18 I think it's something that this committee, this Congress,
19 is trying to support. I think, in some ways, the Obama
20 administration undermines their own strategy, in terms of
21 the credibility of the strategy, by slashing Army forces in
22 the Asia-Pacific, which is what they're proposing to do. I
23 just have a few questions related to the rebalance.

24 Are you satisfied with how that's going, overall, in
25 terms of the credibility of the rebalance for all the

1 services? And, more particularly, are you satisfied with
2 the redeployment of marines from Okinawa to Guam, Australia,
3 possibly Hawaii? And do you think that, when we do that,
4 that we're going to have the strategic lift to take what's a
5 concentrated force now in Okinawa to a much more dispersed
6 force -- will we have the strategic lift to be able to move
7 those forces if and when we need them in a contingency?

8 General Neller: Senator, I'm not qualified to make a
9 comment on the status of the other services, as I simply am
10 not witting to what they're doing.

11 As far as the Marines, we left Okinawa to go to Iraq
12 and Afghanistan. We're back. The force that was there
13 before is present. They're training, they're properly
14 equipped, they're ready to go. We have changed our
15 deployment. Now, instead of one of the battalions going to
16 Okinawa, it goes to Australia for 6 months, and then
17 eventually, because of the agreements, we'll distribute the
18 force to Guam and put some more marines on, on Hawaii.

19 I think the concern is, as you state, that once we do
20 this, our ability to move that force -- training
21 opportunities on Okinawa, mainland Japan, Guam, are limited,
22 and you have to be able to move to where the training is.
23 You have to move to other nations. You have to be able get
24 to Korea, you have to get to Thailand, you have to get to
25 the Philippines. And to do that, you need sealift and

1 airlift.

2 So, when we do this -- and we will do this -- we --
3 we're going to have to -- that's going to be the hard part.
4 And there are some opportunities with high-speed vessels and
5 things with the Navy and the movement of a three-ship ARG
6 from the east Coast to the Pacific area, which will give us
7 more lift. So, that's going to have to happen. But, I
8 concur with you that the strategic lift is kind of the long
9 pole, potentially, in that tent.

10 Senator Sullivan: So, right now, you don't believe
11 that that -- our strategic lift capability matches our
12 proposed deployment laydown?

13 General Neller: It -- I believe it will, but it
14 remains to be seen once we get on Guam and have to move
15 these forces around. We do a pretty good job right now,
16 but, again, we're not on Guam, and we've got decent training
17 in Hawaii, up in the -- up at the PTA. But, we still have
18 to be able to move these forces around. So, I'm concerned
19 about, particularly, gray-hull amphibious lift.

20 Senator Sullivan: Thank you.

21 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

22 Chairman McCain: Senator Hirono.

23 Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

24 General Neller, thank you and your family for your
25 service.

1 And, of course, the Marines are an important part of
2 the military presence in Hawaii at Marine Forces Pacific
3 Command and at the Kaneohe Bay. And we're going to get more
4 marines as we move them out of Futenma, Okinawa. So, thank
5 you very much for all that you do.

6 I also am very committed to the rebalance to the Asia-
7 Pacific. And you mentioned in your advance questions,
8 quote, "Our strong Marine presence in the region" -- meaning
9 the Asia-Pacific region -- "plays a significant role in
10 promoting the regional security and stability." So, if
11 confirmed, I trust that you will continue to support a
12 tangible -- tangible rebalance to build and maintain the
13 important partnerships that we have in this area of the
14 world.

15 General Neller: Yes, Senator.

16 Senator Hirono: You mentioned, in your -- the earlier
17 response to Senator Sullivan, how important training is.
18 So, the missions that the marines perform, including theater
19 security cooperation, exercises with partner nations'
20 forces, and contingency operations, require our forces to
21 maintain a high level of readiness and training. The
22 availability of training ranges, such as Pohakuloa Training
23 Area, which you just noted, on the Big Island and others,
24 are critical to the Marine Corps' ability to conduct
25 operations in the Pacific. Could you share your thoughts on

1 the importance of training ranges, especially as we continue
2 the rebalance to the Asia-Pacific?

3 General Neller: Senator, if we're going to do what we
4 need to do to be ready, we have to have ranges that support
5 our ability to use our weapons and to maneuver the force.
6 One of the great advantages of a training area like
7 Pohakuloa is that we're able to go up there and drop bombs
8 and shoot artillery and do a lot of the things that we need
9 to do. And there is some maneuver space up there. Plus, we
10 have the advantage -- we have to actually deploy there. So,
11 you go up there, it's like -- whether -- even though it's
12 only a matter of miles, it doesn't really matter; you pick
13 up, and you move. So, wherever we go as we position this
14 force around the Pacific, we have to be concerned that the
15 -- that there's ranges and training areas there so that that
16 force can, at a minimum, sustain the readiness that they
17 have once they arrive.

18 Senator Hirono: I think this -- this committee is
19 definitely aware of the need to have these training areas.
20 And we have a number of them in Hawaii. But, there are
21 always issues relating to making sure that we are in concert
22 with the concerns of the community. So, that will remain,
23 especially with regard to Pohakuloa.

24 You were asked some questions regarding sexual assault
25 in the military, which this committee has spent considerable

1 time on. So, you note that it is the responsibility of the
2 commanders to set a positive climate. So, beyond command
3 climate surveys, for example, what other methods are used to
4 determine a commander's ability to establish a positive
5 command climate, where a marine would feel that he or she
6 could report a crime without fear of retaliation? I think
7 this becomes ever more important as you integrate women into
8 the various positions in the Marine Corps. So, for example,
9 what kind of guidance would you give your commanders about
10 specific actions they should take to create an environment
11 in which retaliation, which is a major focal area for our --
12 for many of us on this committee, both overt and
13 particularly the subtle forms of retaliations that could
14 occur?

15 General Neller: Senator, we have a very detailed
16 selection process for those that are -- have the opportunity
17 and privilege to lead marines. And so, a part of -- their
18 records are reviewed, and a board of senior officers
19 determine that they are the best and most capable. Once
20 they assume that office, their seniors in the chain of
21 command monitor what goes in that unit, not just
22 operationally, but what goes on as far as their discipline.
23 And so, that's being tracked. We also have courses, before
24 they assume command, where we talk to them about what their
25 responsibilities are. And this topic, along with other

1 topics, are part of that. So, they understand their legal
2 responsibility, their legal authority, their moral and
3 ethical authority to lead their marines.

4 Senator Hirono: We recognize, General, that changing
5 the culture is not an easy task. So, I know you're aware
6 that this issue will be of ongoing concern to all of us.

7 Thank you.

8 Chairman McCain: Senator Wicker.

9 Senator Wicker: General Neller, thank you very much
10 for your service. And thanks for coming by the offices to
11 talk to so many of us before this hearing.

12 How many marines do we have now in the United States?

13 General Neller: In the continental United States right
14 now?

15 Senator Wicker: I mean, how -- in the United States
16 Marines.

17 General Neller: Just under 184,000, Senator.

18 Senator Wicker: You don't anticipate that number
19 dropping very much in the next 4 to 5 years, do you?

20 General Neller: We believe that by the end of FY17,
21 we'll be down to around 182,000.

22 Senator Wicker: So, maybe a drop of only 2,000, Marine
23 Corps-wide.

24 General Neller: Yes, Senator.

25 Senator Wicker: Okay. And it would -- would it be a

1 mistake to go much lower than that?

2 General Neller: If we were to go lower than that,
3 Senator, the depth-to-dwell ratios that I'm concerned about,
4 and the Commandant's concerned about, would be -- would
5 increase the risk to the force and our ability to meet
6 combatant commanders' requirements.

7 Senator Wicker: With those requirements and the ratios
8 that you want to maintain, how are we doing with recruiting?
9 And are we getting the type of young person we need? And
10 what motivates someone to join the Marine Corps today?

11 General Neller: We're doing very well. And I think
12 that's something that we're watching. But, our manpower
13 director, Lieutenant General Valaquez, the other day,
14 briefed us that right now, for the next fiscal year, we've
15 already signed up 55 percent of the requirement. And so,
16 those marines are in a pool, waiting to come to recruit
17 training. And they're not just marking time, they're
18 working with their recruiters, voluntarily, to get
19 themselves ready to go.

20 The quality of those recruits -- potential recruits --
21 is very, very high. We have a very high standard, and I
22 think that's both a credit to our recruiters, and it's also
23 -- reflects in the quality of the force.

24 On the officer side, we have at least three college
25 graduates waiting for every spot to go -- become a Marine

1 officer.

2 So, we're in a very good place. Again, I don't take
3 that for granted, but I'm hopeful we can keep that going.

4 What inspires or motivates somebody to join the Marine
5 Corps? Senator, that varies from individual to individual.
6 It could be something to prove, somebody told them they
7 couldn't do it, family heritage, want to serve their Nation,
8 want to learn a trade, want to get a -- the great benefits
9 of the 9/11 G.I. Bill, or they just want to be a marine.

10 Senator Wicker: You were walking through a student
11 union, and a poster caught your eye, back in the '70s. Is
12 that right?

13 General Neller: Actually, it was a big, tall guy
14 wearing those -- blue uniform.

15 Senator Wicker: Okay. More than a poster.

16 What frustrates our Active Duty marines now?

17 General Neller: Oh, I think sometimes they get
18 frustrated with their leadership. I think we have to work
19 hard to challenge these young men and women. They're smart.
20 And they want to be -- they want to do important things that
21 keep them engaged, but, when they're done, they want us to
22 say they're done. And that's fair. And so -- but, they --
23 because we've done such a good job, you know, we're kind of
24 victims of our own success. So, we owe them, you know, good
25 training, good gear, good organization, good leadership.

1 And then their end of the deal is, show up, bring their A-
2 game every day, work hard, train hard, and then, when we're
3 done, then they can, you know, take a little bit of a break;
4 at the same time, knowing they're never, never not a marine.

5 Senator Wicker: Let me follow up on your conversation
6 with Senator Sullivan about sealift. And I want to thank
7 the Marine Corps for making the case for the amphib, and
8 particularly the 12th LPD. We -- I don't think we would
9 have gotten the 12th LPD through this committee and through
10 the Congress, both houses, on a bipartisan basis, if it had
11 not been for the Marine Corps coming and saying that that --
12 we very much needed that for us to complete the mission.

13 Mr. Brzezinski was here earlier this year and talked
14 about the need for the amphibious forces to be in the
15 Baltic. And we've had discussion about Russia and the
16 seriousness of the Russian threat, as well as the more
17 immediate threat of ISIS. But, what is the reason for being
18 particularly careful, as Mr. Brzezinski mentioned, about the
19 amphib forces in the Baltic Sea area?

20 General Neller: Well, Senator, we just actually did an
21 exercise in the Baltic with our U.S. and a number of
22 coalition ships. It was called Agile Spirit, I believe,
23 commanded by Vice Admiral Jamie Foggo, who is the 6th Fleet
24 commander. So, we did an exercise in the Baltic. I'm sure
25 it was paid close attention to by certain countries in that

1 part of the world --

2 Senator Wicker: I hope so.

3 General Neller: -- as we -- I do, too -- and as we
4 projected power ashore, did a landing with Poles and
5 Lithuanians and Estonians, and then trained ashore, and then
6 with U.S. Army forces there. So, there is interest in the
7 Baltic because it's on the perimeter of certain land masses
8 that you might have to gain access to. And then, three NATO
9 allies are -- that are very small countries, live on the
10 east end of the Baltic Sea, and they're concerned about
11 potential aggression against them. So, we're there to
12 reassure them.

13 Senator Wicker: I would say -- is it fair to say they
14 remember, not too long ago, when there was a different
15 dynamic in that area, and they appreciate the Marines being
16 there with them and the United States being there with them?

17 Thank you for your service, and thank you for your
18 testimony, sir.

19 Chairman McCain: Senator Kaine.

20 Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

21 Thank you, General Neller, and to your family.
22 Congratulations on a wonderful service, thus far.

23 A few questions. I want to go back to -- you talked a
24 bit about gender integration earlier, and we're -- I want to
25 kind of get your -- your take, first, on how it's going, and

1 then the kind of philosophy that the Marine Corps is
2 undertaking to carry out that mission, if you could talk
3 about that.

4 General Neller: Senator, when the Secretary made the
5 decision to open up all occupational fields, the service
6 chiefs and the services were getting a certain amount of
7 time to take a look at how they might do this. We have
8 worked hard to work in a way to figure out how we will
9 integrate. We've opened up MOSs, we've put marine -- female
10 marine officers, staff NCOs, and NCOs in units where
11 previously women weren't allowed to serve. They've done
12 well. We're going to continue to do that.

13 And then, to determine the last part, whether we would,
14 based on a standard, allow women to serve in infantry,
15 artillery, tanks, light-armored reconnaissance, amphibian
16 tractors, and reconnaissance, we formed a task force of
17 volunteers, and we put them together as a unit. They
18 trained up and they went to 29 Palms into the Mountain
19 Warfare Center and did a series of tests. Those tests are
20 complete. The data has been collected. It's being
21 analyzed, and it'll provide information that will inform the
22 Commandant about whether or not he will request a waiver for
23 any of those MOSs.

24 So, I have not seen all the data. I've seen some of
25 it. I've been involved in this process for some time. When

1 we first sent volunteer female marines, enlisted, to the
2 Infantry Training Battalion to try to gain data and
3 determine their ability to complete that course -- of the
4 number that went, about -- they have about a 40 -- 36
5 percent completion rate. And again, you know, we -- we're
6 still looking at this. We are -- we have not made any sort
7 of pre-decision. And so, again, whatever we do, it is about
8 individual standards, it is about the capability of the
9 unit, and that unit becoming better, or at least as good as
10 it is now.

11 So, that decision's going to come. I believe we had a
12 good process. We've got information. It's fact-based.
13 We're working with the Army, and we're sharing the data with
14 them. And I'm sure that General Dunford has spoken to -- I
15 know he's spoken to General Odierno, and he'll work with
16 General Milley if he is confirmed as the next Chief of Staff
17 of the Army.

18 Senator Kaine: Can I ask a question about the
19 standard, kind of the philosophy in setting the standard?
20 As you set the standard in the areas that are not yet
21 gender-integrated, is the standard-setting just describing
22 the current functions the way we've always done it, or is
23 the standard-setting a new analysis of what are the
24 attributes that are the most needed to do the best job in
25 this particular MOS?

1 General Neller: I have not seen all the different task
2 condition standards. They will be functionally-based. They
3 won't be -- I mean, there may be a screening process for any
4 marine, male or female, but it'll be not lift so much weight
5 as if you have to load the tank main gun, I have to load the
6 Howitzer, I have to prepare the charge, I've got to carry
7 the projectile, I've got to drag the cannon, I have to carry
8 the load, I have to go this fast, this far, with this much
9 weight. It'll be those types of things. And so, that's the
10 data we've got and what the data says about how men and
11 women did. I went out and saw the unit that did the test.
12 It was a very hard test. It was hard. And regardless of
13 whatever happens, I'm -- you know, I'm -- I can tell you
14 that the marines out there, particularly the women marines,
15 they did a great job. It was pretty motivating.

16 Senator Kaine: I'm going to switch gears to an area of
17 the Marines that is incredibly important. I'm not sure
18 everybody focuses on them. They train in Virginia -- and
19 it's good to have a UVa grad before us -- the Marine
20 security guards who train at Quantico. Everywhere I travel,
21 if I'm ever at a U.S. embassy, I always stick my head into
22 Post 1 to thank these important members of, not only the
23 embassy family, but important members of the Marine Corps.
24 This is a job that is getting more attention. This is a job
25 where I think, on Armed Services, we've devoted more

1 resources to it. How familiar are you with that unit, and
2 especially in terms of, kind of -- Do they have the
3 resources they need? Are we training enough? Because we
4 sure need them around the world.

5 General Neller: Senator, I'm not completely conversant
6 in their entire training program of instruction. I -- like
7 you, when I got to embassies, I talk to the marines.
8 They're very high quality, they're very highly screened.
9 It's a great retention tool for us to keep marines in. I do
10 worry, because they are so capable that we don't -- we don't
11 get a lot of them to stay after their service. They have --
12 they've got options. You know, I always ask them, "How many
13 of you are going to stay?" And if there's any of them that
14 say they are, I immediately volunteer myself to be their
15 career planner so I can convince them to stay, because they
16 are some of the very best and brightest young men and women
17 we have. But, I think they're trained well, I think they're
18 resourced well. I've never been to an embassy where they
19 told me they were wanting or lacking for anything, or the
20 regional security officer. So, I'd have to get back to you
21 on any more detail, but my basic rudimentary response is, I
22 think they're in good shape.

23 Senator Kaine: Great. Thank you very much for your
24 testimony.

25 Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

1 Chairman McCain: Senator Ernst.

2 Senator Ernst: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

3 General Neller, thank you very much. Darcy, thank you
4 for being here today. I appreciate your great service to
5 our Nation.

6 I will just fire off one quick question. I apologize,
7 I am going to have to step out again. But, one of my top
8 priorities has been ensuring that our soldiers and our
9 marines, those that -- who are really engaged in close
10 contact in combat, and those who are taking the majority of
11 casualties in our Nation's conflicts, are armed with the
12 best possible weapons available, and give them the will and
13 the fight to win. I mean, we have to make sure that they
14 have the best possible sidearms, their personal weapons.
15 That's one of the first things our young men and women do,
16 qualify on their individual weapon.

17 So, with that being said, I am very concerned about the
18 military's lack of modernizing our small-arms programs. I
19 know the marines have recently gone from utilizing the squad
20 automatic weapon, the M-249, to the light infantry automatic
21 rifle, the IAR. So, I'm glad that they are modernizing in
22 some aspects. They still have not modernized the M-4. I
23 would just like your thought on the small-arms program,
24 maybe where you see we need to go with that, if we do need
25 changes. Just very quickly, sir.

1 General Neller: Senator, I have complete confidence
2 that the weapons we equip our marines with are the very best
3 that we can get. The M-4 is not that -- you know, even the
4 marines in a rifle squad carry an M-16A4, they don't carry
5 an M-4, because we want them to have that longer barrel for
6 that longer reach. So, talking about weapons is a very
7 emotional subject with marines, but I've never heard anybody
8 say they didn't think that what they had was going to allow
9 them to be successful in a battle.

10 We don't want it to be a fair fight. The IAR is a good
11 weapon. We're going to keep the SA, but in a different way.
12 We're always looking at better ways to improve everything we
13 have. We've fielded the Javelin, we've fielded and improved
14 TOW, we've got new Howitzers. We're always working on the
15 tanks. I mean, so, you know, there's no lack of emotion and
16 energy and enthusiasm, when I walk around, about our
17 weapons. And, from everything I can tell, I think
18 everybody's satisfied. Doesn't mean there's not better ways
19 to do it that we can't look at it, whether it's ammunition,
20 whether it's magazines. But, I -- my personal view, in my
21 current position, is, we're in a good place.

22 Senator Ernst: Thank you, General. I appreciate that
23 very much.

24 And, in the interest of time, I'll submit my -- the
25 other questions for the record.

1 So, thank you, General Neller, I appreciate it very
2 much.
3 Thank you, Mr. Chair.
4 [The information referred to follows:]
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1 Chairman McCain: Senator Donnelly.

2 Senator Donnelly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3 And I'd like to thank your family and your friends who
4 are here with you today. It speaks volumes about you.

5 General Dunford, as Commandant, worked very hard on the
6 mental health issue. I just wanted to make sure to get a
7 commitment from you to prioritize mental health and suicide
8 prevention as part of your readiness for all your marines.

9 General Neller: Absolutely, Senator.

10 Senator Donnelly: And that -- as part of that, that
11 there be no stigma in seeking help.

12 General Neller: Senator, we've worked this, and I can
13 personally tell you, as hard as we can. I believe we made
14 progress. And, to the best of our ability, every marine
15 knows how -- knows they're out there, that what we want to
16 do, first and foremost, is help them if they need it.

17 Senator Donnelly: One of the things, you know, in
18 working in this area over the past few years, is finding out
19 how critical leadership at the squad and platoon level is to
20 finding out mental health problems. And, you know, I want
21 to make sure that your leaders at the squad and platoon
22 level know, "Make a call, talk to somebody. If you see one
23 of your marines going sideways on you or having struggles"
24 -- they probably see it before anybody, don't you think,
25 General?

1 General Neller: Senator, I agree completely. And I
2 can tell you that the focus of our training and -- as we do
3 the suicide prevention and how to react to that -- is
4 focused at that level. And I can give you personal accounts
5 of where sergeants, junior staff NCOs, were there at the
6 forefront to either give a hand or keep a marine from doing
7 something that they probably wish they hadn't done, and
8 saved their lives.

9 Senator Donnelly: General, I spoke this morning to the
10 Governor, an area that you're very familiar with, Anbar
11 Province. And we were going over the efforts that are in
12 place right now to retake Ramadi and Fallujah, and to
13 protect Haditha and obviously all of western Iraq. What is
14 your view on how to best rebuild the relationship with the
15 Sunni tribes and to partner with them against ISIS?

16 General Neller: Senator, again, I have not been in
17 Iraq, in Anbar, since I left, on my birthday in 2007. I
18 would like to go back and see it for myself. But, I don't
19 think the relationship with the Sunni tribes is a real --
20 the issue is not with us, it's with the government in
21 Baghdad. They have to believe that their central government
22 is going to at least give them some modicum of support, that
23 they're going to fix the roads, let the water run, give them
24 gasoline, make the electricity work, fix the roads, and let
25 them, you know, worship as they see fit. So, that

1 relationship that was damaged, it was tenuous, at best; it
2 was damaged by previous governments in Iraq. If Mr. Abadi
3 can do that, then I think he will gain their support. But,
4 he'll have to work really hard.

5 Senator Donnelly: In Afghanistan, you know, we face
6 significant challenges moving ahead. And the Marines have
7 been such an important part of securing entire areas of
8 Afghanistan, of creating secure regions. As you look at
9 that, what do you see, moving forward, as some of the keys
10 to success, to stability there, to holding on there?

11 General Neller: Senator, I've visited Afghanistan a
12 number of times, but I never served there, so my experience
13 base is limited. But, again, I think it's -- goes back to
14 the Afghan government believing that we're going to be there
15 to support them, that the resources are going to be there,
16 and that they have the confidence, and that their soldiers
17 have the confidence, that there's going to be somebody there
18 to back them up. They're similar problems. We need to stay
19 there and work with them. I believe, my experience is,
20 that, you know, they -- if a foreign nation believes that
21 there's somebody that's behind them, that they're likely to
22 do the right thing, the right way, and hopefully for a
23 longer period of time.

24 Senator Donnelly: Well, I will finish with this. My
25 father-in-law was a Guadalcanal marine, and he would be very

1 proud of your service, of all your years of service, and
2 would look very much forward to you taking command of the
3 Marine Corps. So, we wish you the very best.

4 Chairman McCain: Senator Tillis.

5 Senator Tillis: General Neller, Ms. Neller, welcome,
6 and congratulations. Thank you both for your service.

7 General Neller, I want to start -- and, first, I
8 apologize for having to step out. We had to have a quorum
9 in Judiciary Committee, and had to step out briefly, so I
10 apologize if I'm asking a question that's already been
11 asked. But, I'd like to start by talking about what will be
12 your top ground modernization program priorities.

13 General Neller: Well, Senator, right now, the two top
14 programs -- and they are yet to be fielded -- is the joint
15 light tactical vehicle and the amphibious combat vehicle.
16 Both of them are -- the JLTV, as I understand it, is close
17 to low-rate initial production; and the ACV, we should down-
18 select to two vendors with 16 vehicles this fall, and then
19 we'll eventually pick one. So, on those -- in that area --
20 and there's a couple of other things, but -- a radar -- a
21 multipurpose radar and a whole variety of other things --
22 but, right now, as far as specific programs, those two are
23 at the top.

24 Senator Tillis: Can you talk a little bit about the
25 reason why they're top and the difference it makes, in terms

1 of your capabilities?

2 General Neller: Well, for the JLTV, we need a wheeled
3 vehicle that has more survivability than the Humvee. The
4 Humvee's been around since the mid-'80s. We've improved it
5 a little bit, but it's -- there's only so much growth left
6 in the frame. And we need something that's going to give us
7 more survivability and traffickability. So, we need to
8 recapitalize and get a new vehicle. And the decision has
9 been made that the JLTV is that vehicle. So, we're going to
10 buy 5500 of them, and -- I'm assuming that they're going to
11 meet the requirement. I have not looked at any of the test
12 data, but -- I don't even know who the vendor is.

13 On the ACV, same reason. The amphibious vehicle we
14 have today is 40 years old. We've refurbished it, rebuilt
15 it a number of times. It's okay. It's okay in the water,
16 and not so okay on the ground, particularly if there's IEDs,
17 because it's flat-bottomed. It's just not survivable. So,
18 we have to -- and that, because that vehicle spends 90
19 percent of its time ashore, we have to find something that's
20 going to give us more survivability ashore, but that yet can
21 still move through the surf and get us to the beach.

22 Senator Tillis: And that actually leads to the next
23 question I had, which has to do with ship-to-shore
24 maneuvers. I got some exposure to some of the challenges
25 when I was down at Camp Lejeune, a month or so ago. And can

1 you talk a little bit about the ship-to-shore maneuvers --
2 all the way from the connectors, LCUs -- and elaborate on
3 the ACV, in terms of the additional capability it gives you,
4 as compared to what you have today?

5 General Neller: Amphibious warfare is very
6 complicated. It involves a lot of moving pieces. You're
7 also subject to the vagaries of the weather and the sea.
8 So, we've got to get to the objective area in the -- in our
9 amphibious ships. We use air-cushion vehicles and landing
10 craft -- large landing craft to move heavier loads ashore.
11 Neither the Amtrac or what we -- the ACV is going to be able
12 to give us a long-range launch, so we have to be worried
13 about anti-access area denial. So, we'll work through some
14 choreography and sequencing of the force. We want to be
15 able to land under cover of darkness, take advantage of that
16 for our security. So, this ACV that we buy, just like the
17 Amtrac that we have, is -- has to have some surf capability,
18 some sea-keeping capability, and it's got to move at a
19 certain speed so that we can do this with a -- under a
20 period of darkness.

21 Senator Tillis: The last question I have for you has
22 to do with the size of the force. I know that there have
23 been some studies from Marine Corps University that was
24 setting the optimum size of the Marines at about 186,000 --
25 just below 187,000. We're at 184,000. We're moving to

1 182,000. That 5,000 differential, that's a lot of marines
2 and a lot of killing capacity. I know, when I met with you
3 in my office, you're the sort of person that's going to make
4 it work, no matter what your -- what you -- whatever hand
5 you're dealt. But, are you reaching a -- I mean, do you
6 think that 182- is a workable number, or is that just a
7 number you're working with because that's where we are with
8 troop reductions? Or do we need to look back at getting to
9 that optimal number, if you agree with the assertion that
10 187- is the optimal number?

11 General Neller: Senator, the optimal number for a 3-
12 to-1 deployment ratio, which is what we would aspire to, is
13 186-. And we've built into the -- our plan, as we've drawn
14 down, you know, some reversibility of that. We know what
15 units we took down, and cadred, and what units we would
16 bring back. 182- is at that point where we can meet the
17 combatant commanders' requirements and provide a 2-to-1
18 depth-to-dwell, which we think is the minimum sustainable
19 level.

20 So, yes, we can do it at 182-. 186- would be better.
21 But, right now, that's not affordable. If resources were
22 made available, or we were required -- or able to do that,
23 we would grow the force back, but that would take some time.

24 Senator Tillis: Thank you, General Neller. I look
25 forward to supporting your confirmation.

1 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

2 Chairman McCain: Senator Gillibrand.

3 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4 Thank you, General Neller, for being here, your
5 commitment to service, all your sacrifices. Thank you for
6 your family to be here. We're very grateful for your
7 dedication.

8 You and I had a chance to talk about a lot of these
9 issues in advance, and I was very grateful for that meeting.
10 After our meeting, I sent you a report that I did
11 summarizing cases at four bases in 2013, just as a snapshot
12 to understand what do the cases look like. And I want to
13 just brief you on that.

14 The -- in Camp Pendleton, for 2013, they had 50 cases
15 of sexual assault alleged. Now, 10 of those cases were from
16 spouses, so you have an issue with domestic violence that's
17 important to look at. You also had 18 who were civilian.
18 So, 28 out of 50 are not part of our survey. So, when we
19 surveyed -- the DOD surveyed sexual assault last year, the
20 estimated 20,000 sexual assaults, that doesn't include
21 civilians or spouses. So, more than half of your Camp
22 Pendleton cases aren't even counted in those numbers.

23 The other statistic is, the servicemember was 21. Now,
24 the other thing I want you to be aware of, because this is a
25 challenge we have in responding appropriately -- among your

1 spouses, 8 withdrew their complaint within a year, so they
2 didn't have confidence in the system, they just didn't -- no
3 longer wanted to prosecute. Of your civilian complainants,
4 8 withdrew during the year. And then, of your
5 servicemembers, 8 withdrew. So, nearly half of the cases
6 that were reported -- and to report a case, you've got to
7 put your name on the bottom line, you typically get a rape
8 kit, which is very invasive. Any one of these situations,
9 it's now public. For them to withdraw -- nearly half to
10 withdraw within a year does not show confidence in the
11 system.

12 So, that brings us to what Senator McCaskill raised, is
13 this issue of retaliation. How much retaliation is
14 existing? And we know from the survey that last year it was
15 62 percent of cases, someone who reported a rape was
16 retaliated against during that process. And retaliation
17 comes in all forms, as you know: 53 percent social -- peer-
18 to-peer; 35 percent administrative; 32 percent professional;
19 11 percent a punishment. So, you know, arguably, more than
20 half of these cases, there's some form of chain-of-command
21 retaliation.

22 So, really do look to the lower-level commanders, the
23 unit commanders. We have an issue with sexual harassment
24 and sexual discrimination. In all cases, 60 percent of it
25 comes from the unit commander. So, you really have to dig

1 deep to begin to create a better climate, which I think is
2 going to be essential for you to be successful so you have
3 good order and discipline within the ranks.

4 So, as we talked about, I look forward to working with
5 you on that. I think it's very vital.

6 I appreciated your answer to Senator Kaine about combat
7 integration. One issue that I'd like to raise is, I know
8 that the physical fitness tests are gender-normed, and I
9 know that, in the case of Colonel Kate Germano, she was
10 trying to create even tougher requirements for them so that
11 they could meet standards. As you look at your standard
12 review, and as you look as to whether you're going to waive
13 -- ask for a waiver for any positions today, I would urge
14 you not to seek waivers, because all you're saying is,
15 there's no one who can meet the standard today. But, if we
16 begin to create tougher standards to come into the Marines,
17 to make them gender-neutral, you will have women who can
18 meet those standards. They just might not be able to meet
19 the standard today. So, asking for a waiver says, "Under no
20 circumstances can any woman ever meet the standard." I
21 would caution you not to take that action, because, the
22 future of the force, we want all of our best and brightest.

23 So, I'd like to ask you, just basically, When you are
24 going to relook at these issues, do you expect that you will
25 ask for an exception or a waiver?

1 General Neller: Senator, I have not seen all the data,
2 and I'm -- don't believe we've, in any way, shape, or form,
3 presupposed whether we will or not. I have not talked to
4 the Commandant, General Dunford, about this. I will,
5 eventually, because he is no longer going to be our
6 Commandant, and then -- so, he's going to have -- I would
7 ask that he would, you know, inform me as to what we're
8 going to do.

9 So, I take all your points. Again, I want every marine
10 to have the best opportunity to be successful. Nobody joins
11 the Marine Corps to fail. Okay? You know, I'm going to ask
12 marines that, "Anybody join here to fail? No? Good. So,
13 we're going to be successful." So, we've got to put them in
14 the best place where they can be successful and do the best
15 for themselves, but, more importantly, for the unit. So, I
16 know this is going to talk close scrutiny, and this is not
17 something that anybody takes lightly, but we will -- again,
18 we want to make sure that we have the most operationally
19 capable force. But, I take your points, and I do appreciate
20 all the guidance you gave me during our meeting.

21 Senator Gillibrand: Yeah, thank you, General. And I'm
22 very grateful for your service.

23 Thank you.

24 Chairman McCain: Senator Blumenthal.

25 Senator Blumenthal: Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

1 Thank you, General, for your service. As others have
2 said before, it's not only yours, but your family's, and
3 we're grateful to you for taking on this very important
4 mission.

5 No one joins the Marine Corps to fail. That's for
6 sure. And I know that you want to give every opportunity to
7 every marine to serve to the best of his or her ability.
8 And part of the reasons that marines may, in quotes, "fail,"
9 or appear to fail, may be invisible wounds of war, like
10 post-traumatic stress. My colleague, Senator Donnelly,
11 asked about mental health issues. Post-traumatic stress is
12 the result of combat-related injuries that really have never
13 been recognized in the past as much as they are now, and
14 maybe not now as much as they should be. My very
15 distinguished colleague and I -- Senator McCain -- sponsored
16 a bill called the Clay Hunt Veteran Suicide Prevention Act
17 to provide more research as well as more care to marines and
18 others who were injured in duty, often in combat, as a
19 result of post-traumatic stress, other invisible wounds, and
20 mental health generally, to help prevent suicides that occur
21 among them.

22 I would welcome your commitment that you will encourage
23 and support even more efforts to deal with post-traumatic
24 stress and traumatic brain injury and those invisible wounds
25 of war.

1 General Neller: Senator, you have my total commitment
2 to those actions.

3 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you.

4 Do you have any specific initiatives that you've
5 contemplated -- I know it's early to ask you, but -- in that
6 area to encourage more marines to come forward, to identify
7 themselves? Senator Donnelly asked about the stigma that's
8 often associated with those kinds of wounds, but I just
9 wonder if you have any specific initiative.

10 General Neller: You know, Senator, I don't, at this
11 time. But, all I can tell you is this. You know, we --
12 like everybody else, we learned a lot, the last 12 years.
13 You know, unfortunately, we learned a lot about some bad
14 things. And I do think that the force is -- that recognizes
15 these invisible wounds -- I remember a captain got IED'd
16 several times, and we sent him to Landstuhl, and he was
17 berated because he looked like he was fine. But, I honestly
18 believe those days are gone.

19 That said, and there may be marines out there, or any
20 servicemember out there, who's still dealing with something
21 that's bugging them. The marines I talk to, and the marines
22 I serve with today, I don't know anybody that's not out
23 there, reaching out to talk to them, and try to help them.
24 And they have to -- if they believe that you're going to try
25 to help them, they'll come forward. And there are a lot who

1 have. There may be some that -- who have not. Those with
2 TBI that have been diagnosed, we need to continue to take
3 care of them, because they're part of the force until
4 they're no longer on this Earth. So, we're not perfect. We
5 still have a lot to learn. Our Wounded Warrior regiment
6 takes care of marines and stays in contact with them, even
7 after they're no longer on Active service. So, we owe all
8 of them our best support. And I commit to you that, if
9 confirmed as Commandant, that they're going to get it from
10 me.

11 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you. Well, I welcome and I
12 applaud that commitment and your sensitivity on this issue.
13 I can guarantee, without being an expert, that there are
14 marines and soldiers and sailors and airmen who are out
15 there with wounds that are bugging them, and they need the
16 encouragement to come forward.

17 Let me shift to --

18 Chairman McCain: Could I just interrupt, Senator?

19 Are you familiar with the legislation, Clay Hunt
20 Suicide Prevention Act?

21 General Neller: Sir, I am not.

22 Chairman McCain: Thank you.

23 General Neller: I will become familiar with it,
24 though, if confirmed, or if -- I'm interested now. I wasn't
25 aware of it, Chairman.

1 Chairman McCain: Thank you.

2 Senator Blumenthal: We'll make sure that your office
3 receives some additional material on it, but Senator McCain
4 has really been a champion. I've been very proud to work
5 with him on this issue. And it's critically important.
6 Twenty-two veterans every day in this country, the
7 strongest, best country in the history of the world, commit
8 suicide. And this bill is an effort to correct that
9 problem.

10 If I can just focus, in my remaining seconds, on the F-
11 35 joint strike fighter, I know that we have not yet passed
12 the initial operating capability tests and stage. I wonder
13 if you could comment on what you see as the importance of
14 this fifth-generation fighter to the Marine Corps.

15 General Neller: Senator, we hope, soon, that we will
16 be able to declare, based on our readiness evaluation, that
17 we are at IOC.

18 As far as the airplane, it's going to replace three
19 different airframes: the F-18, the Harrier, and the EA-6B.
20 I'm not sure we even realized the potential of this
21 airframe, other than the fact that it's a fifth-generation
22 aircraft and we'll be able to enter airspace of our
23 adversaries that we weren't able to enter before, and safely
24 do whatever the mission is.

25 The real exciting thing about this airplane, other than

1 we can hold targets at risk as part of the joint force that
2 we didn't -- weren't able to hold at risk before, is the
3 electronics and all the information that this thing is going
4 to be able to gather and eventually disseminate to the force
5 on the ground. I'm an infantry guy. Planes are nice, but
6 they're really nice when they drop bombs and they tell me
7 what's on the other side of the hill. So, that's really
8 what I'm interested in. And I think, you know, this
9 airplane, potentially, if it does what we believe it's going
10 to be able to do, is not just going to help us do what we do
11 now better, it's going to change how we do what we do. And
12 that's what we're going to have to learn as we go through
13 this.

14 So, it is expensive. The more we build, the more our
15 allies buy, the cheaper it will be. And so, I'm excited
16 about the potential that this provides to -- not just to the
17 Marine Corps and the naval force, but to the joint force.

18 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you very much, General.

19 Thank you.

20 Chairman McCain: Senator Ayotte.

21 Senator Ayotte: Thank you, Chairman.

22 I want to thank you, General, for your service to the
23 country, and your wife, as well, and your whole family.
24 Appreciate all that you've done and are willing to take on
25 in this important position.

1 Wanted to ask you about Iraq. I know that several
2 others have asked you about -- but having served our country
3 in Iraq, and just seeing that the Director of FBI, James
4 Comey, said, this week, that ISIS now poses a greater terror
5 threat to the U.S. than al-Qaeda, that's pretty telling.
6 What is it that we need to do in Iraq now to address ISIS
7 that we're not doing?

8 General Neller: Senator, I'm -- my time in Iraq is a
9 bit dated, although I'm somewhat informed in my current job
10 as to what we're doing, as far as Marines and the joint
11 force. So, I think we're doing what we need to do right
12 now. We're training the Iraqis, we're ensuring the
13 provision of equipment and ammunition and supplies. We're
14 working in their operations centers, working with them,
15 advising them. The only thing that we're not doing is,
16 we're not accompanying them, at least to the best of my
17 knowledge.

18 So, at the end of the day, whether we do or not, they
19 are the ones that are going to have to do this. They are
20 the ones that are going to have to restore their territory.
21 And I believe, based on what I've seen them do in the past,
22 that they have the capability to do that. Because we have
23 to defeat ISIS, we have to get them to a point where they're
24 insignificant and that they're just some people on the
25 Internet saying a bunch of stuff, but they don't have any

1 capability or anything to back it up. And right now, they
2 are not -- that's not where they are. They have land, they
3 have terrain, and they're masquerading as a country.

4 Senator Ayotte: As you look at what is -- where we are
5 with Iraq and our current force posture in Afghanistan, what
6 we have consistently heard from General Dunford and others
7 is that it's important that we have a conditions-based
8 withdrawal from Afghanistan, as opposed to a calendar
9 withdrawal. Would you agree with that? Thinking about what
10 we've seen happen in Iraq, post our leaving.

11 General Neller: Senator, it's my military opinion that
12 a condition-based withdrawal is more effective than one
13 based on time.

14 Senator Ayotte: Because, obviously, your enemy can
15 wait you out and know when you're going to leave, versus
16 what's happening on the ground. You would agree with me on
17 that?

18 General Neller: I would say that's a accurate
19 statement.

20 Senator Ayotte: So, as -- one thing you said, in terms
21 of what we're doing in Iraq right now, that we've repeatedly
22 had raised in this committee -- from your experience on the
23 ground, generally does the employment of joint terminal
24 attack controllers make airstrikes more accurate and
25 effective?

1 General Neller: I would agree that the provision or
2 that capability or having that within a -- with a maneuver
3 unit makes them more effective.

4 Senator Ayotte: So, one of the issues that I think
5 needs to be addressed, obviously, right now, as I understand
6 it, with Iraqi Security Forces -- do you believe that our
7 American military dropping airstrikes in Iraq right now
8 would be more effective if JTACs were embedded, at the
9 tactical level?

10 General Neller: In principle, yes, Senator, but I --
11 there's got to be some methodology we've worked out, that
12 I'm not witting to, that -- you know, for a pilot to go out
13 there, as good as they are, to just find a target, there's
14 got to be some coordination going on, because we do have
15 Americans within their operations centers, so there's got to
16 be some coordination where they're being given at least a
17 general location or a target or something to look at so that
18 they're just not out there flying around. But, I don't know
19 the answer to that, but -- so -- but, if we -- there were
20 controllers, generally a unit is more effective, yes, ma'am.

21 Senator Ayotte: Certainly, that's what the JTACs do on
22 the ground, is help our -- help ensure that the targets are
23 more precise and effective.

24 I wanted to ask you also about -- you and I spoke
25 briefly about this in my office. With what happened in

1 Benghazi, where brave Americans were murdered, where are we
2 today, in terms of -- and one -- I think one of the things
3 that all of us were really upset about was the fact that our
4 military couldn't respond quickly enough to help. And
5 wanted to know where we are today. If we had another
6 Benghazi-type attack in North Africa or the Middle East
7 tonight, would the Marine Corps be in a better position to
8 respond?

9 General Neller: Senator, today, post-Benghazi, in what
10 is referred to as the new normal, the Marine Corps deployed
11 a special-purpose MAGTF, a ground combat unit, and some MB-
12 22 Ospreys to Spain. That force has grown. It's a full
13 infantry battalion spread across three bases, and a squadron
14 of 12 Ospreys. They have an alert force on a 6-hour alert.
15 If there was known to be some sort of indications or
16 warning, they could position themselves on other bases in
17 the Mediterranean or even in Western Africa. There's a
18 number of security locations we've established, where we
19 could go, with the support of the host nation.

20 So, our capability is much greater, particularly if we
21 have some idea that something's going to happen or we know
22 that someone is going to go there, and we need to provide
23 them with protection. So, we're in a much better place than
24 we were at that time.

25 Senator Ayotte: Thank you.

1 Chairman McCain: Senator Graham.

2 Senator Graham: Thank you.

3 General, congratulations on your nomination. The
4 Marine Corps, in my view, is the -- for -- pound for pound,
5 the finest fighting force that we've ever created. So,
6 let's just keep it that way.

7 Is it true that ISIL is targeting military personnel
8 and their families, calling for attacks against our military
9 personnel and their families here at home?

10 General Neller: Senator, I'm not aware that they've
11 specifically targeted American citizens. I am aware that
12 they have put information about American citizens on social
13 media.

14 Senator Graham: It's my understanding that they've
15 urged people to come after our military personnel and their
16 families, and they're encouraging people here and abroad to
17 do so.

18 If the recruiters had been armed, do you think things
19 would have been different?

20 General Neller: Senator, I don't know.

21 Senator Graham: I think they would have been. And
22 here's the question I don't want to have ever again, "I
23 don't know" -- I mean, the answer. Because we've got to
24 know. So, I think it would have mattered. And I know this
25 is not your job, unilaterally, to decide. So, it's now

1 time, in my view, to get real with where we stand as a
2 Nation. They're coming after us here and everywhere else,
3 and we'd better get ready for -- to be able to defend our
4 people.

5 General Dunford said that he thought the greatest
6 threat to America today was Russia, not radical Islam. Do
7 you agree with that?

8 General Neller: I agree with General Dunford that, as
9 a nation-state, Russia is probably the greatest threat.
10 But, I believe that the greatest threat to the American
11 people, because they say they want to kill us, is radical
12 extremism.

13 Senator Graham: Do you agree with me, the greatest
14 threat of all is a radical Islamic nation-state with a
15 nuclear weapon?

16 General Neller: Any radical organization with a
17 nuclear weapon is of great concern, Senator.

18 Senator Graham: Do you agree with me that, if Iran --
19 do you believe that Iran is a radical Islamic nation-state?

20 General Neller: I believe that Iran is a state that is
21 involved itself in a number of nefarious activities which
22 have created instability across the Middle East and other
23 parts of the world.

24 Senator Graham: Do you believe the Ayatollah really
25 means it when he says, "Death to America" and "Death to

1 Israel"?

2 General Neller: Senator, I have never spoken to the
3 Ayatollah to ask him that question.

4 Senator Graham: And I doubt if you will. But, given
5 all the behavior of Iran and their past activity, would it
6 be smart to assume the worst when it came to the Ayatollah,
7 and not the best?

8 General Neller: It would be my military advice to
9 continue to watch them closely in everything they do, and
10 judge them on their actions, and hold them accountable for
11 those things that they do that violate international law and
12 disrupt the stability of the region and the world.

13 Senator Graham: Would you agree they're the primary
14 destabilizing influence right now in the Mideast, they're
15 supporting extremist organizations that have toppled four
16 Arab capitals?

17 General Neller: I believe that they are an extremely
18 destabilizing force in the Middle East.

19 Senator Graham: Do you agree with me, Assad wouldn't
20 last 15 minutes without Iranian and Hezbollah help?

21 General Neller: Sir, I'm aware that the Iranians are
22 supporting the Assad government. I don't know, if they
23 withdraw, how long he would last or not last.

24 Senator Graham: Well, but that's --

25 General Neller: But, sir --

1 Senator Graham: Put it this way. He's -- they're
2 Assad's main benefactor.

3 General Neller: They are providing a great deal of
4 support to him, yes, Senator.

5 Senator Graham: Do you agree that the pro-American,
6 pro-Western government in Yemen was toppled because of
7 Iranian support for the Houthis?

8 General Neller: I believe that the Houthis received a
9 significant amount of support from Iran. To what degree
10 that allowed them to topple that government, that --

11 Senator Graham: Let's put it --

12 General Neller: -- would be conjecture on --

13 Senator Graham: -- this way.

14 General Neller: -- my part.

15 Senator Graham: If Iran stopped supporting the
16 Houthis, do you think we'd have a different outcome?

17 General Neller: Senator, that would be speculative on
18 my part. I've been to Yemen a couple of times. The
19 government they had was troubled. And they have a huge
20 amount of tribal and factionalism in there. Clearly,
21 Iranian support to the Houthis facilitated their successful
22 actions in Yemen to topple the Hadi government.

23 Senator Graham: Do you agree that Hezbollah would have
24 a hard time surviving without Iran?

25 General Neller: They would certainly not have the same

1 capability they have today.

2 Senator Graham: So, my point is, from a Marine Corps
3 --

4 Chairman McCain: General, you're not answering the
5 Senator's questions. Would you answer that question? Do
6 you believe in that, or not?

7 Senator Graham: General, I'm not trying to put you in
8 a bad box. I'm just trying to explain to the American
9 people who the Iranians are and what they're up to. That's
10 all I'm trying to do.

11 Do you agree with me that they are a very destabilizing
12 influence in the Mideast, they're the largest state sponsor
13 of terrorism, and we should know that?

14 General Neller: Yes, Senator.

15 Senator Graham: Okay.

16 Finally, as to the Marine Corps, you've indicated that,
17 in 1975, the Marine Corps was a place that was in a bad
18 spot. You've come a long way. Do you agree with me that,
19 if we impose sequestration and we fully implement by 2021,
20 the Marine Corps will be in a bad spot?

21 General Neller: Yes, Senator.

22 Senator Graham: At a time we need the Marine Corps the
23 most.

24 General Neller: We would not be able to provide the
25 capabilities that we need to provide to the Nation.

1 Senator Graham: In your time as a marine, have you
2 ever seen a more -- a larger need for the United States
3 Marine Corps than today, in terms of the threats we face?

4 General Neller: Senator, this is a very challenging
5 time, and I think it's a -- this is a time when a force like
6 the Marine Corps would have a great capability to -- for the
7 Nation.

8 Senator Graham: Thank you very much.

9 Chairman McCain: Well, General, before we close, when
10 you say, "We're doing what we need to do in Iraq," I think
11 -- you know, I don't know where you've been. Obviously,
12 ISIS is winning in Iraq. And for you not to be in favor of
13 us having forward air controllers on the ground, in some
14 scholastic answer -- you know full well, as I do, forward
15 air controllers make the difference. There are -- 75
16 percent of the sorties that are flown return to base without
17 firing a weapon.

18 And this line about, "They're the ones that have to do
19 it themselves" -- General, they can't do it themselves. We
20 know that. The Iraqis cannot do it themselves. That's why
21 they're losing. That's why they've lost their second-
22 largest city. That's why ISIL continues to make gains. And
23 the only people that are fighting against them are the
24 Iranian-backed Shi'ite militias.

25 So, the Iraqis have to do it, but, without American

1 assistance, including airpower, including forward air
2 controllers on the ground, we're going to see the stalemate.
3 And for you to say, "We're doing what we need to do," then
4 maybe you can tell me what we're doing that will win against
5 ISIS. Can you tell me that?

6 General Neller: Senator, what we're doing, I believe,
7 is providing advisor teams and support to train --

8 Chairman McCain: And that's succeeding, and that's
9 causing success, is that right?

10 General Neller: It's stemmed the tide for ISIS, but it
11 is not removing them from Iraq, so it is not --

12 Chairman McCain: So, you believe that ISIS is --

13 General Neller: -- succeeding right now.

14 Chairman McCain: So, you believe that ISIS is losing.

15 General Neller: No, sir, I do not.

16 Chairman McCain: You believe they're winning.

17 General Neller: No, sir, I don't believe they're
18 winning, either. I believe they're at a stalemate right
19 now.

20 Chairman McCain: They're at a stalemate. And when you
21 have a stalemate, then, when the enemy controls the largest
22 -- second-largest city in -- about a third of it -- and the
23 only people that are fighting against them are Shi'a
24 militias backed by Iranians, with Suleimani, who was
25 responsible for the deaths, in General Dunford's testimony,

1 of 500 marines and soldiers, orchestrating the attacks, I
2 don't think we are, quote, "doing what we need to do,"
3 General.

4 I'm going to give you some written questions. I -- I'm
5 very disappointed in a number of your answers.

6 And let me just go back again. You know what happened
7 in that recording -- recruiting station, don't you? The guy
8 walked up to the door and shot and killed four marines. You
9 know -- that was in the media. I'm sure, no matter what job
10 you're holding, you knew that, didn't you?

11 General Neller: Yes, Senator.

12 Chairman McCain: Then shouldn't we have had those
13 marines be able to defend themselves?

14 General Neller: Senator, the marines needed to have
15 the force protection they need. At the recruiting station,
16 there was only one individual wounded. It was at the
17 Reserve Center where they were -- where they killed. But,
18 yes, they should have been able to defend themselves,
19 Senator.

20 Chairman McCain: Thank you.

21 I'll have some questions for the record.

22 [The information referred to follows:]

23 [COMMITTEE INSERT]

24

25

1 Chairman McCain: But, General, if you think we're
2 doing what we need to do in Iraq and Syria, then we have a
3 real strong and different view of the situation there. We
4 lost too many good marines in the Battle of Fallujah and
5 Ramadi. And Senator Graham and I were over there. And one
6 of my sons fought there. And for so -- for us to say we're
7 doing what we need to do, I think, frankly, is not in
8 keeping with the appreciation we should have for the
9 sacrifice that those brave young people made.

10 Senator Reed: Well, Mr. Chairman, I just simply want
11 to say I don't think anyone understands the sacrifices that
12 the marines made in Iraq better than General Neller. And I
13 think his comments are his professional opinions, based upon
14 what he knows, not as the commander in Iraq, but as the
15 aspirant to be the Commandant. But, I certainly think that
16 there's no one that feels more deeply about the situation in
17 Iraq on a personal level, from leading marines there, than
18 General Neller, and that should be part of the record.

19 Thank you.

20 Chairman McCain: This meeting is adjourned.

21 [Whereupon, at 11:49 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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