CNO Nominee Gilday: Ford Weapons Elevator Problems a ‘Navy Failure’

Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Sen. James Inhofe (R-Neb.) questions Vice Adm. Michael M. Gilday during Gilday’s confirmation hearing to become the next CNO. C-SPAN3

WASHINGTON —

The nominee for the next chief of naval operations said the U.S. Navy is ultimately to blame for the ongoing problems with the weapons elevators on the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford.

“Ultimately, sir, that’s a Navy responsibility,” Vice Adm. Michael M. Gilday said, testifying July 31 at his confirmation before the Senate Armed Services Committee in response to a question from Sen. Tim Kaine (D-Va.), about which entity made the decision not to test the weapons elevator ashore.

“We own the risk and the risk-mitigation strategy to keep that ship on time. So ultimately I would consider that a failure of the Navy.”

“Of the 23 new technologies that we introduced to Ford, [the staff of the secretary of the Navy] did not consider the [weapons] elevator system to be high-risk, and so it wasn’t prototyped ashore,” Gilday said.

“I think money was a factor … but I don’t think it was the overriding factor,” he added. “I think that as the engineers took a look at the existing design, that they saw the risk as lower, they saw the risk as acceptable.”

Gilday said that three of the major new systems introduced on the new carrier – the Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch System (EMALS), the Advanced Arresting Gear and the Dual-Band Radar – are demonstrating “significant improvements in the reliability of the systems” and that the remining major issue with the ship’s systems is the continuing problem with the weapons elevators.

He said the reliability of the Dual-Band Radar is now close to 99 percent.

Regarding the EMALS, “We’ve had almost 800 launches, and for [each of] three successive days, it’s right at the level we see in the existing Nimitz class,” Gilday said. “We think we are on a good path with respect to the reliability in sortie-generation rate.”

However, Senate Armed Services Chairman Sen. James Inhofe (R-Neb.) cited a report from the Operational Test and Evaluation Force saying that about every 75 launch cycles there was a critical failure, noting that the Navy’s own requirement on the EMALS is for a failure of once for every 4,000 launches and for the AAG of once every 10,000 recoveries.

“I want to make sure that we [do not] continue to operate

where we have the failures, the premature deployment [of immature systems],” Inhofe said. “I want to make sure that the record is going to reflect beyond just the elevator, and those problems having to do with the arresting gear, having to do with the catapult, and the radar.”