Key House Subcommittee Chairman Rejects Modernization Plans as ‘Happy Talk’

Senior leaders from the four armed services said they have multibillion-dollar, long-term plans to modernize their aged maintenance facilities, but the chairman of a key House subcommittee rejected their “happy talk” and demanded evidence that the services are committed to funding the expensive programs to update their depots, shipyards and arsenals.

The need to modernize and improve badly outdated major maintenance facilities dominated the Nov. 21 hearing before the House Armed Services Committee’s readiness subcommittee on the status of the Defense Department organic industrial base.

Subcommittee Chairman John Garamendi (D-Calif.) was joined by ranking member Doug Lamborn (R-Colo.) in demanding that the services commit to funding their plans to upgrade those facilities. The need for major improvements to the rework and repair facilities is elevated by the historically high average age of the services’ legacy aircraft, ships, tanks and other weapon systems – many of which have obsolete parts that are no longer being produced.

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> *John Garamendi (D-Calif.), chairman, House Armed Services readiness subcommittee*

“It is widely known that the facilities and equipment in our organic industrial base [are] aging and, in certain locations, [are] in poor or failing condition,” Garamendi said in opening the hearing.

“This situation does not help maintainers if they are required to work in dilapidated buildings with equipment made decades ago. We must have a plan to modernize the facilities [and] sustainment, restoration and modernization accounts that support” them. He urged the witnesses to explain their plans to modernize their infrastructure and capital equipment.

In his opening statement, Lamborn, citing a Government Accountability Office report rating the condition of most of the depots as “poor,” said: “It is not enough for our depots to meet today’s requirements. We must also posture them to remain relevant for future demand. This raises a major concern about the state of our aging infrastructure.”

The leaders of the services’ construction and repair organizations acknowledge the deteriorated condition of their facilities and said they are executing long-range plans to update them.

Navy Vice Adm. Thomas Moore, commander of Naval Sea Systems Command, cited NAVSEA’s $21 billion, 20-year program to

dramatically modernize public shipyards. Vice Adm. G. Dean Peters, commander of Naval Air Systems Command, mentioned a $1.9 billion, multiyear plan to update his plants. And Maj. Gen. Joseph Shrader, chief of Marine Corps Logistics Command, said he was following a $1.9 billion, 25-year updating plan. Lt. Gen. Duane Gamble, deputy Army chief of staff for logistics, and Lt. Gen. Donald Kirkland, commander of the Air Force Sustainment Center, cited similar multibillion-dollar extended plans to modernize their facilities.

Garamendi said the committee had seen their plans, which he denounced as “happy talk,” and demanded that the leaders state their commitment to fully fund those plans. For their part, the uniformed leaders said their services were committed to the modernization programs, but that withheld assurance, citing the need for Congress to fund their long-term plans.