

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074
MINORITY (202) 225-5051
<https://oversight.house.gov>

Ranking Member Robert Garcia

Subcommittee on National Security, the Border, and Foreign Affairs

Hearing on “Addressing Oversight and Safety Concerns in the Department of Defense’s V-22 Osprey Program”

June 12, 2024

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to all of our witnesses for their service to our country.

We’re here today to make sure our nation is secure, and to make sure that our military is being responsible with our servicemember’s safety and our tax dollars.

We know that the V-22 Osprey is very important for the Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps, and allows them to complete vital and complicated missions.

With the unique capability to hover and land vertically without needing a runway like a helicopter; and the fast speed and long-distance range of an airplane, this platform can quickly carry heavy equipment.

The V-22 opens up new mission areas and gives our troops important flexibility.

If you look at the Osprey’s major mishap rate, which is the actual data that the military uses to judge safety, we know that:

Per flight hour over the past 10 years was actually comparable to similar aircrafts.

So we know that the aircraft has some unique capabilities that it provides to our military, but the Osprey has some unique challenges.

And that’s not surprising given how actually remarkable tilt-rotor technology is.

For instance, we know that when something goes wrong, the Osprey requires even greater pilot skill and experience to land safely.

But we also know that it has incredible speed, lift, and range.

When you think about delivering supplies to an aircraft carrier, which we know is critical to defending our allies in the Pacific, and many other important situations, this aircraft is ideal—and actually it is sometimes the only aircraft which can accomplish certain tasks.

However, we know that the Osprey’s complicated technology creates unique procurement and development challenges.

The Osprey requires tens of thousands of parts for completion—made by many contractors and subcontractors.

The Osprey was delivered late and over budget. This is an all too familiar story when we're talking about the defense acquisitions process.

And we know that the concerns about Osprey's safety issues are not new. In its lifetime, we know that 16 Ospreys have actually been damaged beyond repair in accidents and 62 servicemembers tragically lost their lives.

It is our responsibility to protect every servicemember. Congress has to hold both the Pentagon and our defense industry accountable.

So I hope we can look critically at some of these challenges.

Investigations into a June 2022 incident showed a so-called "hard clutch engagement" caused a catastrophic failure and crash, which killed all five Marines onboard the aircraft.

In 2023, two more Ospreys crashed – last August in Australia killing three Marines, and most recently last November, a crash killed eight Airmen off the coast of Japan. Both crashes are still under investigation.

And we know that following the November crash, the Air Force, Marines, and Navy actually grounded their entire Osprey fleets.

This was an appropriate decision to protect our servicemembers.

By March, that order was lifted, and the Osprey is flying again, but it is required to stay close to a landing zone.

I understand that the military has put in place maintenance and design upgrades to address some of these issues.

Given this aircraft's history and ongoing safety issues, I believe we need to hear more today about why the DOD concluded that the Osprey can return to service, and how we will keep our people safe in future.

I appreciate Chairman Grothman calling this hearing and hope we can work in a bipartisan way to ensure the highest degree of protection for our armed forces.

Only through continued Congressional oversight, can we protect the men and women who have chosen to serve our country.

Finally, I want to remind everyone why we're here today – to honor the service and sacrifice of the men and women in uniform who put themselves in harm's way to protect our nation, and specifically the three Marines lost in the Australia crash, and the eight Airmen lost in the Japan crash.

Chairman Grothman, I'd like to ask unanimous consent to enter each of their names into the record here today.

Thank you Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

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