

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
OVERSIGHT & GOVERNMENT REFORM**

**OPENING STATEMENT OF
CHAIRMAN EDOLPHUS TOWNS**

**Hearing: The Future of the V-22 Osprey:
Costs, Capabilities, and Challenges**

June 23, 2009

Good morning. Thank you all for being here.

Today's hearing is on the V-22 Osprey, an aircraft that has been in development for about 25 years and has a very controversial past. This hearing, however, looks beyond that checkered past and focuses on current issues raised in a new report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO).

According to GAO, the V-22 has operational problems that raise serious questions as to whether the aircraft can accomplish the full range of missions of the helicopter it was intended to replace, or the range of missions provided by other modern helicopters.

GAO found that the V-22 has problems with parts, maintenance, reliability, and availability—and I understand the reliability issue is one in which the Department of Defense concurs. In addition, GAO found that the V-22 may not be operationally effective in combat and questions the ability of the aircraft to operate in both extreme heat and extreme cold.

In short, GAO found that the Osprey has severe operational and suitability problems. And these problems have not come cheap.

Since 1983, more than \$27 billion has been appropriated for the V-22 program. The cost per aircraft has almost tripled since the Osprey's inception, to some \$120 million each. And the cost of the program may rise even higher given expected increases in operation and support costs.

Let me be completely clear: the value of just one American service member is priceless—and if a 120 million dollar aircraft like the V-22 does the best job of protecting our troops and helping them to accomplish their missions, then it should be supported.

But at \$120 million per aircraft—the Osprey better work as advertised.

When we first convened this hearing a month ago, I decided, with the support of Ranking Member Issa, to postpone the hearing because the Department of Defense had failed to produce certain key records pertaining to the Osprey. It took them a few weeks to do it, but finally we obtained copies of the after-action reports and other data we had requested.

The additional documents raise even more serious questions about the V-22. The Marine Corps' own reports on the performance of the Osprey in Iraq reveal that the Osprey was restricted to a very limited role due to its vulnerability to hostile fire, its lack of maneuverability, and its unreliability in the heat and sand of Iraq.

In the course of our investigation we asked the Defense Department for an inventory of all of their Ospreys and how many of those were ready for combat. The answer was both surprising and appalling.

Since 1988, the Marine Corps has bought 105 Ospreys. Of this number, only 47 are considered “combat deployable.” Worse, we asked the Marine Corps how many of these are ready for combat on any given day. On the day the Marine Corps picked, June 3rd of this year, only 22 of these 47 Ospreys were ready for combat. In other words, fewer than half could be used for combat on a good day.

At this point I have strong reservations about the future of this aircraft. I want very much to hear what our witnesses will have to say about these issues.

Thank you.