

**Office of the Commandant of the Marine Corps**

**Opening Statement before the  
Senate Armed Services Committee  
On  
Sexual Assault Prevention**

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As Prepared

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Chairman Levin, Ranking Member Inhofe...members of this Committee, thank you for calling today's hearing on this most critical issue. Let me begin right up front...sexual assault is criminal behavior that has no place in our Corps...it violates the bedrock of trust that Marines must have in one another...the legendary trust that we have ALWAYS HAD IN ONE ANOTHER...it is shameful and we are aggressively taking steps to eradicate it.

While there are cases of mixed and same-gender attacks, sexual assault within the Marine Corps is predominately a male-on-female matter. That said, as we begin this hearing, it's important to note that our data shows that the crime of sexual assault is being committed by no more than 2% of our Marine population...clearly, and as importantly...the remaining 98% of your Marines are "keeping their honor clean."

Since June of last year, we have tackled the sexual assault problem head on and have seen measurable improvements in three specific areas...prevention... reporting...and offender accountability. I am encouraged by these positive changes and believe we have momentum on our side. I testify before you today...to let you know that eradicating sexual assault from within our ranks is a top priority with me, as it is with the senior leadership of our Marine Corps. But talking about this issue is not enough...direct action and a uniformed strategy is required. Our history over the last century is replete with examples where we've changed the Marine Corps as an institution. Following World War II, we knocked down racial barriers, paving a clear road of racial equality in our Corps.

Following the Vietnam War...as a young Lieutenant, I saw firsthand how we attacked a rampant drug problem. We solved this discipline and illegal behavior problem from the top-down. We were successful through determined leadership, and a combination of education and strict legal actions. Over time, the Corps changed...drug users and drug pushers became viewed as what they truly were...pariahs...we exiled them from

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our ranks. During that time, we pushed separation authority down to Commanding Officers to enforce discipline standards and to affect swift judgment against offenders. It was our Commanders who drove the change.

I've seen how the Marine Corps is tackling our alcohol problem through leadership and de-glamorization of irresponsible behavior. While we are far from complete in these efforts, DUIs and other alcohol infractions are no longer acceptable behavior for our professional Corps of warfighters. I've watched us change over the past decades in this regard...what was deemed acceptable behavior for Lt and Major Amos...is simply not condoned today. It's the evolution of behavior...and it's good for us.

Accountability in the Marine Corps begins and ends with me. Sexual Assault Prevention within our ranks is front and center with me, and at the top of my priorities. Our senior officers and Staff Non-Commissioned Officers "are all in!" They are focusing on making the necessary changes to prevailing conditions and attitudes to create the environment that the American people not only expect, but demand from their Marines.

Over the last year we've implemented an aggressive, three phased campaign plan that strikes at the heart of this issue...its goal is complete elimination of sexual assault within our Marine Corps. As we launched our plan last Spring, the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps and I traveled to every base and station throughout the world to look our Marines in the eye...to remind them of our heritage...to remind them WHO THEY ARE...and as important...WHO THEY ARE NOT! We spoke of the importance of maintaining the "spiritual health" of the Corps. Just as I expect to be held accountable for everything the Marine Corps does and fails to do. I in turn, hold my Commanding Officers accountable for everything their units do, or fail to do. Our Commanding Officers are the centerpiece of the Marine Corps' effectiveness as a professional and disciplined

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warfighting organization. Commanding Officers are charged with establishing and training to standards, and uniformly enforcing those standards. A unit will rise or fall as direct result of the leadership of its Commanding Officer. Commanding Officers never delegate responsibility...they should never be forced to delegate their authority.

After more than 43 years of service to our nation, it is inconceivable to me that a Commanding Officer could not immediately -- within applicable regulations -- be able to hold Marines accountable for their criminal behavior. As Congress responsibly considers changes to a Commander's authority under the UCMJ...I plead with it to do so cautiously. As strongly as I support the authority of the Commanding Officer...I reject the status quo in other areas related to military justice and policy. I have reviewed current legislative proposals related to sexual assault and military justice, and I believe there is merit to many of the proposals. I am committed to being an equal partner as we engage in serious debate about the best way to eliminate sexual assault from within our ranks.

Thank you again for holding this important hearing on such a critical issue facing the military services...I am prepared to answer your questions.