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STATEMENT OF

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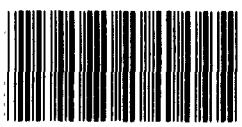
BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON LEGISLATION AND NATIONAL SECURITY

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here today to testify on our review concerning the Department of Defense efforts to standardize avionics equipment. This Subcommittee and others have been emphasizing the need to standardize avionics equipment for several years. Standardization is seen as a means to reduce acquisition and support costs as well as to enhance force readiness, interoperability, and reliability. Acquisition of avionics will cost in excess of $50 billion over the next 5 years and an equally significant amount will be spent supporting these systems.

We believe the Department of Defense and the services are, in general, aware of the need for and the benefits of standardization and have taken some positive steps in that direction. They have, for example, established policies, set objectives, and issued guidelines to increase joint

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development and standardization among the services.

We have concluded, however, that little progress has been made compared to the opportunities available. This is largely because the Department of Defense and the services have not given adequate support to the standardization efforts. Although the Department of Defense and the Services are involved in a number of standardization projects, the Joint Services Review Committee, which was the focus of our evaluation, received less than one-third of the funds needed to develop its standard avionics equipment. We were told that aircraft program managers are interested in standard items but are unwilling to depend on others to assure their availability when needed.

The Joint Services Review Committee was a direct outgrowth of congressional deliberations on the fiscal year 1980 Defense Appropriations Bill wherein the Congress directed the services to coordinate avionics development and procurement to reduce the proliferation of equipment. The Joint Services Review Committee was established by a Memorandum of Agreement co-signed by each service's Assistant Secretary for Research and Development. Its job is to identify and support joint avionics standardization projects which would meet interservice requirements and reduce overall life cycle costs of the Department of Defense avionics equipment. The Committee consists of one uniformed member and a civilian assistant from each of the services, all of whom perform Committee functions on a part-time basis.

For its purposes, the Joint Services Review Committee designated avionics components and subsystems as either "mission" or "core" equipment. To increase its chances for success the

Joint Services Review Committee elected to concentrate on a few core avionics subsystems. Core avionics are defined as those items which have identical functions in a multitude of different type aircraft and which can be developed and produced as common items. Examples of core avionics are communications, civil navigation aids, radar altimeters, and attitude heading reference systems. The Joint Services Review Committee believed the selection of core avionics items for joint development would be met with little resistance and controversy from the services because: (1) the equipment is relatively inexpensive in comparison to other kinds of avionics equipment, (2) the technology is mature and involves minimum risk, (3) each item has potential for use on several thousand aircraft, and (4) their use is required, from a generic standpoint, on all aircraft.

From 30 candidates proposed by the individual Joint Services Review Committee members, 5 items believed to have the least technical risk and wide application were selected. The items selected included a central air data computer, digital audio distribution system, attitude heading reference system, data transfer loader/verifier, and flight data recorder.

Based on program office computations and service requirements in 1982, the Joint Services Review Committee estimated that joint development of these five items could save the Department of Defense close to $500 million in development and procurement costs. The Joint Services Review Committee has since updated this figure to $770 million.

To develop the five items in a timely manner, the Joint Services Review Committee in 1981 estimated that about $64 million would be needed during the 3 years ending in 1984. The services provided only one-third of this. The funding picture for the next 5 years is not much better, as the services have budgeted about $38 million of the estimated $100 million required to develop these systems during 1985 through 1989.

Because of the lower than expected funding, the Joint Services Review Committee decided to use most of its money on one item--the standard central air data computer, which was to be provided to aircraft manufacturers as government furnished equipment. Even though development of the computer was completed on schedule, delays in awarding the production contract have resulted in missed savings opportunities. The Navy and the Air Force are now required to buy computers through their prime contractors which will very likely be different from the standard computer supported by the Joint Services Review Committee.

The other four projects have also been affected by the funding shortfalls. Development and production contract award dates have slipped and therefore some of the aircraft that were intended to use these standard items may end up using nonstandard equipment.

The Joint Services Review Committee is not the first attempt to standardize avionics. For example, in 1974 the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency recommended 22 avionics candidates for standardization with little or no success. Three of the candidate systems subsequently showed up on the Joint Services Review Committee's project list.

We believe several factors have effectively precluded successful avionics subsystems standardization programs in the past and as currently proposed by the Joint Services Review Committee. Because of low visibility, ad hoc management, and the small size of Joint Services Review Committee projects, attempts to get top management attention can be difficult. Individuals responsible for communicating the needs and problems are reluctant to bring issues on small items to the attention of top management occupied with major multi-billion dollar systems. The feeling expressed to us was that top echelon officials have, on a daily basis, "fires to put out" on higher priority items such as the B-1 Bomber and the MX missile and do not have time to devote to relatively small avionics standardization projects.

Another problem is funding instabilities. Even after the required funds are initially approved, subsequent reprogramming actions and budget cuts occur because of conflicting priorities within the services. The standard avionics projects have generally lost out in this budget process because:

--They are relatively small and low priority items when compared to major weapon systems programs and therefore do not have strong support during the budget review process at higher military department or the Office of the Secretary of Defense levels.

--The efforts are jointly funded and can be cut or deleted by any one of the participating services at higher levels.

--The program elements used to support the Joint Services Review Committee's projects frequently contain other avionics items. Decisionmakers who cut these program elements are often not aware that they contain funds for standard joint projects.

The funding problems can be addressed in several ways. One proposal is to reserve a block of Department of Defense funds to finance development of joint standard equipment. Such a concept was proposed but rejected by the services because of their tendency to resist attempts to "fence-in" or dedicate funds for specific programs. A second proposal is to specifically identify Joint Services Review Committee projects in each of the services' program elements for avionics systems. This would provide decisionmakers in the Congress, the services, and the Department of Defense greater visibility over joint programs.

In conclusion, we believe the Department of Defense and the services have taken some positive steps toward avionics standardization by establishing the Joint Services Review Committee.

However, our review of the Joint Services Review Committee and earlier standardization initiatives shows that to simply issue policies and set objectives are not enough. We believe that top level commitment to avionics standardization must be enhanced. Whatever is done, the key is that accountability for standardization programs must be placed at the highest levels and be reinforced on a continuing basis.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes our prepared testimony and we will be happy to answer any questions that you or the Subcommittee may have.

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