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Statement of
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for
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Subcommittee on Financial Contracting and Oversight
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
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Chairman McCaskill, Senator Johnson, distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to speak about what the Department of Defense is doing to improve the Department's efforts to achieve the fullest possible accounting for our missing DoD personnel and provide answers to their families. I look forward to discussing the responsibilities of the various members of the Department's accounting community, as well as the specific collaboration between the Defense Prisoner of War Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) and the Joint Prisoner of War, Missing in Action Accounting Command (JPAC).

Based on my experience as the first commander of JPAC, I came to my current position well aware of the challenges I would be confronting. I knew that the Department's personnel accounting community suffered from organizational and structural weaknesses, which have been cited in other reports and studies. Many of these structural flaws relate to the primary problem recently identified by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO). Specifically, it noted, and I quote: "With each accounting community organization reporting under a different line of authority . . . no single entity has overarching responsibility for community-wide personnel and resources -- important levers for providing the capacity to reach DoD's accounting-for goal. As a result, no single entity can implement or enforce decisions without obtaining widespread consensus."

Over the past year, Major General McKeague, Mr. Goines, and I, along with others in the personnel accounting community, have made significant strides in improving our unity of effort. But this is an issue that clearly needs further work. Recognizing that improvement was needed in a number of areas, I encouraged all members of the personnel accounting community to cooperate fully with the GAO. I have embraced the GAO's report. As I strongly recommended, the Department has begun the process of implementing all nine of the GAO's recommendations.

Some of the issues raised in the internal draft JPAC Efficiency Report may require additional attention and investigation. In fact, last week the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy requested that the DoD Inspector General initiate an immediate investigation into the allegations of fraud, waste, and abuse. Additionally, the Under Secretary requested that the Director, Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation (CAPE) undertake a review of the organizational structure the Department employs to accomplish this critical mission and to coordinate their efforts with the IG to avoid any duplication of effort. Fortunately, the GAO has helped us identify, in a thorough and objective manner, what the Department needs to do to improve our performance of the sacred mission of accounting for our missing personnel.

I would like to describe recent and upcoming activities regarding missing personnel. Last week, our Nation commemorated the 60th Anniversary of the Korean War Armistice at Arlington Cemetery, where the President took the opportunity to recognize the family of a missing serviceman whose remains had just been identified. Next week, I will be hosting the Department's annual meeting for family members of American service members missing from the Korean War and Cold War. We expect approximately 430 family members from across the country to attend the two-day meeting so that we can brief them on our efforts to account for their missing loved ones.

On July 12, I led a meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah, where we sat down and briefed 80 family members of missing service members from WWII, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. Likewise, I had the great honor to address the Veterans of Foreign Wars in July, as well as the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia in June. Major General McKeague was

with me at these meetings. I know he agrees that the families and our key external partners are as determined as ever to help us improve the way we account for our missing personnel, and just as importantly, to help us improve how we provide answers to their questions.

Many of our families realize we may never find their loved ones, but they look to us to help them understand what happened and they don't want us to give up. It has been made clear to me that not knowing the fate of a missing loved one is as painful as never bringing them home. With that in mind, the lessons and experiences we have learned from our families and veterans have helped shape the Department's views on how we account for those in Iraq and Afghanistan and how we support their families.

I believe that with the support of Congress, the Department of Defense is taking steps to address longstanding challenges to efficiency and effectiveness in the personnel accounting community.

Thank you and I look forward to taking your questions.