

Opening Statement of Chairman Claire McCaskill

“Mismanagement of POW/MIA Accounting”

August 1, 2013

As prepared for delivery:

This hearing will now come to order.

We are here today to review the Department of Defense’s management of POW/MIA accounting.

Our nation has made a commitment to service members and their families that we will obtain the fullest possible accounting for the missing and recovery of remains for those who died serving our country. Today, the Defense Department estimates that there are about 83,000 missing U.S. personnel from past conflicts including World War II, the Cold War, Vietnam, Korea, and the Persian Gulf War.

Over the last five years, Congress has appropriated nearly \$500 million for this effort. In 2012 alone, this amounted to over \$132 million, approximately \$50 million more than the previous year. These added funds were intended to ensure that the Department had every resource it needed to increase its capacity to account for 200 missing persons by 2015, a requirement set by Congress in 2009.

On average, however, the accounting community has identified and accounted for only 72 previously missing personnel per year. Although Congress has more than doubled the overall budget of the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, known as JAY-pack, over the last five years, the additional funds have not yet yielded any significant increase in identifications.

We cannot put a price tag on this mission. But we can and must ensure that hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars are being spent as efficiently and effectively as possible.

According to a recent report by the Government Accountability Office, the Defense Department’s capacity to account for missing personnel “is being undermined by longstanding leadership weaknesses and a fragmented organizational structure.” In addition, disagreements and lack of communication between the various Defense Department commands and offices involved in the accounting mission have harmed the Department’s ability to improve its accounting capacity, as required by Congress. GAO also identified significant duplication and overlap between JPAC and the Defense Department’s Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office, known as DPMO, and between JPAC’s Central Identification Laboratory and the Air Force’s Life Sciences Equipment Laboratory.

The Subcommittee has also reviewed an internal report regarding JPAC's internal operations. This report, which was prepared at the request of JPAC's commanders by a fellow hired by JPAC's Central Identification Laboratory, found that JPAC's Research & Analysis division was so mismanaged that it risked "total failure" of JPAC's mission. It called the division's processes "acutely dysfunctional" and also found that JPAC has wasted or abused taxpayer funds on travel and "military tourism." This report was banned by the former Commander of JPAC and its findings did not become widely known until earlier this summer.

These findings are deeply disturbing. However, since announcing this hearing, the Subcommittee has heard from nearly a dozen current and former employees of JPAC, DPMO, and experts in the accounting community who have questioned this report's independence and accuracy.

I wish to state clearly, at the beginning of this hearing, that the Subcommittee does not have a dog in this fight. I am not here to take the side of JPAC, or DPMO, the Central Identification Laboratory or Research & Analysis. I am here to give a loud wake-up call to everyone involved that it is time to put your squabbles aside for the good of the mission and the good of our nation. It is unacceptable for dysfunctional bureaucracy to impede our efforts to bring closure to the families of missing personnel.

To all those in the accounting community who work every day to find the missing, to identify remains, and to bring peace of mind to the families, I thank you. You should be so proud of the work that you do. And you should serve as an example to those throughout the chain of command whose pettiness, negligence, or willful ignorance allowed these problems to develop and remain uncorrected for so many years.

I hope by the end of this hearing we will understand more about the issues the accounting community is facing. I intend to raise some very hard questions, including how many of the missing personnel can reasonably be recovered and identified, and what it will actually cost to achieve this mission. We need to get these numbers straight. The family members of the missing deserve honest answers about what is feasible.

What we may not know is how quickly the Department can fix these problems. I assure you that both here in this Subcommittee and in the Armed Services Committee, I intend to stay on this until they do.

I thank the witnesses for being here, and I look forward to their testimony.