MCPON testifies before Congress on quality of life

Story and photo by MC2 Thomas L. Rosprim,
Office of the Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy

WASHINGTON – Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy (MCPON)(SS/SW) Rick D. West testified before Congress Feb. 16.

West appeared before the House Appropriations Committee's Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies.

West, along with the other top enlisted leaders from the Marine Corps, Army and Air Force, discussed the current status of their respective military branches, focusing specifically on quality-of-life programs and initiatives.

"During the past year, I have traveled extensively around the world to visit, listen, learn and speak with Sailors and their families," said West. "I have observed, firsthand, their tremendous work and sacrifices, and I am constantly amazed and truly awed by their outstanding capabilities and resiliency as they serve with distinction on ships, squadrons, submarines, and ashore."

Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy (MCPON) Rick D. West, 2nd from left, Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force (CMSAF) James A. Roy, Sgt. Maj. of the Marine Corps Micheal P. Barrett and Sgt. Maj. of the Army Raymond F. Chandler III prepare to testify before the House Appropriations Committee Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies Feb. 16. The testimony of the four services senior enlisted advisors focused on quality of life for the service members and veterans of the military.

Recruiting, retention, force management, and professional development of service members were among the topics addressed at the hearing. West and his counterparts from the other service branches responded to several questions from representatives about transition resources in place to assist active duty personnel and families affected by force reductions.

"We want to make sure our Sailors have every opportunity to succeed in the future," said West. "The Navy has lined up a world-class placement consultant to help our separating Sailors transition to the civilian sector. They will provide coaching, mentorship and guidance to prepare our people as much as possible. Additionally, Naval Sea Systems Command, one of our largest components, is driving the 'Shipmates to Workmates' program which pairs Sailors with partner organizations for possible employment opportunities."

Other subjects of discussion included current efforts by the armed forces to combat sexual assault and suicide, promote resiliency and ensure a high quality of education for the children of service members. West emphasized that success in these areas, and a commitment to holistic quality-of-life overall, are main factors in determining how long many Sailors will serve.

"We thank Congress for the historical support of pay and benefit increases and quality of life initiatives. Steady gains in these areas have allowed us to retain skilled Sailors and develop them into the enlisted leaders of the future," said West. "We cannot, however, rest on past success. The civilian job market searches for the same smart, motivated and dedicated people. We must keep pace with pay, allowances, housing, support programs and educational opportunities. And in this time of war, we must continue to make care a top priority for our wounded service members."

West also discussed the value of communication with Sailors and families through resources such as Afterdeployment.org, Military OneSource, Navy.mil, and various social networking sites.

"Both CNO and I are committed to using social media because it is another opportunity to connect with our Sailors Navy-wide," said West. "Social media is a great tool in our outreach efforts for getting information out in a timely manner to our entire Navy family."

West spoke of the operational tempo of the Navy and mentioned the nearly 50,000 Sailors, including more than 4,000 mobilized Reserve Sailors, and 40 percent of the Navy's ships which are underway or deployed globally on any given day.

"America's Navy is defined first by its agile warfighting capability ... operating forward and always ready," said West. "Our fleet is deterring aggression, protecting sea lanes, projecting power and delivering humanitarian assistance where needed. Despite fiscal constraints facing our nation, the world's oceans and waterways are not getting smaller. We still remain engaged in every theater of operation. We have the best Navy we have ever fielded and we will continue that trend into the future. We will work the challenges and accomplish the mission."

The master chief petty officer of the Navy periodically testifies before Congress along with the senior enlisted leaders of the other services. This was his fourth appearance before the congressional committee.

2012 Military Saves Week Campaign kicks off

By MC3 (SW) Mikelle D. Smith,
Defense Media Activity-Navy

WASHINGTON – Fleet and Family Support Centers (FFSC) on military installations worldwide will be participating in the 2012 Military Saves Week Campaign Feb. 19-26.

The campaign's purpose is to develop a military command climate that supports sensible financial behavior by focusing on financial literacy education, by supporting available savings products, and by encouraging service members and their families to take action.

"We employ a variety of resources, as well as partnerships throughout military installations, to conduct monetary affairs including classes and individual counseling to make individuals aware of their financial situation," said Fred Davis, Personal Financial Management Program Analyst, Commander Naval Installation Command (CNIC). "We are exceptionally proud in last year's achievements, and we hope to repeat, and possibly do better, during the 2012 campaign."

Military Saves financial fairs reached more than 60,000 individuals across all the military services during 2011. Seminars and classes reached nearly 40,000 people.

"One of the best things that Sailors can do to make sure they are financially successful is to take the classes that are offered during the week and throughout the year to learn how to go through their credit reports, how to invest in stocks and bonds, and how to determine their overall status," said Davis. "Also, financial counselors are always available to help guide those who may feel like they want a one-on-one experience. Our counselors are trained professionals, so I want Sailors to know that everything disclosed to one of them will remain completely confidential. "

This year's goals for service members and their families include increased household savings for short and long-term needs, and decreased consumer debt.

"With the current downsizing of the military, we want to make sure all Sailors understand the importance of always being prepared and always having a backup plan; the financial component of that plan is very important," said Davis. "Ultimately, everybody has the opportunity to better their financial situation. Having been a counselor for many years and prior military, I've heard many stories. And we are here to support the needs of the service members and their families."

"We want the best possible outcome to happen to each individual that comes into our offices," he continued. "All of our services are no-cost and we just want everyone to move forward in a positive fashion to secure their financial future."

For event information about the 2012 Military Saves Week Campaign visit http://www.militarysaves.org.