

Navy Concerned About Retention of Experienced Aviators



WASHINGTON – The Navy’s air warfare director told Congress that some of the service’s experienced aviators are “ready” to leave the service, citing fewer flying opportunities and quality-of-life issues.

Rear Adm. Scott D. Conn, testifying April 10 before the Seapower subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee, cited a Government Accountability Office report that said that Navy pilot shortage was 9% overall and 26% in first-tour aviators.

Conn said some of the shortages were tied to the grounding of T-45 jet trainers when the Navy was investigating oxygen system problems.

“We’re going to have to extend people in assignments or rotate people or, as squadrons are in the maintenance or basic phase [of training], maybe we don’t push those people to them,” Conn said.

“Some of the authorities you have given us, in terms of bonuses, the department head bonus, and the increase of rates, has had some impact across most types/models/series [of aircraft communities],” he said. “We have seen no impact in the [strike-fighter] community.”

Responding to a question about aviator accession from Sen. Angus King (I-Maine), Conn said the Navy was “bringing in our goal.”

Retention is a concern, Conn noted.

“We’re seeing a lot of experienced [aviators] – some of our best – deciding to go to other things,” he said. “We’re in a competition for talent. The airlines are continuing to hire. Some of these folks are going to grad school. Some are starting their own businesses. The economy is doing well.”

He added: “It is a challenge that we have particularly at the more senior levels.”

The Navy has every departing pilot complete a survey. Conn said that three factors are the most influential in aviator departures: First, “not doing what they signed up for – they’re not flying enough, which means we need to get our readiness where it needs to be to get them in the air. Two: some quality-of-life issues, more so in our nonfleet concentration areas, [Naval Air Station] Lemoore being one of them. Three is the pay gap.”