

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION
REQUEST FOR APPROPRIATIONS FOR FISCAL
YEAR 2026 AND THE FUTURE YEARS DEFENSE
PROGRAM**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES SENATE**

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

ON

S. 2296

TO AUTHORIZE APPROPRIATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026 FOR MILITARY
ACTIVITIES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, FOR MILITARY CON-
STRUCTION, AND FOR DEFENSE ACTIVITIES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF
ENERGY, TO PRESCRIBE MILITARY PERSONNEL STRENGTHS FOR
SUCH FISCAL YEAR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

**PART 6
PERSONNEL**

APRIL 9, 2025



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION REQUEST FOR APPROPRIATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026 AND THE FUTURE YEARS DEFENSE PROGRAM—Part 6
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**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION
REQUEST FOR APPROPRIATIONS FOR FIS-
CAL YEAR 2026 AND THE FUTURE YEARS
DEFENSE PROGRAM**

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9, 2025

UNITED STATES SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE PERSONNEL POLICIES

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:35 p.m. in room SR-222, Russell Senate Office Building, Senator Tommy Tuberville (Chairman of the Subcommittee) presiding.

Committee Members present: Senators Tuberville, Scott, Warren, Blumenthal, Hirono, and Duckworth.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR THOMAS H. TUBERVILLE

Senator TUBERVILLE. Good morning. I'd like to call this hearing in session from the Armed Services Personnel Subcommittee. We appreciate our witnesses here today, and thank you all for your service.

You're going to find today, and as the last couple weeks have been very, very busy, so we'll have people in and out. I think we have three votes going on, one going on as we speak, and so we'll be in and out. Hopefully we can get more people here today. We have other hearings going on, so thank you for being here, and Ranking Member Warren, thank you for being here, we had to sprint to get here, right?

Senator WARREN I did.

[Laughter.]

Senator TUBERVILLE. All right. Senate Armed Service Subcommittee on Personnel meets this afternoon to provide an important opportunity for senior leaders at the Department of Defense (DOD) to highlight areas where Congress can support and strengthen our military's most valuable asset: it's people.

People are our most valuable asset. I think we should all know that those who volunteer to serve in and out of uniform are the backbone of our National Defense. This is a critical discussion as we prepare for the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for fiscal year of 2026.

I want to thank our witness for joining us today, Lieutenant General Brian Eifler, Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel for the

United States Army, Vice Admiral Richard Cheeseman, Chief of Naval Personnel for the United States Navy, Lieutenant General Michael Borgschulte, Deputy Commandant for Manpower, and Reserve Affairs for the United States Marine Corps. Lieutenant General Caroline M. Miller, Deputy Chief of Staff for Manpower, Personnel, and Services for the United States Air Force and Ms. Katharine Kelley, Deputy Chief of Space Operations for Human Capital for the United States Space Force.

I'm glad to see our military refocusing on warfighting and readiness after the previous Administration prioritized diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and abortion and other progressive policies initiatives over lethality. One of the reasons we're here today. This shift is already leading to renewed enthusiasm for personnel for military services among the American people.

While I'm encouraged by the recent improvements in military recruitment, I'm increasingly concerned about the quality of the recruits we're bringing in. Many of the services have lowered their standards to meet requirement goals. The Army and Navy's Prep Courses have seen some success, but that success only matters if they're actually raising the academic and physical performance of our recruits. The caliber of men and women we bring in directly affects readiness levels, and the long-term strength and effectiveness of our military.

I'd like the witnesses to address the effect that lowered enlistment standards could have on long-term attrition and readiness, and how you are ensuring you're not sacrificing quality for quantity.

I'd also like to address the health of the force in this hearing. Military hospitals and clinics are facing staffing shortages, leading to reduced access to care, which ultimately impacts the health and retention of servicemembers and their families. This combined with lower recruiting standards, means the force is more susceptible to health issues like obesity and mental health challenges. I'd like to hear what the services are doing to ensure the health and readiness of their military personnel.

In recent years, this subcommittee has invested heavily into the quality-of-life servicemembers ensuring they and their families have the resources and support necessary to thrive, both in and out of uniform. This remains a priority. However, these investments will be undermined if we fail to address the quality of recruitment and health of the force. Sustaining a healthy and effective military goes beyond simply meeting and recruiting missions. It requires a commitment to the well-being and long-term readiness of every single servicemember.

I thank all the witnesses for being here today. I look forward to your testimony and Senator Warren now can give her opening statement.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR ELIZABETH WARREN

Senator WARREN Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Our annual posture review hearing provides the department and the military services the opportunity to discuss personnel priorities for the coming year.

It's also a chance for Members of this Subcommittee to continue to address the major challenges confronting our all-volunteer force. After all, our ability to defend ourselves and defeat our adversaries depends on brave men and women stepping up and volunteering to serve. I am pleased to see the military services are making progress in addressing their recruiting challenges since our last posture hearing.

It's critical that we welcome and support anyone who wants to serve their country. But in just the last 2 months, President Trump has fired General C. Q. Brown and Admiral Lisa Franchetti. It sends a chilling message about who is and who is not welcome in our military. Secretary Hegseth has removed the military's top legal advisors, and the Army has reportedly cut training on combat medicine and the laws of war.

Secretary Hegseth has announced plans to fire or push out 50 to 60,000 civilians, and he has already fired civilians who do everything from acquisitions to missile defense to childcare for military families. So, let's start with the civilian workforce. As Secretary Hegseth told this committee during his confirmation process, "Civilians are important and provide continuity and expertise to our armed forces." DOD civilians are not just critical to supporting the military, they're also a bargain for taxpayers.

The most recent study from the Federal Salary Council, found that civilian employees earned nearly 25 percent less than their counterparts in the private sector. They come to work because they believe in the most important mission we have, and that is to keep Americans safe. But what are co-Presidents Trump and Musk doing? Well, just last week, President Trump signed an illegal executive order attacking Federal unions and stripping Federal employees of their rights. At DOD, this won't make us safer. This won't make us more efficient. It will diminish morale and harm recruiting.

The Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) has plans to slash the DOD workforce by 8 percent. The results will fall into one of three buckets, and none of them are good. First, the military manpower could be pressed into service to accomplish the tasks that are more appropriately performed by civilians or the Federal Government could pay billions more to backfill these employees by using contractors or critical work could just be left undone.

So far, neither Elon Musk nor Secretary Hegseth has given any indication of how they plan to deal with the workload that these civilian employees currently perform. As part of the 8 percent planned reduction, Elon Musk has taken a chainsaw to DOD's probationary workforce. Think about what that means. It means firing workers who've been recently promoted or who've been hired to fill a critical need, often to fill gaps identified by Members of this very Committee.

The law makes it very clear that the Secretary must make sure that reductions do not jeopardize our national security, specifically the law. 10 U.S.C Section 129a mandates that the Secretary may not reduce the civilian workforce, "Unless the Secretary conducts an appropriate analysis of the impacts of such reductions on workload, military force structure, lethality, readiness, operational effectiveness, stress on the military force, and fully burdened costs."

We have no indication that this analysis has occurred, and I look forward to working with Members of this Subcommittee to ensure that this Administration complies with the law. It is also important for this Subcommittee to understand how damaging the Trump administration's efforts to shut down the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) will be for servicemembers and their families. An entire division of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau functions as the cop on the beat to enforce servicemembers' consumer rights, and it has been remarkably effective.

The CFPB has discovered more than \$363 million in financial scams directly affecting our servicemembers and veterans, and it has gotten that \$363 million returned directly to the servicemembers and vets who were cheated. Dismantling the CFPB will destate the enforcement of the servicemember Civil Relief Act and the Military Lending Act, which provides special protections for servicemembers.

For example, current law permits servicemembers to break their lease if they are deployed or if their duty station is transferred. The law also protects servicemembers from being foreclosed on or having their car repossessed without a court order. Without the CFPB to enforce these key laws, servicemembers are now vulnerable to scams and predatory practices that distract from the mission and undermine our military readiness.

I also continue to be concerned that this Administration does not understand how essential women are to our military. None of our military branches would have met their recruiting goals if women had not volunteered, and we cannot afford to dismiss the talents of more than half our population. I am very concerned that this Administration is more focused on pushing women out of combat roles and reinstalling a glass ceiling that will only make us weaker.

There are several topics I want to focus on with our witnesses today. First, childcare. We need to make sure that servicemembers have access to high-quality, affordable childcare. The most recent Blue Star Family Survey confirmed that "Childcare continues to be a top barrier to employment for Active Duty spouses." Failing to address these shortfalls, threatens retention, and will drive out the military families we need.

Second, making sure that servicemembers receive the benefits they deserve and are protected against predatory companies. To thank servicemembers for the sacrifices they make, Congress has created programs like the Public Service Loan Forgiveness and Tuition Assistance program, making it easier for servicemembers to get the education that they want and that they need.

I look forward to discussing how we can improve those programs in a bipartisan fashion. I want to thank all of our witnesses for being here today, and I look forward to your testimony. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Thank you, Senator Warren.

Now, we'll have opening statements from each of our witnesses. General, you'd like to start?

**STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL BRIAN S. EIFLER,
DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF FOR PERSONNEL, G-1, UNITED
STATES ARMY**

Lieutenant General EIFLER. Chairman Tuberville, Ranking Member Warren, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

The Army stands ready to defend our Nation. Our Army can provide combat power anywhere in the world to protect American and allied interests. Our Army is lethal, cohesive, and ready. We are proud, but we are not satisfied. The Army is transforming its organizations and delivering technology to keep up with the evolving battlefield. Continually transforming means the Army is more adaptable, flexible, and lethal.

The Army is moving forward under four focus areas that directly address an increasingly volatile world. These pillars are warfighting, ready combat formations, continuous transformation, and strengthening the profession. Within these four pillars, our team of professionals will execute all human resource (HR) actions that directly support our most important asset, our people.

Under this framework, the goal is to improve, streamline, and renovate how we do things in the H.R. community, to be faster and more efficient. Our readiness for large scale combat operations depends on it. As an example, we will focus on the overhaul and re-vamping of our retention processes. This will ensure quality over quantity, and provide leaders the right skills for our formations.

Next, we'll modernize our centralized promotion board system and leverage artificial intelligence in an ethical and responsible way to make sure we update the systems. Additionally, we will work with this Congress to overhaul the officer professional management system to make it relevant to the current operational environment and the future.

The Army remains committed to quality-of-life initiatives to ensure our soldiers remain focused on their missions. Barracks renovations, and modernization efforts are correcting outdated housing, dining facilities are being updated to provide more flexible and nutrition options. The Holistic Health and Fitness Program (H2F) embeds experts directly into our units to ensure peak performance. Recruiting will remain a priority.

The Army exceeded its fiscal year 2024 goal with over 55,000 new soldiers and is targeting 61,000 in this fiscal year, and are currently on glide path to surpass without lowering standards. With congressional support, we will keep the Army on a sustainable strategic path as we transform for the future. We will deliver ready combat formations with advanced capabilities to defend our Nation and its interest.

As we celebrate our 250th anniversary this year, I thank you for your unwavering support of our talented soldiers, civilians, professionals, and their families.

[The prepared statement of Lieutenant General Brian S. Eifler follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY LIEUTENANT GENERAL BRIAN S. EIFLER

Chairman Tuberville, Ranking Member Warren, distinguished Members of this Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you on behalf of the

men and women of the United States Army. The United States Army is amidst a fundamental transformation. We are adapting and changing capabilities, force structure and recruiting enterprise in order to recruit and retain the best talent for our All-Volunteer Army. We are committed to upholding standards, merit-based leadership, and are prioritizing safety and well-being of our personnel.

RECRUITING AND ACCESSIONS

I am happy to report that the Army exceeded its Fiscal Year 2024 Regular Army accessions mission of 55,000 with over 1100 in the Delayed Entry Program. This success comes after deliberate transformation of Army recruiting and from the unwavering efforts of recruiters across the country. We are building off last years momentum and started off fiscal year 2025 with historic recruiting numbers. The Army is on track to surpass fiscal year 2025 accessions goals and has already achieved 70 percent of its recruiting mission as we enter our busiest recruiting season. We are doing this without lowering standards or sacrificing quality.

The Army is continuously transforming and refining its enlistment and retention incentives to efficiently recruit and retain the best talent. Active Army enlistment incentives encourage prospects to commit to high-priority jobs for longer periods, building and sustaining readiness. Qualified applicants can select from a menu of options that include both monetary and non-monetary incentives, reflecting the fact that potential recruits are motivated by a variety of different things. This approach increases satisfaction for the individual soldier while allowing the Army to more effectively meet its mission requirements. In fiscal year 2024, the Army increased selection into priority MOSs by an average of 19 percent while paying \$200 million less in bonuses. There were almost 5,000 more requests for non-monetary vs. monetary incentives, and the two most popular options were Critical Skill Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) selection and Station of Choice.

While pursuing quality accessions, the Army remains committed to retaining its best and brightest talent. The Army is modernizing its Enlisted Retention program to remain competitive with the other services and the private-public sector. These efforts include professionalization of 79S MOS Career Counselor and the use of current Data Analytics to inform quality retention targets.

As a result of our wide-range of flexible incentives, many choose to serve for an additional 1-to-3 years. In fact, during fiscal year 2024, the Regular Army retained 62,500 soldiers (114 percent) of the target objective of 54,700. The United States Army Reserve retained 11,700 of 12,000 (97.5 percent) and the ARNG retained 38,500 of 39,500 (97.4 percent). As of 31 January 2025, all components retained above their year-to-date (YTD) targets. The Regular Army retained 19,000 (131 percent) of the 14,500 fiscal year 2025 YTD target. The USAR retained 7,000 (108 percent) of their 6,500 target and ARNG retained 14,000 (119 percent) of 11,800 target.

INNOVATIVE TALENT MANAGEMENT

The Army continues to modernize its Talent Management Program to ensure we have the right soldier, in the right place, at the right time. To achieve this, we've implemented a comprehensive, data-driven approach and published an updated Talent Framework. This framework identifies 137 knowledge, skills, and attributes (KSAs) essential for success in modern Army jobs. It provides a common language for talent management and allows us to better understand the strengths of each individual within the Total Force.

The Army is modernizing its personnel processes by leveraging analytics, robotic process automation, and machine learning to optimize talent decisions while returning time and resources to line formations. This effort has spurred a more comprehensive transformation of the promotion and evaluation process, with objectives to 1) improve the quality of candidates selected for promotion; 2) reduce manpower requirements for operating promotion boards; 3) reduce cognitive load; and 4) increase the transparency of the centralized board process. Our approach combines the strengths of analytics and human judgment, using technology to support and inform decisionmaking, while maintaining human involvement as the final arbitrators of all personnel decisions.

Additionally, we've established the first Army Talent Assessment Strategy. This strategy will guide the development of an assessment ecosystem that measures the KSAs outlined in our framework. This new approach will enable data-driven, informed talent decisions that are related to recruitment, development, and retention. Beyond the framework, we are pursuing innovative programs to directly enhance our talent management and innovation capabilities with a focus on increasing efficiency and reducing redundancy of our processes, while facilitating the lethality of

the force through access to modern and innovative developmental resources and tools.

The Army Coaching Program provides leaders at all levels with dedicated, trained coaches. These coaches empower self-development, guide professional goals, enhance performance, and help individuals navigate critical career transitions. Since 2020, this program has trained more than 300 Army Coaches and provided coaching to more than 6,000 personnel. We are strategically expanding this program to focus on key areas like Army Recruiting, Human Resources, and trainer development.

Finally, the Army is also piloting a Career Mapping Tool. This innovative tool is revolutionizing career planning for soldiers, Officers, and Civilians. By leveraging individual interests, KSAs, and career aspirations, this tool provides personalized career roadmaps, empowers individuals to make informed decisions about their future, while also enabling leaders to identify growth opportunities for their subordinates and better understand the talent within their formations. More than 5,000 members of the Total Force have already used this tool, providing overwhelmingly positive feedback.

LEADER SELECTION AND PERSONNEL SYSTEM MODERNIZATION STRATEGIES

The Command Assessment Program (CAP) remains focused on objective assessments and informing merit-based selection for O-5 and O-6 command, Brigade Command Sergeant Major, and key leader positions. CAP collects, synthesizes, and uses objective and relevant data to inform the command and key billet slating decision process. It provides individualized feedback and executive coaching. The program assesses approximately 2,000 candidates annually to select the Army's most capable leaders and inform their alignment against half of the field-grade commands and key leader positions every year. The top third are selected for command, reflecting the Army's unwavering commitment to merit-based leadership.

As CAP has matured, the Army has seen a decrease in the number of high-risk candidates certified for command. The U.S. Air Force and the U.S. Navy are beginning to develop their own command selection system, inspired by the Army's success. Additionally, the British Army used CAP to develop their One Star Command Assessment Program to select brigadier generals.

The Army invests a great deal into its officer corps to ensure that leaders uphold the Army values, can make strategic decisions, and are ready to command in combat. The Army is committed to retaining that talent and is transforming the Officer Retention Program. We do this by incentivizing high performers through monetary and non-monetary tools, incentivizing service beyond Active Duty service obligations and by reviewing and modernizing the Officer Personnel Management System XXI.

THE INTEGRATED PERSONNEL AND PAY SYSTEM—ARMY (IPPS-A)

IPPS-A is the Army's online Human Resources (HR) solution to provide integrated HR capabilities across all Army Components. It provides a platform to align with the Army's efforts to sustain a ready, effective, efficient, and lethal force to support the Nation. Next, the system will be modified to complete all movement order types for the Total Force, facilitating Audit 2028 requirements. Finally, IPPS-A projects to release one-time payments for Army military pay starting in fiscal year 2026. One-time payments include Death Gratuity Payments, adoption reimbursement, and Temporary Lodging Allowance.

Within IPPS-A, the Army is transforming talent management, by offering a suite of features designed to enhance force readiness and improve the soldier experience. Enhanced auditability is achieved by automating transactions and creating detailed logs, ensuring responsible resource management and compliance with auditing standards. Total Force Visibility is made possible for the first time through a single, centralized platform for viewing personnel data across all Army components, providing leadership with critical insights for strategic planning.

IPPS-A empowers soldiers with 24/7 mobile access to their records, enabling them to view information, submit requests, and track their progress with ease. This increased transparency extends to all aspects of a soldier's career, from tracking promotion points to managing the retirement process. The integrated Customer Relationship Management System streamlines communication with H.R. professionals, allowing soldiers to find answers and resolve issues efficiently. Additionally, the Streamlined Talent Marketplace optimizes talent management by connecting soldiers with assignments that match their skills and aspirations.

With the upcoming integration of DD214/214-1 forms and automated one-time payments, IPPS-A will further streamline transitions for separating soldiers. This widespread adoption and proven ability to process millions of transactions accu-

rately demonstrates IPPS-A's progress toward creating a more agile, ready, and soldier-centric force.

TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Army's commitment to caring for its people through the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) is multi-faceted and designed to support soldiers during a crucial period of their lives, their separation and departure from the Service. By providing comprehensive, personalized, and ongoing support, the Army prepares soldiers to become veterans. During the transition, soldiers and their families are prepared for building successful civilian lives through varied career opportunities from civil service to becoming an entrepreneur. We've learned that our best recruiters for the next generation of soldiers are those who came before, the last generation of soldiers and our Soldiers for Life.

TAP is dedicated to supporting soldiers as they transform into civilian life. The TAP process begins with an initial assessment with counseling, employment and education workshops, and seminars to help soldiers achieve Career Readiness Standards, which are mandated by law and policy. The program ensures that soldiers are well-prepared for their next chapter, whether it involves furthering education, employment options, or other pursuits. The TAP provides life-long learning, critical skills and empowerment tools to the servicemember, tools they will take with them along the journey into civilian life.

CAREER SKILLS PROGRAM (CSP)/ SKILLBRIDGE (SB).

On average, 10 percent of transitioning soldiers participate in a CSP/SB. About 7,250 CSP/SB applications were submitted during FY24, of which 58.9 percent of the graduates were junior enlisted soldiers (E-1-E-6), 17.5 percent were senior Enlisted Non-commissioned Officers (E-7-E-9), 14.9 percent were Warrant Officer/ Company-grade Officers, and 8.7 percent were field-grade officers.

The Army recently revised the program to ensure junior enlisted soldiers receive the maximum benefits of the program with the lowest barriers to usage. While any separating servicemember may participate, more senior-ranking soldiers and officers require approval from the first general officer in their chain-of-command. This ensures that funding is maximized by junior enlisted, the population who needs these career enhancing opportunities the most.

RESPONSE TO REDUCTIONS ACROSS THE CIVILIAN WORKFORCE

In response to the President's Executive Order "Implementing the President's Department of Government Efficiency Workforce Optimization Initiative" as well as OPM and OMB's memorandum "Guidance on Agency RIF and Reorganization Plans", the Army has been focused on reshaping the force by maximizing existing voluntary separation and recruitment restriction tools at our disposal. Specifically, we continue to comply with the DOD hiring freeze and are finalizing a process to ensure no vacant civilian position is filled, and no new civilian positions are created, except in cases where exemptions are approved by the Secretary of the Army. In addition, we continue to support and facilitate the voluntary separation (through either resignation or retirement) of thousands of civilian employees from the Army's rolls via the OPM Deferred Resignation Program (DRP). The Army has also been evaluating its year-to-date use of Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA) and Voluntary Separation Incentive Pay (VSIP) and determining the extent to which opening one or more VERA/VSIP windows would further assist in right sizing the civilian force. Our use of these tools aligns with the Administration's directive to streamline the Federal workforce and ensure effective resource allocation.

The Army works closely with the commands to ensure our workforce can maintain the readiness and capabilities that the Army must have to meet its missions worldwide.

CONCLUSION

The Army remains focused on its mission: to fight and win our Nation's wars. To meet our mission requirements, we rely on Congress's support as we modernize and refine our workforce. This relationship and these investments in our people will ensure the Army's readiness today and into the future.

The Army's number one priority is warfighting—with our people being our most important resource. The people of the United States Army—these soldiers who serve our Nation, both in and out of uniform, along with the families and Army civilians who support them—are our strength and our legacy. Congressional support for our

Army enables our ability to transform our force while showcasing our abilities and offering opportunities to allow careers and Families to flourish.

Thank you for your generous and unwavering support of our outstanding soldiers, civilian professionals, and their families.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Admiral.

**STATEMENT OF VICE ADMIRAL RICHARD J. CHEESEMAN JR.
USN CHIEF OF NAVAL PERSONNEL, N-1, UNITED STATES NAVY**

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. Chairman Tuberville, Ranking Member Warren, and distinguished Subcommittee Members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, representing the incredible sailors and families of our United States Navy.

Supporting me today is my Senior Enlisted Advisor, Fleet Master Chief Delbert Terrell, who provides wise counsel on all issues whether officer enlisted or civilian. It is those sailors and civilians that we both serve who are on duty around the clock and around the globe, a lethal fighting force working to deter aggression, particularly in the Red Sea, Eastern Mediterranean, and Western Pacific.

Continuing Resolution (CR) 2025 funds a thorough strategy driven Navy budget that is focused on delivering resources to ensure our naval forces remain ready, resilient, and agile to execute national tasking, and preserve peace through strength. I thank you for your support within CR 2025, that helps Navy's recruiting and retention efforts, as well as our quality-of-service initiatives writ large. They are making a difference, and I encourage continued congressional support in these areas for fiscal year 2026 and beyond.

Navy recruiters had a historic 2024, contracting more sailors than in any given year since 2003. We exceeded our increased contracting goal by implementing real time data informed processes, capitalizing on the Future Sailor Prep Course, streamlining medical waiver reviews, increasing the quality and number of recruiters, and identifying and removing barriers to recruiter productivity. As a result, we are on pace to exceed our fiscal year 2025 recruiting goal of 40,600 future sailors.

I remain focused on ensuring our schoolhouse supply chain is ready to receive this influx of motivated students, and we are ensuring every future sailor receives the training they need to be ready on day one in a fiscally responsible, efficient, and effective manner. Additionally, we continue to exceed retention forecast across all zones, in part due to consistent congressional support in funding sailors' special incentive pay and bonuses.

Sea Duty manning is an essential element of our operational readiness, and I know our chronic shortfalls impact job satisfaction and retention. We are driving barrier removal across the enterprise, and we can now predict a steady drop in gaps at sea over the next 18 months. My goal remains achieving 100 percent rating fill by 2027.

Our sailors, civilians, and their families are the backbone of our navy. It is our duty to take care of them by delivering the highest standards of quality of service. We must build great people, great leaders, and great teams to innovate, solve hard problems, and dominate in combat. Our sailors stand ready as a lethal fighting

force to deter or confront any adversary. You and every American can be proud of your Navy and this team.

This is my last scheduled hearing in front of this body as I retire later this summer. It's been a privilege to serve in this role over the last 3 years, and I sincerely thank all the Members of this Subcommittee and the staff for your continued support. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Vice Admiral Richard J. Cheeseman follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY VICE ADMIRAL RICHARD J. CHEESEMAN JR.

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon Chairman Tuberville, Ranking Member Warren and distinguished Members of this Subcommittee. On behalf of all of the men and women of your United States Navy, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

Our Navy builds great people, great leaders, and great teams to innovate, solve hard problems, and dominate in combat. Our sailors stand ready as a lethal fighting force to deter or confront any adversary. We will always evaluate and enhance our capability to attract, develop, and manage a talented workforce. Ultimately, the Navy's success in combat is dependent on the strength of our Navy team.

Navy thanks the bipartisan support from Congress, and the work of this Subcommittee in particular, for passing P.L. 118–159, the Servicemember Quality of Life Improvement and National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2025 (FY 2025 NDAA). The fiscal year 2025 NDAA grants us several authorities to use to increase readiness and sustain our Culture of Excellence. Another example is the enhanced capabilities given to Navy to manage our servicemembers such as allowing officers to opt-out of selection board considerations to complete certain assignments, advanced education, or career progression requirements delayed by an assignment or education goal. Navy must maintain a strong foundation of our most critical strength, our highly trained and skilled personnel in order to enhance lethality and readiness.

When I first testified to this Subcommittee, I assured you that we would continue to evaluate and improve our capabilities to achieve our mission of attracting, developing and managing the talent to ensure our advantage at sea while providing exceptional service to military and veteran families, caregivers and survivors. As I look back on my journey in charge of our Navy's greatest asset, I am proud of what our team has accomplished and encouraged for the future of our fighting force.

OUR SAILORS

Thanks to the incredible performance of our recruiting nation, who utilized all statutory authorities, levers and data available, we not only met but exceeded our mission in fiscal year 2024, contracting 40,978 future sailors, the highest number since 2003. We continue to drive toward increased accession missions to meet the requirements of the Fleet; our fiscal year 2025 mission is 40,600, which we are on glideslope to meet and exceed this year. Our recruiting initiatives, coupled with enhanced retention levers, will promote improvements in our manning goal of 100 percent enlisted rating fill by the end of 2026, which will directly translate to reducing our 20,000 operational gaps at sea. We expect to start seeing that progress on the waterfront later this Spring.

The fiscal year 2025 budgeted end strength reflects the continuing recovery to meet Fleet requirements and is achievable given the current recruiting environment and shipping capacity. Projected execution and requirements of the Fleet are greater than what is currently budgeted as Navy will maintain recruiting goals necessary to further reduce the gap to Fleet requirements.

RECRUITMENT

Building on the success of our recruiting efforts in fiscal year 2024, the Navy implemented a comprehensive strategy to further enhance recruitment for both enlisted sailors and officers. We achieved this improvement by implementing data informed processes throughout the recruiting enterprise. Navy established a Recruiting Operations Center to monitor data in real time, implemented the Future Sailor Preparatory Course to improve accession success, streamlined medical waiver reviews, increased the quality and number of recruiters, adjusted recruiting goal incentives, improved marketing processes, and identified and removed barriers to re-

cruiter productivity. These changes are sustainable. As a result, Navy is on pace to exceed our fiscal year 2025 recruiting goal of 40,600.

We continue to explore innovative strategies to attract qualified, motivated individuals. Navy is maximizing its pool of recruits with the physical and academic Future Sailor Preparatory Courses, as well as by expanding our reach through partnerships and traditional and mixed media marketing. We are maintaining our standards as every recruit must complete the same training at boot camp and meet all qualifications for his or her assigned rating.

Navy Recruiting Command (NRC) achieved 99 percent of the Active Component Officer mission in fiscal year 2024, falling slightly short in Nuclear Propulsion Officer Candidate (NUPOC) and Medical. NRC is now using data-driven production reviews to ensure accountability and adherence to recruiting directives. These data-driven decisions are a direct result of NRC's enhanced use of our enterprise-wide Customer Relationship Management (eCRM) system to improve candidate tracking, offering a more intuitive interface and user-friendly dashboards. Finally, our strengthened partnerships with Chaplain, Medical, and Nuclear community leaders enabled a more targeted outreach and specialized recruitment strategies to build a strong talent pipeline.

TALENT MANAGEMENT

Continued investment in Force Development (FD) is critical to ensuring our sailors receive the advanced, comprehensive, and effective training and education they need—whether on the job, during deployment, or in their off-duty hours. The Navy is committed to expanding and modernizing education, professional development, and training to enhance sailor performance and Fleet readiness. Our programs provide a continuous learning path that develops the skills and knowledge sailors need to succeed throughout their careers. To build and retain combat-ready Warfighters, the Navy offers rewarding career paths, advancement opportunities, and leadership development, supported by a strong performance management system. Furthermore, we are modernizing our talent marketplace, shifting from a vacancy-driven advancement system to a billet-based approach, which offers sailors more choice in their assignments while better aligning with the Navy's operational needs and enhancing mission outcomes across the force.

We continue to develop a more robust enlisted talent marketplace focused on flexible, streamlined, and responsive community and career management. MyNavy H.R. is adopting a talent management approach that better values strengths, skill portfolios (to include proficiency and experience), and career development aligned with the Navy's operational needs. This is being achieved through the Detailing Marketplace Campaign Plan (DMCP), with continued emphasis on Billet-based Advancement (BBA). BBA aims to align the Navy's advancement and distribution systems, ensuring commands have stable personnel assignments and sailors have the experience and obligated service to complete their tours. This merit based process matches sailors with Navy job requirements and skillsets, advancing them to the new paygrade once they accept, obligate, and report to the new command, while supporting informed career decisions and meeting critical manning needs.

Our officer talent management efforts continue to benefit from the authorities provided by Congress in the Defense Officer Personnel Management Act, to include promotion merit reorder, expanded continuation authority and expanded officer spot promotion authority. To enhance leader development, we utilize the Navy Leadership Assessment Program (NLAP), which is a data-driven initiative process that provides valuable insights into the strengths, vulnerabilities, the potential of officers, and complements existing command qualification processes. The program, developed in collaboration with the Office of Naval Research, uses a standardized leadership competency model and includes technical solutions to automate and visualize data for screening boards. As NLAP moves forward, it will expand to include more Type Commanders, integrating lessons learned and tailoring the program to meet specific community needs while maintaining rigorous scientific standards.

RETENTION

Navy is dedicated to retaining our most capable sailors; retention is a critical component of achieving our end-strength goals. To that end, we leverage monetary and non-monetary incentives, including Selective Reenlistment Bonuses, suspension of High Year Tenure Length of Service gates, the Retention Excellence Award and Best in Class program, and enhanced exit and milestone surveys which focus our retention efforts. As a result, enlisted retention remains healthy. We exceeded our fiscal year 2024 retention benchmark forecasts in zone A (0–6 years), zone B (610

years), and zone C (10–14 years). Navy continues to meet or exceed its retention benchmark forecast for fiscal year 2025.

These efforts are improving manning in critical billets at sea and ashore, ensuring we have the right people in the right places to maintain our operational readiness. We regularly review compensation packages to ensure we remain competitive in a tight labor market, positioning the Navy as an employer of choice. The latest Department of Defense Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation highlights that our compensation package is strongly competitive with the civilian employers.

While officer retention remains a challenge in specific career fields, we appreciate the continued support of Congress in supporting our budget to preserve monetary retention incentives in areas such as Aviation, Explosive Ordnance Disposal, Surface Warfare, Submarine Warfare, Naval Special Warfare, and Health Professions Officers.

Ship manning is an essential element of operational readiness, but it also impacts job satisfaction and retention. Since 2015, Navy has increased the number of authorized billets on at-sea units, but at-sea manning has not kept pace with that growth. At the beginning of fiscal year 2025, Navy had a shortfall of sailors relative to at-sea billets. Our recruiting and retention efforts will drive progress toward our primary manning goal of 100 percent enlisted rating fill by the end of 2026. Gaps at sea have fallen from 15 percent to 13 percent, although this metric trails recruiting successes by the length of time it takes for new accessions to complete training and report to the Fleet.

The Navy continues strong emphasis on quality of life improvements, such as expanded family support programs, improved housing, and more robust mental health resources, as we know that this affects sailors' retention decisions. Additionally, Navy Personnel Command recently spearheaded targeted efforts to discuss and influence sailor intentions ahead of stay/go decision points, leaning in on how we might accommodate career options to retain them. These combined efforts help to build a more resilient, experienced, and sustainable force for the future.

QUALITY OF SERVICE

The Navy recognizes and values the service and sacrifice of our sailors around the world. As such, it is our duty to take care of our sailors and families by delivering the highest standards of Quality of Service (QoS) they deserve. MyNavy H.R. continues to be an active member of the VCNO-established QoS Cross-functional Team to identify and address issues that result in an inadequate experience for our sailors.

MyNavyHR remains focused on providing sailors with a meaningful sea-going experience during their initial tour. We identified off-ship career growth opportunities for sailors stationed on aircraft carriers undergoing Refueling and Complex Overhaul (RCOH). We conducted Fleet Manpower Requirements Determination (FMRD) studies to ensure the right manpower mix for mission readiness. Moving forward, we will hold proactive manning summits to reduce sailor tour lengths on operational assets in industrial environments. In addition, we also issued a policy establishing tour length guidelines for first-term sailors in RCOH or extended shipyard periods, addressing manning levels, special handling for communities like nuclear-trained sailors, and sailors volunteering to stay.

Taking care of our sailors is a top priority, and that includes offering those in non-deployable status meaningful and challenging assignments that align with their skills and career goals. To help keep talented sailors during times when they cannot deploy, the Navy launched the EMPLOY program. EMPLOY is a new process that happens before a sailor—whether officer or enlisted—gets formally considered by a Medical Evaluation Board (MEB) for entry into the Disability Evaluation System (DES). The EMPLOY Board decides if a non-deployable sailor can continue serving in important, mission-focused roles onshore, either in the U.S. or overseas, instead of entering the DES process. Through this program, detailers and Community Managers work with sailors to explore career path changes, like switching to more shore-based specialties. This initiative helps the Navy retain sailors with valuable skills, knowledge, and experience that are essential to our warfighting mission.

MYNAVY H.R. SERVICE DELIVERY AND IT DRIVERS

The Navy is focused on improving performance, integrating Active and Reserve components, increasing productivity, ensuring auditability, and driving cost efficiencies in personnel readiness. This transformation leverages data-driven decision-making to optimize talent distribution and enhance H.R. services for over 400,000 sailors and their families. In fiscal year 2024, the Navy achieved historic lows in transaction times, resolving military pay cases in 3 days, travel claims in 2 days,

and activity gains and losses in 2 days. We also ensured DD-214s were delivered 60 days before separation when submitted on time. Additionally, the implementation of eCRM streamlined processes, improved sailor service, and reduced burdens on both sailors and the workforce. Significant progress was also made in auditability and financial management, with positive results from the independent Public Auditor.

By integrating advanced technologies and data-driven solutions, the transformation seeks to streamline personnel management processes such as pay, benefits, career management, and training. This initiative replaces outdated systems with more agile, secure, and user-friendly platforms, empowering sailors to manage their careers more effectively while enabling leaders to make better-informed decisions. Ultimately, IT transformation will enhance overall mission readiness by optimizing H.R. operations through innovation and technology.

ADVANCING OUR CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE

Our sailors and their families deserve to serve in an environment of trust, respect, and connectedness. The Navy's drive at sustaining a Culture of Excellence (COE) prioritizes command culture alongside combat readiness. Our COE prepares sailors to operate in uncertain, complex, and rapidly changing environments by ensuring every member of the Navy team—sailors and civilians—has the opportunity to become the best version of themselves as they work to preserve the peace, respond in crisis, and win decisively in combat. We are keeping sailors aware of best practices learned from the Fleet, among other insights aimed to enhance sailors' everyday lives. Specifically, we are (1) setting clear standards and measures, (2) providing education and training, starting with commands, then scaling up/down the career continuum, (3) practicing standards and measures through development forums, for the individual and unit, (4) incentivizing through talent management, and (5) awarding at the unit and individual levels.

The Navy is unwavering in its commitment to taking care of its sailors, recognizing that primary prevention is our best defense against suicide and sexual assault. The Navy Suicide Prevention Program prioritizes sailors' well-being by offering critical resources, stress management tools, and guidance to help recognize and address suicide risks early. Through initiatives like Embedded Mental Health programs, the Sailor Assistance and Intercept for Life (SAIL) program, and the Suicide-Related Behavior Response and Postvention Guide, the Navy fosters a culture of support and connection, empowering leaders to promote mental health and resilience within their units. Similarly, the Navy's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) program is grounded in the belief that any occurrence of sexual assault is unacceptable, emphasizing prevention, education, and training while ensuring 24/7 worldwide reporting and comprehensive victim care. The Navy remains committed to accountability and building a culture where sailors feel supported, safe, and valued, ensuring that every sailor has the resources they need to thrive.

CONCLUSION

We will continue to recruit and retain talented, dedicated Americans to ensure Navy will remain the strongest, lethal fighting force. We will also deliver the quality of service that our sailors and families deserve. I greatly appreciate the partnership with this Subcommittee and other Members of Congress to maintain our strong warfighting teams over my past 3 years, and I am especially grateful for the work of the professional staff members, who enabled open and transparent communications. It is my greatest hope that we can continue our collaborative relationship as I transition with my relief, when confirmed. It has been the honor of a lifetime to serve as the Chief of Naval Personnel and more importantly as a uniformed member of the Naval Service. On behalf of the United States Navy and their families, I thank you for your sustained commitment and unwavering support as we look toward the Navy of the future.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Thank you, Admiral. General Borgschulte.

STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL MICHAEL J. BORGSCHULTE USMC, DEPUTY COMMANDANT FOR MANPOWER AND RESERVE AFFAIRS UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. Chairman Tuberville, Ranking Member Warren, and distinguished Members of the Sub-

committee, I am honored to appear before you and tell the Marine Corps story through the personnel lens.

The Marine Corps approaches the challenges of this critical manpower portfolio with a singular focus, and that is delivering combat-credible lethal forces to operational units wherever they are needed. Every decision we make, whether that's through recruiting, retention, assignment, or policies are evaluated through the lens of lethality.

Today, your Marine Corps has over 30,000 marines operationally deployed in over 35 countries across the globe. These marines are supporting our Nation's campaigning efforts, underpinned deterrence, under the banner of peace, through strength, and ready to respond when called upon. Sustaining this high State of warfighting readiness depends entirely on our ability to recruit and retain those lethal warriors. I'm pleased to report that we continue to win on the recruiting front and we will make mission again this year.

We've achieved these recruiting goals while exceeding all DOD quality standards without lowering and without ever compromising those standards that define us, the marines. We believe our discipline culture, our warfighting ethos and high standards, attracts the competitive high performing Americans, that we need to fill our ranks with tough, smart, and gritty marines.

The retention of our marines has also reached historic heights this year. We've exceeded last year's unprecedented numbers, and just this last week we surpassed a hundred percent of the retention goals that we need, and we're not stopping. This marks the highest number and highest quality we've retained of marines in decades and proves that warriors that earn the title marine want to stay marine and are proud to protect and defend the Nation that we love.

I'd also like to thank you, each of you on this Subcommittee for your ongoing support in providing each of the services with the tools that make these successes possible. Financial incentives, quality of life initiatives, school access, family support programs, and many, many more, make a difference when a young American decides to become a marine or stay a marine.

Now I'm going to go a little bit, step further with a request. If you have sons or daughters or family members or friends that you think have what it takes to be a marine, I know a general, they can make that happen. I'll leave a bunch of business cards out here after testimony so we can get in contact with me.

But after all this success talk, I'd be remiss if I didn't stress this. We can't stop here. The success each service is going to highlight today, which has been fantastic, it remains fragile. The force depends not only on resources, but on something more enduring. That's the value of military service.

Our Nation must reawaken a sense of purpose around serving, around being part of something bigger than self. I ask you to help us restore the value and prestige of service in the eyes of our fellow citizens.

In closing, I'll ask that we all continue to commit to attack each key decision through the lens of lethality and warfighting excel-

lence. Our marines and our Nation are counting on it. I look forward to your questions today. *Semper Fidelis*.

[The prepared statement of Lieutenant General Michael J. Borgschulte follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY LIEUTENANT GENERAL MICHAEL J. BORGSCHULTE

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Tuberville, Ranking Member Warren, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, it is my privilege to appear before you today to provide testimony on Marine Corps personnel. Our Commandant has provided clear guidance on Marine Corps priorities and the individual marine remains the bedrock. We will continue to focus on recruiting the best and most qualified young Americans who seek the challenge of becoming a marine. We will invest in their personal and professional development and retain the very best who demonstrate the courage, discipline, critical skills, and ethos that make the Marine Corps the Nation's most lethal warfighting organization.

MARINE CORPS EFFICIENCY

The Marine Corps has always been a lean organization. We do not ask for more than we need, and we hold sacred the funding which the American people trust to us. We are proud to report that we attained a clean audit in fiscal year 2023—the first in the Department of Defense's history—and sustained that clean audit in fiscal year 2024. We accomplished this with a great deal of hard work and dedication and by leveraging and modernizing our technology—automating our system interfaces and streamlining the functionality of our systems and related business processes. What it means is that, when the Corps is provided a taxpayer dollar, we can show where and how it has been invested—a responsibility we take very seriously. Readiness for the warfighter means being accountable for our assets, knowing where they are, and in what condition they can be found, at a moment's notice. The Marine Corps' commitment to combat readiness, lethality, accountability, and discipline are enhanced with every dollar with which we are entrusted.

RECRUITING

The significance of Marine Corps recruiting efforts is highlighted by the fact that all officer, enlisted, regular, Reserve, and prior service recruiting efforts fall under the Marine Corps Recruiting Command (MCRC), the Commanding General of which reports directly to the Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC).

Despite continued challenges, we are winning at recruiting. Your Marine Corps once again made its recruiting mission in fiscal year 2024 and is currently on track to meet it again this fiscal year. Service as a marine continues to attract those who meet our standards and aspire to prove themselves worthy of earning the title. Importantly, we have achieved our recruiting missions while exceeding all DOD quality standards; we will not lower our standards.

We must collectively ensure the health of our All-Volunteer Force and the strategic advantage it provides—talent, capability, and warfighting excellence. The CMC remains committed to providing resources and sending the very best marines to become recruiters in order to achieve the accession mission while sustaining quality and standards. One in four of our general officers have been recruiters during their career, and we pride ourselves in assigning a sergeant major to every recruiting station, and a recruiter to every zip code in our Nation. This is the bedrock of successful Marine Corps recruiting.

We are thankful for this Committee—and to all of Congress—for passing into law an increase in tuition assistance for our Platoon Leaders Course. This will help to modernize a program which aims to attract more highly qualified officers earlier in their educational endeavors. This will greatly assist our Officer Selection Officers in their efforts to find the next generation of marine leaders.

Despite our success, we must remain mindful of the long-game—that recruiting will continue to be difficult into the future. Our delayed entry program is where these future marines are first trained and educated on what it takes to be a marine. Historically, we have started each fiscal year with a pool of approximately 50 percent of our recruiting mission. In fiscal year 2023, this fell to 22 percent, as we leveraged the pool to ensure mission accomplishment. This required marine recruiters to focus on finding individuals to ship in the near-term, impacting their time to physically and mentally prepare for the rigors of the transformation process to ma-

rine. The good news is that we built the pool back up to 28 percent last year and are on track to be well over 30 percent this year. Our success has been the combined results of leadership, increasing our recruiting force, re-aligning recruiters and recruiting assets, increased advertising, and efforts to streamline applicant medical processing.

The Marine Corps advertising program is essential to building awareness among high quality populations that are increasingly unfamiliar with military service. Advertising funds repay many times over, producing lower first-term attrition, higher quality marines, and increased readiness. Robust and sustained advertising funding is essential, now more than ever.

We thank Congress for its continued support for recruiter access to high schools and colleges. The Fiscal Year 2024 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) provided additional timeliness guidelines for recruiter access to directory lists. However, continued vigilance is essential to ensure that recruiters have consistent and quality access to ensure the ability to recruit the best. The single biggest reason we hear from young people for not joining the Corps is that they simply were not made aware of the opportunity. Maintaining meaningful access to high schools and student directories remains a top priority for the Marine Corps. We will certainly continue to come to Congress with new ideas to further improve recruiting.

RETENTION

As a result of Force Design, we shifted from a “recruit and replace” to an “invest and retain” model with immediate positive results. We are transitioning to a more experienced enlisted force characterized by increased retention and contract utilization; this will give us the technical and leadership intensive skills necessary on 21st-century battlefields. At the same time, the service is increasing investment in quality of life and quality of service initiatives most closely related to the care and retention of marines and their families. Major reform initiatives implemented in recent years such as the Commandant’s Retention Program and the extended first term alignment plan retention model are continuing to secure our highest performing marines for reenlistment at earlier points in their career. At the same time, we are implementing new initiatives such as the Enlisted Career Designation Program, which, for the first time this year, will offer our most experienced marines the opportunity to reenlist for the duration of their careers, rather than force them to reenlist at regular intervals. All efforts are focused on sustaining combat readiness by increasing the number of trained, experienced, and deployable marines across the total force.

Overall, we are retaining marines with the right skills and talent at a historic pace. This reinforces that once an individual becomes a marine, they want to “stay marine.” We achieved historic retention in fiscal year 2023 and fiscal year 2024 and we will exceed mission again in fiscal year 2025. The desire for continued service speaks to our ethos—being part of a team, accomplishing the mission, taking care of one another, and serving something bigger than self. It reinforces that marines value their service to our Corps and Country and the high standards we demand of our marines.

Key components of our retention strategy are re-enlistment bonuses and quality of life initiatives; we thank you for your support of these. One main initiative for your marines in the strategic Indo-Pacific area of operations was very simple—to allow shipment of more than one vehicle when a marine had a family member of driving age. This authority supports the marine, the spouse who needs to get to work or transport a child to childcare, or the spouse or child that needs to get to school. It is a big deal to those who we send to these remote locations overseas.

Despite these successes, the retention environment is competitive. We continue to experience challenges retaining certain communities, like aviation, cyber, and some of our intelligence specialties. Of particular importance is aviation retention. Assessments have shown this must be viewed holistically and cannot be solved by bonuses alone. We are exploring monetary and non-monetary incentives, to include improving aircraft readiness rates and flying hours, and increasing the production pipeline throughput, all of which support increased operational readiness.

We thank Congress—especially this Subcommittee—for the incentives, flexibilities, and special pays you have authorized. They enable the development of better strategic talent pools and increase access to our talent for longer periods and with more options to better access and match it to warfighting requirements.

COMPENSATION

Competitive compensation is a foundation of the All-Volunteer Force with impacts to both recruiting and retention. Currently, basic pay and accompanying benefits,

such as housing, medical care, bonuses and allowances, and tax advantages, are very competitive. According to the recent DOD 14th Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation, pay for officers is in the top 24 percent of pay as compared to their civilian counterparts; for enlisted, it is in the top 17 percent. We appreciate Congress' 4.5 percent basic pay increase for marines.

We continue to use both monetary and non-monetary incentives to retain, match, and assign marines to billets that are appropriate for their experience and skill. Selective Retention Bonuses for Active and Reserve marines allow shaping specific personnel requirements by targeting critical military occupational specialties and supporting lateral movement of marines to these billets. We continue to be proactive in the retention campaign by designing complementary monetary and non-monetary incentive packages tailored to individual marines with unique desires and aspirations.

TALENT MANAGEMENT

The Marine Corps is a notable example of a meritocratic institution. The Corps takes pride in commitment to recognizing and rewarding excellence among its ranks in a fair, transparent, and methodical way. Whether it is accessing, assigning, promoting, awarding, or retaining marines, we remain dedicated to merit-based principles. To remain the most ready and lethal force, we capitalize on the knowledge, skills, abilities, performance, and potential of every marine, and provide each marine opportunity for success on their merits.

To further increase our readiness and lethality, we are modernizing how we manage our talent. The overarching goal of Talent Management (TM) is to increase Marine Corps combat capability and remain the premier expeditionary force-in-readiness. TM requires that we recruit and retain the best talent, modernize the assignment process consistent with our warfighting philosophy, introduce new measures to increase career flexibility, and utilize modern digital tools, processes, and analytics, with transparency. Much like the overarching approach to Force Design, TM is a multi-year, total force effort—a service-wide strategic design process that we are executing. Some of our proven talent management initiatives include:

- *Commandant's Retention Program (CRP)* identifies the most competitive marines and offers them an opportunity to stay a marine via pre-approved reenlistment. Since its introduction in fiscal year 2023, over 4,000 high-performing marines have chosen to reenlist under CRP.
- *Enlisted Career Designation Pilot (ECDP)* provides greater stability and career certainty for senior enlisted marines, allowing Eligible E-8 and E-9 marines can voluntarily opt into the ECDP upon reenlistment, committing to an additional 24 months of service and potentially extending their careers to their desired end date up to their enlisted career force control dates for their current rank.
- *Direct Affiliation Program (DAP)* affords qualified Active component marines the opportunity to seamlessly transition to the Reserve component with no break in service. As of February 2025, we've accomplished more than 40 percent of our fiscal year goal, which equates to over 800 warfighting marines ready to serve our Nation in the Reserves.
- *Special Duty Assignment (SDA) Volunteer Program* allows marines to provide duty station preference for recruiter, drill instructor, and combat instructor billets if they volunteer for them. Since its initial inception during the fiscal year 2023 SDA Campaign, this program has sustained an 86 percent average increase in total volunteer assignments, significantly reducing involuntary screenings and improving career satisfaction and retention.
- *Sequenced Professional Military Education (PME) Staff Non-Commissioned Officer (SNCO) Promotion Selection Model* increases the number of marines that our enlisted promotion selection boards may consider eligible for promotion. As of March 2025, 746 marines across the total force have promoted under this initiative. These additional SNCOs would have otherwise not been eligible and passed for promotion. Our standards have not changed. Once selected, marines must still complete all PME requirements for grade before delivery of their promotion.
- *Staff Non-Commissioned Officer (SNCO) Alternate Selection List* incentivizes strong performance and provides the service with an additional TM mechanism to mitigate risk to mission. As of March 2025, we have activated 113 alternates for promotion—directly enhancing overall readiness by reducing potential gaps in or formations.

- *Increasing Lateral Movement* incentivizes qualified marines to transition into high-demand, low-density MOSs.
- *Promotion Opt-Out* allows officers to opt out of promotion without penalty and enables them to complete a broadening assignment, advanced education, career progression requirement, or other assignment.

Other initiatives in development:

- *Improved MOS Assignment* will be a better, more predictive, data-driven matching tool that will optimally align applicant interest, Primary Military Occupational Specialty (PMOS) skill requirements, and the needs of the Marine Corps.
- *Retention Prediction Network (RPN)* is currently being developed to identify a potential recruit's likelihood to enlist and continue to serve through their first enlistment and beyond. RPN is a multi-year collaborative effort with academia that harnessed vast quantities of manpower data to provide data-informed talent management decisions.
- *Talent Marketplace* will modernize the current assignments system with a Total Force, transparent, data-based environment that allows marines, commands, and duty assignment professionals to collaborate on the assignments process. At full implementation, the marketplace is envisioned to utilize advanced analytics supported by artificial intelligence and machine learning elements to enable a market-style assignment system.
- *Total Force Retention System 2.0 (TFRS 2.0)* is being deployed this year and will leverage a fully digital platform to support the first term alignment plan reenlistment campaign, resulting in a modern user experience and significant reduction in processing time.

TM success will remain dependent on modern technology systems, and we continue to modernize our IT portfolio—consolidating older, disparate systems into a small subset of interoperable, multi-faceted applications that ride on a single IT system hosted in the cloud. Cloud migration allows IT efficiencies and effectively scaled applications, data bases, and services across the enterprise to meet emergent requirements in a dynamic environment. As we migrate to the cloud, we will be able to optimize and capitalize on the promise of artificial intelligence and machine learning. Our vision of cloud-based, application-accessible platforms must move at the “speed of relevance.” The goal is to have modern technology with increased capabilities to enable the management of marines’ careers.

RESERVES

As a vital component of a fully integrated Total Force, the Marine Corps Reserve delivers responsive, joint capable, combat-ready units and individuals to the Naval and Joint Force, fulfilling warfighting requirements for contingencies and crisis response across the entire competition continuum. Aligned with ongoing Force Design modernization, the Reserves continue to adapt to meet contemporary and evolving warfighting challenges. By actively contributing to the National Defense Strategy, the Reserves enhance operational effectiveness by participating in strategic exercises, fostering critical partnerships, and supporting operational commands. Resources are prioritized to deliver robust and immersive training opportunities, cultivating a ready and resilient force, and fostering a profound sense of purpose among reservists in defense of the Nation.

Bonus programs support the retention of experienced drilling reservists and incentivize direct affiliation of marines transitioning from the Active component. Bonuses also enable ambitious yet attainable reserve recruiting missions throughout the fiscal year. Together, these recruiting and retention initiatives populate reserve formations with high-performing marines, stabilizing unit readiness and contributing to the readiness and lethality of your Marine Corps.

CIVILIAN WORKFORCE

Our civilian employees—both appropriated and non-appropriated funded—support the mission and daily functions of the Marine Corps and are an integral part of our Total Force. Our civilian workforce is lean—with only one civilian for every nine marines, compared to 1:2 for DOD as a whole. They exemplify our core values; embrace esprit de corps, teamwork, and pride in belonging to our Nation’s Corps of Marines; and serve alongside our marines throughout the world, in every occupation and at every level. A large majority of our civilians work outside the Washington, DC, beltway at 57 bases, stations, depots, and installations around the world. Fifty-nine percent of our civilians are veterans who have chosen to continue to serve our Nation; of those, 23 percent are disabled veterans. Many others are spouses of ma-

rines. Our civilians steadfastly continue to provide vital support to our marines, Reserve marines, their families, and our wounded, ill, and injured. They continue to truly show themselves as *Semper Fidelis* by keeping our marines and their families in the forefront.

TAKING CARE OF MARINES AND THEIR FAMILIES

Warfighting capabilities are not just built on unit training; they are also built on trust and meeting the other operational needs that support overall wellness of our marines and their families. Marines rely on the institution to provide their families with stability. To that end, we recognize the importance of marine and family predictability and support it as a major line of effort for successfully achieving combat readiness.

Marine Corps Total Fitness (MCTF) is an integrated system of health, wellness, prevention, and performance capabilities that enable the readiness, lethality, and resilience of individual marines and enhance the well-being of marine families. MCTF is our primary prevention delivery mechanism and a proactive, holistic approach to prevention and wellness, program delivery, resource management, infrastructure development, and policy design. MCTF emphasizes four domains of fitness—mental, spiritual, social, and physical. It also recognizes other foundational building blocks for wellness such as sleep, nutrition, medical/dental care, and financial, environmental, and occupational fitness.

Our Warrior Athlete Readiness and Resilience centers prioritize the marine warfighter who is closest to the fight and recognize that meeting marines' operational needs are inseparable components of mission success. We engage marines and families where they work, train, live, and naturally congregate to create greater accessibility, sustainability, affordability, and benefit. We help marines and families build life skills that contribute to holistic wellness: coping and problem-solving strategies, stress identification and mitigation, healthy relationships and boundaries, and peer-to-peer mentorship and support. We appreciate Congress' support of our integrated prevention strategy to combat harmful behaviors and improve the readiness, performance, and resiliency of the Corps and our families.

SUICIDE PREVENTION

A life lost to suicide is tragic. Suicide prevention remains a top priority for Marine Corps leaders. Suicide is also a critical issue across the United States; the current U.S. suicide rate is the highest since 1941. Marine Corps' efforts to reduce suicides include implementing Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Committee recommendations, expanding our integrated prevention efforts, and promoting MCTF to reduce suicides by strengthening the social, spiritual, mental, and physical health of our people. Our Unit Marine Awareness and Prevention Integrated Training and Operational Stress Control and Readiness training focus on primary prevention and early intervention basics. The Prevention in Action training for leaders and stakeholders outlines a comprehensive approach to prevention. We have also fully implemented the Brandon Act, which ensures marines are educated on all options to seek care, including the option to voluntarily seek help through an officer or SNCO supervisor and initiate a referral for a mental health evaluation. Part of our effort will always be to encourage every marine to use the care and services available—and we need to make sure that mental health care is easily accessible. Nationwide shortages of health care personnel and providers have created significant challenges for accessing quality, timely health care, especially in more remote and overseas locations.

SEXUAL ASSAULT/SEXUAL HARASSMENT PREVENTION

The Marine Corps values every marine and is committed to fostering a culture where all marines feel safe in their unit and where the crimes of sexual assault and sexual harassment are eradicated. The Marine Corps Sexual Assault Prevention & Response program encourages prevention, reporting, investigation, and prosecution of these criminal behaviors to the fullest extent. We remain steadfast in holding perpetrators appropriately accountable for their crimes and commanders and senior enlisted leaders accountable for the climate of their units. We also provide training and education to marines, sailors, dependents, and eligible civilians to foster an environment where sexual assault and harassment of any kind is not tolerated and provide guidance on how to respond and report. We appreciate Congress' support as we continue these efforts.

FAMILY SUPPORT

Permanent Change of Station (PCS) Flexibility. The Marine Corps continues to prioritize stability for units and reducing the stress placed on marines and their families. PCS moves, while essential, can be disruptive. Through TM, we seek to further increase PCS and permanent change of assignment (PCA) flexibilities, balancing the needs of the individual marine's career, their family, and the service.

Childcare. High quality childcare is one of the many important child and youth programs we offer. It is a readiness priority for the Marine Corps. Our child development centers currently serve more than 40,000 children, and we have waitlists for 800 children, primarily at Camp Pendleton, Hawaii, Quantico, MCAS Beaufort/MCRD Parris Island, and Camp Lejeune/New River. While waitlists are caused by a variety of factors, we share the national challenge of employee turnover rates. We are addressing childcare waitlist issues through several initiatives, to include a non-competitive childcare employee transfer program. More than 40 percent of our direct care childcare employees are marine spouses, which contributes to the annual turnover rate due to PCS. The non-competitive transfer program enables employees to seamlessly transfer from their current position to one at a different installation. This has provided dividends, allowing us to retain more than 180 spouse employees we may have otherwise lost.

We also offer childcare fee assistance for eligible marines who are assigned to an installation with a significant waitlist or who are not stationed near a DOD childcare facility. Over the past 3 fiscal years, the rate of fee assistance utilization has increased steadily for both community-based childcare providers as well as children served. In fiscal year 2024, more than 1,800 children were enrolled in the fee assistance program with 733 community-based providers, at a total cost of \$8.7 million.

Spouse Employment. Spouse employment is also important for many Marine Corps families and can be a significant factor in their financial security, readiness, and retention. The Family Member Employment Assistance Program provides employment-related referral services, career and skill assessments, career coaching, job search guidance, portable career opportunities, and education center referrals/guidance. Additionally, to support our spouses who work within Marine Corps Community Services, we released the Relocation Tool within the personnel system to allow spouses to identify their next Marine Corps duty station ahead of their move, which fosters direct transfers and career continuity. We also reimburse eligible marine spouses up to \$1,000 for State licensure and certification and other business costs arising from relocation to another State and have supported 511 spouses thus far. We appreciate Congress' recent expansion of this program and continued support.

CONCLUSION

Our highest priority will always be recruiting, developing, and retaining elite warriors in the highest state of combat readiness to support and defend this great Nation. Every initiative that we undertake must demonstrably and logically contribute to readiness and lethality. Our measure of success is a Marine Corps with improved performance in combat which enables us to fulfill our congressional mandate to be 'most ready when the Nation is least ready,' today and on the battlefields of the future. Today, we stand ready to do exactly that.

Semper Fidelis.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Thank you General. General Miller.

**STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL CAROLINE M. MILLER
USAF, DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF FOR MANPOWER, PERSONNEL, AND SERVICES, A-1, UNITED STATES AIR FORCE**

Lieutenant General MILLER. Chairman Tuberville, Ranking Member Warren, and distinguished Members of this Subcommittee. I'm honored to have the opportunity to appear before you with my fellow service personnel colleagues.

The Department of the Air Force is committed to ensuring we are postured to deter and if necessary, prevail against our sophisticated peer competitors to include China and Russia. As the department looks to the future, readiness continues to be the foundation of our mission success

Readiness can be assessed through multiple lenses; however, our most significant competitive advantage is our people, our airmen. We exist to fly, fight and win, none of which is possible without the dedication and talent of the men and women who volunteer to serve. This year, we continue to focus on recruiting, developing, and retaining skilled and innovative individuals, ensuring they are equipped with essential operational skills and resources.

Fiscal year 2024 saw improvements in recruiting due to an increase in recruiter manning, changes to training processes, and an increase in delayed entry program to its highest level in 10 years. The department is also improving pilot retention through increased sessions and training through pit capacity, using monetary and non-monetary authorities granted by Congress.

As readiness is directly linked to the welfare of our airmen and their families, we continue to target barriers to well-being and overall force readiness in areas including economic security, access to quality childcare, sexual assault and sexual harassment prevention and suicide prevention.

Efforts to reduce financial stress include training through programs such as the personal financial readiness program and direct financial assistance authorized by the Fiscal Year 2025 National Defense Authorization Act.

We also remain committed to improving access to available, affordable, and quality childcare programs. To bolster sexual assault and sexual harassment response and prevention, we have implemented policies to establish standards for care providers to ensure accountability and facilitate inter-office collaboration.

Furthermore, the Department has codified the DOD suicide response system and implemented a postvention command support team. This team delivers leader-focused training designed to implement rapid response activities following a suicide event to minimize suicide contagion, facilitate individual and unit cohesion, and reduce negative impacts of force readiness.

Talent management remains one of the cornerstones of our efforts to build and develop the force we need. Our talent management philosophy is based on high standards, accountability, and meritocracy. Each airman record is evaluated on its own merits, specifically in terms of job performance, demonstrated skills and warfighting readiness. To improve readiness, the department is focused on developing specialized skills to solve operational and strategic challenges.

As the Department of the Air Force looks to the future to preserve our supremacy against adversaries, I assure you the Air Force leadership is wholly focused on maximizing readiness and lethality, while caring for our force.

Thank you for your continued partnership and your advocacy of the United States Air Force. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Lieutenant General Caroline M. Miller follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY LIEUTENANT GENERAL CAROLINE M. MILLER

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Tuberville, Ranking Member Warren, and distinguished Members of this Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and for

your continued support. I am honored to share the continuing efforts of the United States Air Force within the human resources portfolio to build and maintain critical airmen readiness.

As the Department of the Air Force (DAF) looks to the future, readiness continues to be a cornerstone of our mission. While readiness can be assessed through the lens of our platforms, lethality of our pilots, and weapons in our inventory, our most significant competitive advantage is our people—our airmen. They are the foundation of our force; their knowledge, skills, and abilities are critical to deterring aggression, sustaining combat operations, and defending the Nation at a moment's notice. As we navigate evolving global threats, it is essential that we recruit, train, and retain a lethal and well-equipped force that is prepared to successfully respond to current and future challenges. Meeting today's challenges requires a highly capable, combat-ready force that will enable the Air Force to have the right airmen in the right place at the right time. Ensuring our manpower is aligned to future force structure and modernization efforts requires a focus on recruitment & retention, force readiness, and talent management to develop and retain the talent needed to execute assigned missions and strengthen our lethal fighting force for the United States.

The Air Force relies on the strength of our meritocracy at every level of the personnel system; we must rebuild readiness and enforce high standards & accountability to fulfill the President's objective of leading with peace through strength. The DAF maintains a commitment to excellence across all facets of our force structure. We have a robust, dynamic, well-developed and technically proficient total force encompassing Regular, Reserve and Air National Guard personnel together with our civilian workforce who are prepared to respond to any conflict or crisis. Our comprehensive approach to readiness reflects our unwavering dedication to provide care and support for our airmen, guardians and their families to ensure they are equipped to thrive in an ever-changing landscape and remain postured to succeed.

GROW THE FUTURE AIRMAN

To maintain air supremacy, the Air Force must maintain steadfast focus on its greatest strength: our airmen. We exist to fly, fight, and win—none of which is possible without the dedication and talent of the men and women who volunteer to serve. Ensuring the right airman is in the right job at the right time requires that we not only attract skilled and adaptable individuals, but also effectively develop them and reward excellence so they choose to continue serving. Our approach to recruitment, readiness and talent management is centered on that principle.

In fiscal year 2024, with the assistance of Congress, the DAF successfully reintroduced Air Force Warrant Officers to boost and retain cyber and information technology talent across the Department. Warrant Officers will serve as technical experts charged with remaining actively engaged in and abreast of advancements in the cyber and IT fields to ensure the Air Force remains at the forefront of change. In December 2024, after a 297-day sprint to develop the foundation and training necessary for a Warrant Officer Corps, we graduated our first class of 30 Air Force Warrant Officers, selected from a pool of 490 incredibly talented enlisted airmen. This historical class is the first assessed class since we ceased assessing Warrant Officers in 1959.

FORCE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY: RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Air Force lethality is grounded in the proficiency, skill, and commitment of its airmen. Our end-strength force management strategy directly influences recruitment and retention and ensures we have the right airmen to execute our mission.

While fiscal year 2023 was a challenging recruitment year, the Air Force successfully closed the gap in fiscal year 2024 through an increase in recruiter manning, changes to training processes, and an increase in the Delayed Entry Program to its highest level in 10 years. Last year, we also reported declining retention rates, by slightly less than a percentage point. This year, retention rates are up, with overall retention at 90 percent (up 0.6 percent), with officer retention at 93 percent (up 0.5 percent), and enlisted retention at 89 percent (up 0.6 percent). The programs and policies enacted to address the previous dip in retention rates are strengthening our force, reducing gaps in warfighting capability, and shaping future investments.

The Air Force is also closing the gap in our pilot shortage by focusing our efforts on increasing accessions and training throughput capacity. We have deliberately and effectively used monetary and non-monetary authorities granted by Congress to stabilize the force. We've fully implemented the Fiscal Year 2025 Aviation Bonus program, which is performing well. As of March 2025, the Air Force opened 485 new Aviation Bonus contracts and anticipate by the end of fiscal year 2026, additional bonus take rates coupled with an increased training pipeline capacity will further

reduce pilot shortfall, significantly improving our ability to achieve full readiness levels and increased lethality. Our fiscal year 2025 total force end strength strategic goal of 495,300 remains on target and will allow the Air Force to continue to fill gaps in critically manned fields to bolster current operational capabilities.

FORCE READINESS

Air Force readiness is inextricably linked to the well-being of our airmen and their families. While preparing for the complexities of modern warfare and evolving global security challenges, the Air Force equips every airman not only with necessary operational skills and resources but also psychological fortitude and familial support to excel in their missions. The DAF continually identifies and addresses barriers to well-being and overall force readiness through targeted outreach and tailored programing, in areas including economic security, access to quality childcare, sexual assault/sexual harassment prevention and response, and suicide prevention. Many of these programs provide services for airmen and guardians, so we work in concert with the Space Force for implementation.

Servicemembers have historically identified “financial stress” as one of their biggest strains, leading to the introduction of the Personal Financial Readiness program. This series of 10 financial training sessions, strategically scheduled at various life and career stages, ensures members progressively develop financial knowledge through targeted training. DAF rolled out initial mandatory training IAW NDAA 2018, but in 2023, the first year with new metrics, 20,000 airmen and guardians completed the First Duty Station Personal Finance Course. Evaluation results revealed 67 percent of participants correctly answered financial knowledge questions after completing the course. For fiscal year 2024, we continued to see benefits from this program as approximately 14,000 airmen and guardians completed the course, with correct answers increasing to 72 percent.

For airmen seeking direct financial assistance, recent congressional actions have been influential in increasing financial support. The Fiscal Year 2025 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) mandates an increase in the eligibility threshold for the Basic Needs Allowance (BNA) from 150 percent to 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. In addition to the 4.5 percent pay raise in January, it also authorized a 10-percent Junior Enlisted Basic Pay Raise. The BNA adjustment may increase the number of our BNA-eligible families from below 40 to potentially 1,800 and consequently may increase the budget requirement for military pay and compensation. However, this estimate will be affected by the Junior Enlisted Basic Pay Raise and will be monitored closely.

The DAF Military and Family Readiness Centers continue to provide education, counseling, and referral services to airmen, guardians, and their families with food security concerns. To supplement our continuing efforts to investigate and implement innovative and cost-effective strategies to counter food insecurity, the DAF has contracted a Food System Transformation Study for the total force. This study will provide a current State baseline, data-informed vision of an integrated food system, and an implementation strategy to target these issues in fiscal year 2026.

Access to available, affordable, and quality childcare programs also directly impact mission readiness. In fiscal year 2024, the DAF-operated Child and Youth Programs (CYP) served over 56,800 children. An additional 7,800 children were supported with just over \$33 million in community-based childcare fee assistance. Due to targeted efforts to retain staff, such as the childcare fee discount (expanded in the fiscal year 2025 NDAA to 100 percent for the first child of all CYP employees and a 25 percent discount for each additional child), staffing levels increased from 72 percent in October 2022 to 86 percent in December 2024. Through staffing increases and retainment efforts, the unmet childcare needs waitlist fell below 3,000 at the end of fiscal year 2024, the lowest it has been since DAF began tracking unmet needs in March 2018. However, the current hiring freeze has severely impacted our childcare centers by lowering our staffing levels and increasing waitlists, with the current DAF waitlist a little over 4,000 as of 19 March 2025. With the projected reduction of the civilian workforce, we are still monitoring the enterprise impact this will have on DAF childcare.

Responding to and preventing sexual assault and sexual harassment are critical to force readiness. One successful approach DAF has taken is “co-location,” which implements our policies of “Connect to Care” and “No Wrong Door.” These policies establish standards for care providers to maintain accountability and facilitate inter-office collaboration to support our airmen and guardians. “Connect to Care” is a collaborative approach to support victims and survivors of sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking, cyber harassment, domestic abuse, and/or interpersonal violence. “No Wrong Door” ensures that victims and survivors receive a warm handoff

between support agencies, regardless of which agency they initially engage. We have achieved co-location and/or collaboration of services at 22 installations and plan continued implementation across the DAF.

The DAF has codified the DOD Suicide Response System within its services to airmen, guardians, and their families. The Suicide Postvention Command Support Team (SPCST), with policy and guidance, develops leader-focused training designed to implement rapid response activities following a suicide event. These efforts help minimize suicide contagion, facilitate individual as well as unit cohesion, and reduce negative impacts on force readiness. SPCST is composed of Headquarters Air Force subject matter experts who provide support and consultation to commanders at installations experiencing a “suicide anomaly”—a greater than expected frequency of suicide deaths given installation size and DAF suicide rate. The team provides immediate and long-term recommendations for suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention, as well as implementation of these recommendations. Together with the Wingman Guardian Connect program, which focuses on building personal relationships, the system hopes to significantly increase cohesion and reduce suicide risk, thereby positively impacting force readiness.

TALENT MANAGEMENT

Talent management is the cornerstone to building the force we need. The foundations of our talent management philosophy are high standards and meritocracy. We believe that advancing the best-qualified airmen—those with demonstrated performance, leadership, and potential—is essential for mission success. In alignment with the President’s administration and under Secretary Hegseth’s direction, the Air Force has reviewed all personnel policies to ensure they remain grounded in merit.

Each airman record is evaluated on its own merits, focusing on job performance, demonstrated skills, and warfighting readiness. Promotion boards are determined by Operational Categories to represent the population of the Air Force. Operational Categories include Combat; Combat Support; and Combat Service Support. Our promotion board processes continue to use a whole-person concept to assess duty performance, professional qualities, leadership, experience breadth, and education—without regard to immutable characteristics. This approach is consistent with longstanding Air Force values and Title 10 requirements.

Currently, the Air Force is balancing the DOD commitment to reducing the civilian workforce with maintaining critical talent in career fields that directly contribute to combat effectiveness. We are committed to cutting overhead and improving efficiency but must approach it strategically to avoid harming readiness by losing critical talent. We continue to support NDAA initiatives aimed at strengthening our civilian workforce through the use of direct-hiring authorities, faster hiring timelines, and improved training programs for our civilians. Through process improvements, the Air Force is very competitive in hiring experts in cyber, engineering, and other high-demand, critically manned fields.

The senior-leader focus on standards from Secretary of Defense Hegseth and Chief of Staff of the Air Force General Allvin reinforces that we will not lower the bar in the name of expediency. Whether it is in training, daily performance, or conduct, we expect every airman to meet high standards and we hold leaders accountable for enforcing those standards. By rewarding individual initiative, excellence, and hard work based on merit and standards, we foster a culture where every airman trusts that they have an equal opportunity to succeed. This not only unifies our force but also improves effectiveness by ensuring the most capable individuals assume leadership roles. We encourage a culture where innovation is rewarded and seek to empower commanders and supervisors to recognize and advance talent.

CONCLUSION

Chairman Tuberville, Ranking Member Warren and distinguished Members of this Committee, thank you again for this opportunity to represent our distinguished servicemembers and their families. I want to assure you that the Air Force leadership is wholly focused on maximizing readiness and lethality while caring for our force. We align our policies with a clear-eyed view of the threats we face and a deep respect for the profession of arms. By advancing airmen who demonstrate exceptional skill and performance and giving airmen the opportunity to reach their full potential, we will continue to strengthen the world’s finest Air Force. Unified in this endeavor, we aim to be One Force, and we look forward to our continued partnership and appreciate your advocacy of the United States Air Force—those in uniform, our civilian professionals, and the families, and caregivers who support them.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Thank you, General. Ms. Kelley.

**STATEMENT OF MS. KATHARINE KELLEY, DEPUTY CHIEF OF
SPACE OPERATIONS FOR HUMAN CAPITAL, UNITED STATES
SPACE FORCE**

Ms. KELLEY Chairman Tuberville, Ranking Member Warren, and distinguished Members of this Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to represent the United States Space Force here today, and thank you for your opening remarks about the importance of people. This Subcommittee like no other, is a huge supporter of the talent that we have in the Space Force.

Our mission is clear: to secure our Nation's interests in, from, and to space. Strategic competition in space, represents a serious threat to our national security and to our global leadership presence.

The Space Force remains focused on developing guardians with the foundational skills and experience necessary in this highly technical, contested, and lethal 21st century world that we find ourselves in. This past year, the Space Force launched its inaugural officer training course. This is a rigorous 12-month course covering space, operations, intelligence, cyber, and acquisition, designed to develop the most credible guardians possible.

Simultaneously, we evaluated our enlisted training and development in our cyber and intelligence as applied to the space domain. For our civilians, we launched an optimization for space course to enhance the civilian expertise in this continuing evolving domain.

Building the force American needs requires the continued growth and investments in all our space professionals and all our guardians. As our uniform service grows, we are ensuring the civilian workforce is aligned to critical functions and indirect support of the warfighter mission and the support the guardians give to the joint fight.

I'm proud to share that the Space Force has exceeded its fiscal goal in 24 for enlisted recruiting, and we are on track in 25 to exceed as well. We are also at a retention rate of 96 percent across our force, both officer and enlisted. Currently, we have more than 440 recruits awaiting entry into the Space Force, which will allow us a further pipeline for next year as well,

To ensure the long-term pipeline of guardians, we've established a recruiting squadron, which is the first time for the Space Force to have a guardian recruiting other potential guardians, and so, we are excited about what this new model can bring. We're leveraging new marketing platforms as well because we're cognizant of the talent that we seek for the Space Force, leveraging technology and ways to meet these potential guardians where they're at, and we are excited about a new Space Force planetarium show, that will be debuting around the country on National Space Day next month.

The Space Force is committed to fostering support for guardians and their families as well, as we recognize things like childcare are one of the primary resources crucial for quality of life and readiness, that allow our guardians to focus on the 24-7 operational support that much of our force provides on a day-to-day basis to the joint fight.

We've made significant progress in consolidating space expertise across the Department of Defense. We've opened our first applica-

tion window for space professionals in the reserves to transition over to the Space Force in a full-time capacity. We have far outweighed our ability and interest, and we continue to bring more into the Space Force over the next subsequent years.

The flexible service options that this committee provided us in the Personnel Management Act, enable guardians to move between full and part-time work roles in a much more seamless way and aligned to the service mission needs. We are also leveraging the authorities you gave us to incentivize and compensate our best and brightest, our Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) focused talent and those guardians who represent this Nation

Chairman Tuberville, Ranking Member Warren, and all distinguished Members of this Subcommittee, thank you again for the opportunity to represent our Space Force guardians with you today. As the space domain becomes increasingly contested, no longer a benign environment, we remain steadfast in our mission to secure our Nation's interests. I very much look forward to your questions here today.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Katharine Kelley follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY MS. KATHARINE KELLEY

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Tuberville, Ranking Member Warren, and distinguished Members of this Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to represent the United States Space Force. Our Space Force mission is clear: to secure our Nation's interests in, from, through, and to space. This mission is achievable because of the incredible men and women who are the guardians of the United States Space Force. From intelligence analysts to cybersecurity experts, space operators to acquisition officers, and more, guardians defend our country and freedom to operate in space, deter aggression within the domain while maintaining security and accessibility for military space power and the next generation of innovation.

To achieve Peace through Strength, the Space Force needs to grow smartly in order to respond to the challenges of the space domain. We must recruit and retain the very best talent, anticipate and meet the changing needs of the workforce, champion their professional growth, and provide support for guardians and their families throughout the arc of their careers. These are the goals we rise to meet every day—to take care of the people who will take care of securing our country.

It is a privilege to share with you the continued work of the Space Force in ensuring the warrior ethos is the nucleus of our Service as we re-establish deterrence with a U.S. Space Force capable of providing combat credible forces to execute military operations in the space domain.

END STRENGTH

Space Force capabilities underpin national security. As we build our military to match threats to capabilities and stay ahead of strategic competitors, we must continue to grow the U.S. Space Force. These capabilities will also assist in delivering the Golden Dome for America and highlight the central role space-based capabilities have in protection of the U.S. Homeland.

Additionally, the Space Force is actively building Service Components to provide dedicated space capabilities and expertise to the Combatant Commands, further increasing our operational footprint.

As our military end strength grows, we are reforming the civilian workforce through realignment of personnel to critical functions in direct support of warfighter requirements. The Space Force was created to be lean with civilians performing critical roles for Space Missions. As we optimize our workforce to ensure it is the right size for Space Force, our focus is on retaining civilians with essential expertise.

RECRUITING AND RETENTION

The Space Force faces a unique recruiting situation—a smaller pool of eligible candidates with STEM skills that are in high demand in the commercial sector. De-

spite these obstacles, the Space Force exceeded its fiscal year 2024 enlisted recruiting requirements by 4 percent and is on track to meet our fiscal year 2025 recruiting goals.

To shape a sustainable long-term pipeline of guardians and ensure effective future talent acquisition, the Space Force is establishing a Recruiting Squadron. The squadron will influence and support recruitment efforts, while scouting and attracting top talent aligned with future missions. The Space Force Recruiting Squadron is projected to achieve initial operational capability by Fall of 2025 and will continue to mature over the next year to reach full operational capability with 27 guardian recruiters by Fall of 2026.

This year the Space Force will also debut new marketing platforms. On International Space Day, May 2d, planetariums around the country will begin showing a video providing viewers with a basic understanding of Space Force missions and the Service's role in protecting our everyday way of life. Then in July, the Elevator Level 62 Mobile Platform Experience will make its debut. This is a multisensory, interactive mobile asset that recreates the experience of being 62,000 ft above the earth. Visitors experience different aspects of life as a guardian—a rocket launch, navigating through space debris, and Space Force military and humanitarian missions.

Continued investment in the Guardian Recruiting Squadron and fully funding marketing needs are critical to attracting and recruiting talented individuals in this competitive market.

Because the Space Force is competing with a robust commercial space industry, a proactive strategy to ensure successful retention rates is imperative. That is why the Service is focused on fortifying conditions to ensure guardians understand how they contribute to the lethality, agility, and mission accomplishment of the Space Force. Emphasizing guardians' value and contributions as highly trained professionals and joint warfighters positively influences their decision to remain in military service and is why Space Force retention remains healthy and on target. I am proud to share with this committee that, at the end of 2024, overall guardian retention was 92 percent.

MANAGING TALENT

The implementation of the Space Force Personnel Management Act (PMA), enacted in the fiscal year 2024 NDAA, enables the Space Force to establish an innovative talent management system with flexible service options. PMA defines conditions for guardians to serve on Space Force active status in both full time and part time work roles, providing guardians flexibility to move between roles aligned with service mission needs. Implementation is now fully underway.

The PMA also enables Space Force to transfer Space missions currently in the Air Force Reserve to the Space Force. In June 2024, the Space Force opened the first application window for Air Force Reserve professionals to transfer into the Space Force full-time. Following three selection boards, approximately 300 full-time Reserve space professionals are projected to transfer into the Space Force in fiscal year 2025. Future transfer application windows are tentatively planned for this summer.

Similarly, the PMA will enable the Space Force to implement Section 514 of the Fiscal Year 2025 NDAA which directed the transfer to the Space Force of the space functions currently performed by the Air National Guard. In collaboration with the Air Force and Air National Guard, the Space Force has begun initial planning for this transfer and will continue working to implement Congress' intent.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

The Space Force is focused on developing guardians with the foundational skills and experiences needed to lead in a highly contested, lethal, and uncertain 21st century security environment marked by adversary partnerships and the proliferation of advanced weapons. We are optimizing our force through implementation of innovative workforce development efforts for officer, enlisted, and civilian guardians.

Last September, the Space Force launched the inaugural Officer Training Course at Peterson Space Force Base. The 12-month program is developing a multidisciplinary officer corps by providing newly commissioned Space Force officers with foundational career field training. This initiative prepares officers to address complex operational and technical challenges. Following the course, graduates will begin operational assignments in one of three disciplines, supporting the Space Force's broader efforts to build a combat-credible force to control the space domain.

Simultaneously, with the introduction of the Vosler Fellowships, the Space Force has reimagined enlisted professional military education with a customized curriculum emphasizing agile teamwork and a Tactically Responsive Space mindset.

The new fellowship model focuses on leveraging industry and academic networks, short-term training for staff, and a new experiential learning model to educate enlisted guardians. There are three Vosler Fellowships structured across key career milestones, with each course enhancing leadership and operational capabilities while building upon the previous fellowship's framework. We are also developing Space Force-specific enlisted development programs, incorporating fully qualified promotions and codifying our foundational warfighting capabilities into our functional career fields.

For civilian guardians, the Space Force developed a 2-week pilot course to optimize civilians for mission readiness. The first course launched in October 2024 at the Space Systems Command, bringing together civilian personnel to gain better understanding of Space Force operations and strategic objectives. This program equips civilians with the tools and knowledge needed to effectively support space superiority.

PAY AND COMPENSATION

I want to thank you for protecting the increase in pay for our junior enlisted servicemembers when passing the continuing resolution to fund the government through the end of this fiscal year. While we continue to work through the cost-of-living challenges facing our guardians, we appreciate your support.

This year the Space Force expanded eligibility for the basic needs allowance and launched assignment incentive pay for extreme cold weather environments. We've also conducted a special duty assignment pay review, implementing a new to ensure proper compensation and improved financial stability for our enlisted guardians serving in critical roles.

Retaining talent in highly technical fields is a priority for the Space Force. As a result, we've increased the Selective Retention Bonus (SRB) and secured policy exceptions to offer SRBs widely, based on Space Force Specialty Codes. Our commitment to meritocracy is reflected in the new military evaluation form to be fielded in fiscal year 2025. It is tailored to the Space Force to ensure performance evaluations align with service-specific values, focus on mission accomplishment, and better reflect guardian roles and responsibilities.

QUALITY OF LIFE

Quality of life directly impacts recruitment, retention, and the overall readiness of the force. The well-being of guardians and their families is essential and contributes to a strong and resilient force.

The Space Force fosters a strong sense of community and provides support for guardians and their families through various resources and programs. This past year the Space Force launched the Quality of Life Learning Channel, a centralized platform with key resources, including childcare support, travel reimbursement updates, and health and wellness guidance for guardians and their families.

The Space Force was designed as a lean service. We rely on numerous United States Air Force programs to support our servicemembers and improve quality of life for guardians and their families. These dedicated support professionals have ensured access to fitness centers, childcare and youth programs, and food operations ensuring mission readiness for guardians. This year, Space Force bases reached a 7-year staffing level high across Child Development Centers, filling 87 percent of current vacancies and reducing the unmet need by 71 percent since April 2022.

Guardian health and fitness is another key component of readiness and resiliency. Critical at all points of service, this is especially true when employed-in-place and supporting 24/7 missions. The Space Force has operationalized its Holistic Health Approach with Guardian Resilience Teams that work directly with servicemembers and their families to provide multidisciplinary expertise to build skills and enhance resiliency of the force. These teams have had more than 300,000 touch points with guardians across the enterprise since July 2024. They are located at every Space Force Base, the National Capital Region, Joint Base San Antonio (JBSA), Kirtland Air Force Base, and a remote Guardian Resilience Team has been established for geographically separated units and remote guardians.

CONCLUSION

Chairman Tuberville, Ranking Member Warren and distinguished Members of this Committee, thank you again for this opportunity to speak to you today and represent Space Force guardians and their families. As the space domain becomes increasingly contested, we remain steadfast in our mission to secure our Nation's interests in, from, through, and to the space domain.

This mission is not just about technology, strategy, or capability—it is about people. It is about the guardians who have pledged to protect our country, push the boundaries of innovation, and uphold the warrior ethos that defines our Service. These men and women operate in a challenging environment where precision, vigilance, and adaptability are not just valued but required. Their commitment ensures that our Nation remains secure, our warfighters stay connected, and our future in space remains one of strength and leadership.

We must continue to recruit the best, develop their talents, and provide them with the support they need to thrive—because when we invest in our people, we invest in the security of our Nation. With the right resources, the right policies, and the commitment of leaders like you, we will ensure that America remains the pre-eminent space power for generations to come.

The Space Force is not just preparing for the future—we are shaping it—as we build a ready, resilient Force responsible for preserving the United States's advantage in space.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Thank you, Ms. Kelley. Thank you all of you, and you all have very important jobs as we all know. We all know the consequences if you do great or don't. So, thank you for your efforts.

I once was a recruiter in my former job. I know how hard that is, and pretty much the same level, in the same age group, and it's a thrill a minute, you know, when recruiting 18-, 19-, 20-year-old young men and women. So, we'll go through a few questions here.

General Eifler, you know, this week my office heard from a constituent that the Army was planning to close its command and General Staff College Satellite Campus at Redstone Arsenal, in my State of Huntsville, Alabama. When was this decision made and can you share with the committee the reasoning behind this closure?

Lieutenant General EIFLER. Yes, Chairman, there was no decision. This is all pre-decisional. I know they're doing some analysis out there based on some decisions for the delayed retirement program, but no such decision has been made at this time.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Thank you. Secretary Hegseth recently ordered a 60-day review of military combat armed standards to ensure that everyone who filled these roles was held to the same equal standard. Each one of you, and we'll start with the General on the left here. Can each of you—if you have affected jobs, discuss your services approach to meeting this deadline and creating sex-neutral standards based solely on the operational demands of the occupation and not an artificial desire to achieve a certain representation number? Can each of you talk about these requirements? General, we'll start with you.

Lieutenant General EIFLER. Yes, Chairman. Specifically, we were looking into this because of the NDAA last year that directed the close combat units specifically in Military Occupational Specialty (MOSs) or specialties like infantry, armor, special forces, engineers have a higher standard for close combat activities. So, we have already been working on that and we'll continue to work on that here soon, that is due out by June to have in place, according to this Committee, in this Congress.

What the Secretary of Defense has asked us also to look at as having one standard that is regardless of sex for those close combat units. So, we're taking our analysis and looking at all of that to make sure that we are focused on lethality and focused on what we require for combat

Senator TUBERVILLE. Admiral.

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. Senator, thanks for the question. Navy's taking a similar approach as my Army colleague here. We've done some nascent work with our SEALs and Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) folks, also with some of our Civil Engineering Corps folks. We have a much smaller cadre given we're not necessarily ground focused, but for those communities that are, we're working with Manpower Reserve Affairs, we're developing those standards, but their work to date is nascent Sir.

Senator TUBERVILLE. General

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. Senator Tuberville, thanks for asking this question. For marines, we carry high standards and we don't apologize for it. We're very proud of our high standards. Every marine conducts a combat fitness test, and a physical fitness test. These combat fitness tests; this is where you carry a marine over your shoulder through an agility test for 50 meters. You throw a grenade, a dummy grenade, you carry ammo cans and we're pretty proud of that. Every marine fires an automatic weapon and qualifies not just from a hundred yards, from 500 yards, five football fields, every marine.

In addition, for our combat arms, all marines have the same standards. So, things such as wearing your full combat, heavy equipment with your service weapon, and going on a force march for 20 miles under a certain time, all marines. Another instance would be taking a mark 19, very heavy weapon, grenade launch weapon system, putting that over your head, doesn't matter. Male, female, all marines. Taking an Olympic bar, 115 pounds, putting it over your head, all marines. Taking an Olympic bar, 150 pounds up holding, deadlift all marines. So, we're again, very proud. Thanks for asking that question, we hold our standards and we don't apologize for it. If you can't meet that standard, you're not in USMC.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Can you carry somebody 50 yards on your shoulders?

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. I can. Yes, sir.

Senator TUBERVILLE. I see your group behind you saying Yes, [Laughter.]

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. If you come down to Quantico, sir, I'll carry you.

Senator TUBERVILLE. General Miller.

Lieutenant General MILLER. Yes, sir. We had already started doing this. We already have a special force combat arms physical fitness test, and we just wrapped up the EOD. We've been working over the EOD for the last couple years and they finalized it last week actually. So, the timing was perfect. We're getting ready to demonstrate it to the chief, and at that point we'll be in compliance with the with the requirements.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Were there a lot of adjustments to it?

Lieutenant General MILLER. Not at all. None, and ours are also sex-neutral, they always have been.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Ms. Kelley?

Ms. KELLEY Yes. Chairman, on the Space Force side, I would add one unique dynamic for us. In addition to the review that we're in the midst of on combat relevant, the piece for the Space Force that we're really looking at is the cognitive abilities necessary on an ops

floor for us. A lot of what our focus is for guardians is to make sure that they're coming to work ready, rested, awake, focused on what they need to do.

So, in addition to the physical training and the fitness that they're working on, we're also exploring whether we can bring technology into that to help them see and be more aware of how ready they are for that direct fight that night.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Thank you, Senator Warren.

Senator WARREN Thank you, Mr. Chairman. So, every parent in this country understands how hard it is to find high quality, affordable, available childcare. For our military families, the tasks can be just whole orders of magnitude harder. Often, they have to navigate finding childcare while they're on long deployments, abrupt relocations, and non-standard work hours. If military families can't find childcare, they just may not be able to serve.

I appreciate that at least two of you specifically mentioned childcare when we talk about our servicemembers and our force readiness. DOD knows how important childcare is, and that is why it runs the Nation's largest employer-based childcare system. It's high quality, it's affordable, but right now it is facing a huge shortage of childcare workers, which means fewer childcare slots, and literally thousands of families on wait lists.

In 2023, A DOD task force investigated the staffing shortages and confirmed that, in order to fix this problem, we need to increase childcare workers' wages. So, in last year's NDAA, we tasked the DOD with redesigning the compensation model and starting to implement it by April 1st. But here we are a year later, and you haven't even finalized the redesign, much less begun implementation that was supposed to have started, what is it, 8 days ago?

So, for each witness, I want to ask, when can we expect to see the updated compensation model and when can we expect to see implementation begin? Lieutenant General Eifler, let's start with you.

Lieutenant General EIFLER. Thanks, Ranking Member.

Senator WARREN I'll be writing these down. So, what's the date?

Lieutenant General EIFLER. Yes, so I am not clear on that date, because I know, I believe all the services are working with the Department of Defense on finalizing that. I do believe the CR has some impacts because of funding for it because—

Senator WARREN No, I'm sorry. The CR has impacts on your implementation.

Lieutenant General EIFLER. Right.

Senator WARREN It does not have an impact on your obligation to update your compensation model. You're supposed to do the modeling with the money you got.

Lieutenant General EIFLER. Yes.

Senator WARREN So when can I expect to see your updated model?

Lieutenant General EIFLER. I would have to followup with you, Senator, because I am not clear on when that's going to be in place.

Senator WARREN Okay. Well, I hope you're clear that you're already way past due.

Lieutenant General EIFLER. Yes, Senator.

Senator WARREN Alright. Vice Admiral Cheeseman, how about you? What's the date?

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. Senator, similar answer. We're working with our Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) partners on when that date would be, and when I have a more informed name, I'll make sure I get back with it, ma'am.

Senator WARREN Yes. Well, I'd like to have an answer that suggests that you guys are paying attention to this. We didn't put this in the law just for the fun of it. It wasn't advisory. It was for you to actually perform by a date certain. Lieutenant General Borgschulte.

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. Senator, thank you very much for bringing this up. This is personal to me. I've got kids, I've got a spouse that has a career and we have used our world class childcare at every duty station.

Senator WARREN Good for you. So, when?

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. So, I'll get back, we have increased the wages. I'll get back to you with a specific date, but we have over 40,000 kids in our child and youth programs. I mean, think about that. So that really a retention effort and that allows them to be free to go fight, and I just appreciate you bringing that up.

Senator WARREN Okay. So, you said many nice things and the fact that you've actually moved toward increasing wages put you a step ahead of the other two people to your right.

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. We'll take that. Senator, I'll get you back an exact answer on this.

Senator WARREN But I got to have this done. Okay. Lieutenant General Miller.

Lieutenant General MILLER. Yes, Ma'am. We've actually in increased our wages—

Senator WARREN Also good, how about your plan?

Lieutenant General MILLER. We have a plan. I can get it over to you, ma'am.

Senator WARREN Oh, you actually, have it? because We weren't able to find it, so I'm polite.

Lieutenant General MILLER. I will initiate or I will send over what we have done over the last year, which is quite significant.

Senator WARREN It's an updated compensation model?

Lieutenant General MILLER. Yes, ma'am.

Senator WARREN Is what you're required to do under the law, and then start implementing that model. So, thank you. I hope That's right. Lieutenant General Miller, Ms. Kelley.

Ms. KELLEY Senator, we leverage the Air Force for our Child Development Center (CDC). So, the model that General Miller is referencing would be applicable for guardians as well.

Senator WARREN You're pointing back in the other direction. Yours will be ready when his is ready.

Ms. KELLEY. No ma'am.

Lieutenant General MILLER. Yes, ma'am. I'm sorry. Yes, we support her.

Senator WARREN I was taking you to the other end, I apologize.

Ms. KELLEY The Air Force runs the child development centers that the Space Force guardians leverage. So, the adjusted salaries

that the Air Force has, to include the fee assistance programs that are unbelievably helpful for our CDC workers, we've seen significant improvement.

Senator WARREN I just want to say on this, look, I understand that I am unpleasant about this and intend to be even more unpleasant if this doesn't get done. You all fully understand why this is so important and so important anytime. We don't say to our military families, here's this really hard job, and then not give them the support that they need to be able to carry it out.

So, I appreciate that you all seem to understand that. My job is just to keep turning up the heat until we actually get this done and pay them better. Let me just bring out one more of course. This is all about making sure we have the staff needed to bring down military childcare wait lists. But of course, that's not going to happen if we're slashing the civilian workforce.

Two weeks ago, a Child Development Center in Utah closed because of cuts to its civilian staff. So, let just ask, do you agree that cutting childcare by laying off civilian childcare workers makes life harder for military families? Ms. Kelley, we'll start at your end this time.

Ms. KELLEY Senator, I absolutely agree that lack of childcare is a readiness issue for all the services and certainly for the Space Force.

Senator WARREN Go ahead.

Lieutenant General MILLER. Yes ma'am. It's a readiness issue.

Senator WARREN Thank you. General Borgschulte,

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. Senator Warren, I agree a hundred percent. We have not shut any down and don't plan to.

Senator WARREN I hope that's right, but it really is the reminder that these civilian cuts can have profound effects for our Active Duty servicemembers. Vice Admiral Cheeseman.

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. Senator, thanks for the question. For our childcare employees, they are funded out of non-appropriated funds. We have not let anybody go. In fact, our staffing levels have increased by 10 percent over the last year. We've decreased the wait list by about a thousand spots.

Senator WARREN That is really terrific to hear. Thank you very much. I appreciate your getting that on the record. General Eifler.

Lieutenant General EIFLER. Yes, Ranking Member, totally concur. We have not shut down any, and we do believe it's a readiness issue because of that.

Senator WARREN Good. I appreciate that, and now in the name of the chair I call on Ms. Hirono.

Senator HIRONO Thank you very much. So, Senator Warren, you said you can be very unpleasant about all this? It's called oversight.

Senator WARREN Yes.

Senator HIRONO If we need to be unpleasant about it, so be it. So, Admiral, did you say that this is the last time you're going to be testifying?

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. Yes.

Senator HIRONO Oh, thank you very much. Congratulations for doing what you do and my best wishes to you. So, you know, let's face it. I am deeply concerned about Secretary Hegseth's personnel

policy changes within the DOD, and their impact on military personnel and overall readiness. You all acknowledge how important all these programs are, including childcare and everything else on readiness, but he's making these cuts.

The reinstatement of the transgender service ban and the roll-back of diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, raise serious questions about their effects on recruiting, retention, and unit cohesion. Furthermore, reports of abrupt dismissals of tenured and non-partisan military officials most recently, General Hall, without clear justification, call into question the institutional stability and apolitical foundation of our military.

These concerning developments require a thorough examination to ensure that DOD policy supports a diverse, inclusive, and effective fighting force. Even as there are all these attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion, the fact of the matter is that all of the services need to recruit from as wide a swath of people as possible. So, these attacks on DEI, they are the wrong way to go. As I said, we should be recruiting from as wide a swath of people as possible.

This is for Admiral Cheeseman. The Navy currently has over 20,000 gaps at sea billets, and this shortfall has serious readiness implications since it requires a Navy to pull sailors assigned to ships and submarines undergoing maintenance and assign them to units going on deployment. This cannibalization of personnel causes cascading and disruptive effects across the Service. Question to you, does this gap concern you?

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. Senator, thanks for the question. It keeps me awake at night. Yes.

Senator HIRONO So, it concerns you?

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. That's right.

Senator HIRONO What are you doing about it?

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. Yes, ma'am. Our survey data tells us the single biggest concern among our sailors is burnout due to lack of manning. All right, so with that, we've done a number of things. First, we have completely merged our distribution and advancement systems into something we call billet base advancement. That has shown great strides in this area from E-5 to E-9, I essentially have no gaps at sea. In fact, I have a small surplus. All of our gaps at sea right now are among apprentices, and it speaks directly to the recruiting challenges we've had in the past.

When we contracted over 40,000 sailors in 2024, it takes time to get those sailors through the pipeline. They will start arriving to ships in 2025. By the end of this fiscal year, we should have about 18,000 gaps. By the end of 2026, we should be down to about 8,000 gaps. It takes on average 9 months for a sailor to get through the pipeline. Those new sailors are coming.

Senator HIRONO I hope you achieve those goals, and in fact, we probably will be following up with you on how you are doing because this is a huge, and you're not going to eliminate the gaps by hoping that it will. I am just going to ask you all, are women in the military important? Let's start with you.

Lieutenant General EIFLER. Senator, yes, they are.

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. Senator, absolutely.

Lieutenant General BORGSCULTE. Yes, Senator, absolutely.

Lieutenant General MILLER. Absolutely. Yes, Ma'am.

Senator HIRONO So, when we talk about the how important childcare is and all of those kinds of things, it makes me wonder whether in fact women are important in the military. Let me just point out a program that was created, it's called the Women's Initiative Team (WIT). All the services had Women's Initiative Teams. Apparently, they are all gone. Are they gone in all your services? Are you planning to bring them back? It's important, I would say if women are important to the services, do you still have WITs?

Lieutenant General EIFLER. I'm not aware of that we do, Senator.

Senator HIRONO Pardon Me?

Lieutenant General EIFLER. I'm not aware that we do. Senator.

Senator HIRONO Did you ever have them?

Lieutenant General EIFLER. I believe we did.

Senator HIRONO Okay. Well, what about you?

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. Senator, for the Navy, we folded our Women's Initiative Team. But we are, we do have a Navy culture advisory group that takes in all issues from all sailors.

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. Senator, I'm not aware of that particular initiative. But we incredibly value our females in the Marine Corps.

Senator HIRONO Well, I'm told that all the services have them, so the fact that you're not aware, and when you say that women are important, and this is one of the ways that we can recruit, retain them, and support them, I would suggest, in fact, I'm going to followup and put language in the NDAA that requires all of you to reinstate this program, so that if women in fact are important to the services, then your policies and practices will reflect. General Miller.

Lieutenant General MILLER. We all of our affinity clubs have been stood down temporarily.

Senator HIRONO Yes. I wonder why, I know why, that is a rhetorical question. Ms. Kelley.

Ms. KELLEY Yes, Senator. We connected with the Air Force for this as well. They have been stood down. But I acknowledge your point.

Senator HIRONO Yes, and they've been stood down because they're all supposedly under attack for promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion. It's like totally wrong. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Thank you, Senator Warren.

Senator WARREN Thank you, Mr. Chairman. So, when Congress passed the GI Bill in 1944, a grateful Nation promised to help servicemembers with the cost of their education. This was a thank you for their sacrifices to our country. The promise is not charity. It is an ironclad commitment, and its key to how we recruit and maintain a fighting force.

Survey after survey has demonstrated how important this promise is, both to recruitment and to retention. I see you're nodding along with this. Too often, however, the Federal Government has failed to live up to our promise, not delivering on the student debt relief that servicemembers are entitled to, or leaving them vulnerable to predatory lenders.

For example, after student loan repayments restarted after the pandemic, the CFPB found that servicemember complaints about

student loan servicers went up, thanks to hours long hold times, and other customers service failures with their companies that were managing their loans. Meanwhile, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has warned about the rise of scams, where predatory schools will promise “immediate” student debt cancellation that doesn’t really exist in order to lure veterans into enrolling.

So again, I’d like to go down the line, if we can, with our witnesses for this question. Just yes or no. Does it undermine our ability to recruit and retain personnel when we let bad actors scam our servicemembers out of the educational benefits that they have earned and been promised by the United States Government? Lieutenant General Eifler, if I could start with you.

Lieutenant General EIFLER. Yes. Ranking Member

Senator WARREN Vice Admiral Cheeseman?

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. Senator, yes, ma’am. Absolutely.

Senator WARREN Lieutenant General Borgschulte.

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. Yes, ma’am. Absolutely. No armory should not be scammed.

Senator WARREN Lieutenant General Miller?

Lieutenant General MILLER. Yes, ma’am.

Senator WARREN Ms. Kelley?

Ms. KELLEY Yes, ma’am. Absolutely.

Senator WARREN Well, that is the reason that I have proposed language for this year’s NDAA to protect servicemembers from predatory actors. This committee has worked in a bipartisan fashion before to ensure that servicemembers get the educational benefits that they have earned under a bipartisan law signed by President George W. Bush back in 2007.

The Federal Government will cancel the student loans of people who work in public service and faithfully pay their loans for at least a decade, as a way to honor their public service. Last year, Senators Cortez Masto and Senator Moran, led a successful effort to require DOD and the Education Department to perform a data match so that all eligible servicemembers automatically receive the public service loan forgiveness that the law says that they have earned.

So, once again, I want to go down the line with our witnesses. Is it important that DOD do everything it can to deliver debt cancellation under the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program to all eligible servicemembers as statutorily required by Congress? Lieutenant General Eifler?

Lieutenant General EIFLER. Yes. Ranking Member.

Senator WARREN Vice Admiral Cheeseman?

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. Yes, ma’am.

Senator WARREN Lieutenant General Borgschulte?

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. Yes, ma’am.

Senator WARREN Lieutenant General Miller?

Lieutenant General MILLER. Yes, Senator Warren

Senator WARREN Ms. Kelley?

Ms. KELLEY Yes, ma’am. Absolutely.

Senator WARREN Okay, good. We’re in a good place. Once again though, this is work that remains unfinished. So, I have submitted an NDAA proposal for this year requiring DOD to provide quarterly updates until the public service loan forgiveness data match

is implemented, and also requiring the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to analyze the challenges that servicemembers face with student loan debt repayment.

I have also submitted a proposal to require DOD implement the same risk-based surveys that the VA is already statutorily required to use to monitor fraud and waste and abuse at schools that receive more than \$600 million in servicemember tuition assistance each year.

These are programs that matter to our servicemembers, and I appreciate having all of you as allies to make sure that our servicemembers get what the American people promised them. So, thank you very much, and thank you, Mr. Chairman, for letting me do this.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Thank you, Senator Warren. Let's talk about healthcare really quick. The demanding nature of military service loan deployments and challenges of balancing military and family life can lead to a burnout, and turnover among military medical professionals.

Additionally, the potential for more lucrative opportunities in the civilian sector can make it harder for the military to retain these highly specialized medical professionals. Last years NDAA included a provision to increase the authorized number of nurse officers the services could recommend for promotion. So one at a time, what are you doing to recruit and retain military medical personnel specifically, and what can we do to help assisting and retaining medical personnel general?

Lieutenant General EIFLER. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I think this, as you articulated pretty good, it's a competition that we have with our local communities across the service, across all services. Having recently served in Alaska, we're in competition with the hospitals in the area for healthcare professionals, the whole gamut.

So, we appreciate the support with being able to provide the necessary bonuses and pay grade equal to what's out there in the commercial sector to keep them in. I think one of our biggest number one issues is job satisfaction. Our providers want to be doing the things that they were trained to do. They want to do more service on post. So, every time, if we channel folks off post to other care, it limits their experience and their satisfaction.

So, they want to do the surgeries, they want to do the medical care. So, the more we can focus them on that, the better off that they are with their satisfaction. That's one of the things we're working on to make sure that all the medical professions are getting to do the things and getting the service and the experience in the field that they want to be doing.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Are you seeing a lot of interest in medical and recruiting?

Lieutenant General EIFLER. We are. It's just a competition. It is something that we've got to be creative, we can't rest. We got to keep the gas pedal down. We can't rest on our laurels. We always are looking at ways to bring them in into the service of our Nation. So, we're actively doing that across our recruiting commands.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Thank you, Admiral.

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. Senator, thanks for the question. First thanks to the authority for the Nurse Corps, Navy intends to use

that to our advantage. For the medical community writ large in the Navy, it's similar to the enlisted recruiting problem we have, and our issues are because stress and burnout on the force.

So, we have doubled down on our medical recruiting. We have changed the process, which way we do that. We've outsourced some of that to medical professionals to do the recruiting for us. As a result, we've seen a tenfold increase to date in the number of folks interested in joining the Navy. So nascent efforts still, but trending in the right direction. We're going to be much better this year than we have been in the past, sir.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Thank you. General Borgschulte.

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. Sir, in the Department of the Navy, the marines don't have any medical personnel, so we rely on my good friend here by Vice Admiral Cheeseman to support us. They do a very fine job of it, but I think it goes deeper than that. That's in the Military Treatment Facilities (MTFs), but also out in town. So, some of those bases and stations can be an expeditionary force when we're out in areas where they don't have access to a Military Treatment Facility.

Sometimes going out through TRICARE out in town can take 30 days plus, especially with mental health physicians, very difficult. So again, thanks for the help with the Department of Navy. We certainly support them, and I would ask for anything that you can do to help with the out-of-town physicians

Senator TUBERVILLE. General Miller?

Lieutenant General MILLER. Yes, sir. We also have the same struggles of trying to get our medical professionals on board. I'll say that Defense Health Agency (DHA) has been challenging as well just to work with them. General DeGoes, our Surgeon General (SG), has been doing everything he can to get out there and recruit the medical specialties. We're trying to give them their credits so we can bring them on at higher grades than they normally would.

Additionally, we're looking in the mental health perspective of doing online. You know, so one provider can do multiple areas, so they don't actually have to physically be there, but they can do online mental health. So, it is a struggle. We're trying everything that we can to get our force back up because we've got to have them.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Ms. Kelley.

Ms. KELLEY Yes, Chairman. Much like the marines, we rely on the Air Force for medical support. So, from a guardian perspective, a guardian is going to a MTF that the Air Force is running underneath the auspices of defense health. I would agree that the recruiting is a challenge. I would also agree that the way that the Air Force is attempting to tackle this and that changes that they're making in that additional pay structure are going to be very pivotal for the guardian as well.

Senator TUBERVILLE. This question, if anybody can answer if you want. There's been discussion over the past few years about unnecessary and burdensome barriers to entry for DOD nurses, including in 1-year prior experience required barrier. Can any of you speak to these barriers and are they hurting or helping recruiting? I mean, have you seen any of that? Anybody want to throw anything in?

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. Sir, from the Navy, I have not seen that or familiar with that, so I'll take that for the record and get you a more fulsome answer.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Okay. Thank you. Senator Scott.

Senator SCOTT Thank you. Chairman. First off, thanks to each of you for your hard work. I don't think what you do is easy. So, we've had a tough time other than the marines of hitting our recruitment numbers right, for quite a few years. So, should anybody be held accountable, and if so, have they been held accountable for not meeting our recruiting goals?

Lieutenant General MILLER. I'll start, sir. So, our recruiting numbers in the Air Force have gone up. We're actually exceeding where we thought we would be. The last 2, 3 years, it was a little more difficult based on COVID, I think was one of the factors, the other thing is just the propensity to serve across our Nation was down.

So, what we have done, we have put every effort we can into increasing our recruits, and we have exceeded our goals. We actually were planning to exceed it by about 3,000 this year. We'll see if we have enough Military Personnel (MILPERS) to cover that.

Senator SCOTT But y'all didn't meet the goals?

Lieutenant General MILLER. Yes, sir. We did this year.

Senator SCOTT But the prior years?

Lieutenant General MILLER. No, sir. We did not. So, we looked at what was, we had our own barriers internal to the Air Force, and so we removed those barriers. One of them, you know, we had very strict, for example, tattoo policies and so we removed some of those because it was a barrier for entrance from some of the population of our Nation. So that increased it.

The other thing that we did was we noted that internally to the Air Force, you had to have a driver's license in order to enter our Air Force. We removed that, and if it's required for your position, we will work on getting the driver's license. So, all of the internal barriers were moved and we have since seen a larger population and from which we can recruit. Additionally, we did not lower our standards at all. We have maintained our standards, DOD standards.

Senator SCOTT But the individuals that were responsible for recruiting before you started making your numbers, should they have been held accountable or not? Or is it something that was completely outside your control?

Lieutenant General MILLER. It's not, I don't think it's in my control, but I think that they were held accountable in the fact that they were given specific goals. We used to do goals every quarter, and now we do them monthly, and so, our recruiter, who's a one-star general reports to a four-star. So, I think the accountability was there from that aspect, sir. Okay.

Senator SCOTT But nothing happened to anybody for not meeting their goals? They were promoted just like anybody else?

Lieutenant General MILLER. Well, he's been a one-star the whole time, so he hasn't yet been promoted.

Lieutenant General MILLER. Well, I mean he's been a one-star the whole time, so he hasn't yet been promoted. However, except for fiscal year 1979, fiscal year 1999, and fiscal year 2023, the Air

Force Recruiting Service (AFRS)-now aligned under the Air Force Accessions Center (AFAC)-has met or exceeded its goals. Additionally, the current AFAC Commander and Director of AFRS, Brigadier General Christopher Amrhein, took command in June 2023 (end 3QFY23), upon the retirement of the previous AFRS Commander. The Air Education and Training Command (AETC) Commander, Lieutenant General Robinson, established accountability via direct reporting for AFAC, and under Brigadier General Amrhein's leadership, provided guidance to the team that resulted in AFRS increased mission effectiveness across the inspire, engage, and recruit spectrum. Consequently, the DAF increased its Delayed Entry Program (DEP) to a point where we exceeded goal in fiscal year 2024 (which was an increase from the fiscal year 2023 goal). AFRS currently has the largest DEP in 10 years and is on track to exceed its fiscal year 2025 goal (again another increase from the fiscal year 2024 goal).

Senator SCOTT Okay. How's the Navy? How about the Navy?

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. Sir, thanks for the question, and also, thanks for the opportunity yesterday to speak in your office—

Senator SCOTT You're meeting goals, right?

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. Sir, we're far exceeding our goals. Absolutely, in 2025. I anticipate sending 44,000 future sailors to bootcamp, probably just under that number, our goal is 40,600. So, we're well above it. I think inside of our enterprise, my Navy H.R. enterprise, we took a really hard look about who was tasked to do what. We upgraded the position of the Navy recruiting commander from a one-star to a two-star, and with that came a recruiting operations center, increased data analytics, a review of medical waiver processes came. We understand the data behind recruiting.

To be candid, sir, I think we had to learn how to recruit coming out of COVID. I cannot speak for my fellow servicemembers here, but that's how it was for the Navy. I think prior to COVID, we were very good at processing the people who walked in the recruiting stations. Coming out of COVID with a decrease in propensity that General Miller just mentioned, we really had to learn how to recruit. We're up on step now, and we're running on all cylinders, sir.

Senator SCOTT How about the Army?

Lieutenant General EIFLER. Yes, thanks, Senator. As you know, probably a couple years ago, we completely revamped it. I think this was an Army-entirety fault. I wouldn't say an individual, but I would say the Army was at fault. We were sleeping at the wheel for years on recruiting, resting on our laurels and we put General Davis and a team of folks in there to revamp and re-look how we did recruiting, systemically from the top and the bottom.

Over the last 12 to 18 months have been putting these in place and we're seeing now the fruition. We saw that last year was a good year, this year is a great year. We are exceeding—we're over 50,000 recruits out of the 61,000 that we are shooting for this year, just 6 months in. So, we're having, as I call it, catastrophic success with this, with how we're doing now.

Senator SCOTT But the ones in charge when we weren't successful, nothing's happened to them. They were promoted just like normal? Like I think that's true.

Lieutenant General EIFLER. No, they weren't Senator.

Senator SCOTT Okay. All right. Okay. So, so what's the slogan for the marines?

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. Senator Scott, good to see you. We talked a bit about this. We put our best marines in recruiting even if they want to—

Senator SCOTT Do you have a slogan?

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. A slogan?

Senator SCOTT You have a slogan?

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. The few, the proud, we have a lot of slogans, sir, if that's the one you're after. We don't promise you a rose garden. Many different, we'll stop there.

Senator SCOTT Army, do you guys have one?

Lieutenant General EIFLER. Yes, This We'll Defend, Senator.

Senator SCOTT How about the Navy?

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. Sir, Forged by the Sea.

Senator SCOTT Air Force.

Lieutenant General MILLER. Fly, fight, and win. Aim high

Senator SCOTT Space Force?

Ms. KELLEY Semper Supra, always above.

Senator SCOTT Do you think that when people come in, they know what your mission is? When you're recruiting, do they know what your mission is? I think we've all heard for years the marine slogan, and we've all heard for years the Army slogan. But I don't know, do you think we've heard the others? Do you think that that's the reason why we've had a hard time? Are people not sure what we're doing? Anybody?

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. So, Senator, I'll speak to it from a Navy component. We've been with the Forged by the Sea Marketing campaign for a little bit of time. It resonates well with younger folks. The average age of our recruit is 22, not necessarily 18 like some of the others are, so they're a little older. It resonates that slogan, that culture manifests through bootcamp, through A6C schools now into the fleet. So, I think it's—pretty well,

Lieutenant General MILLER. Senator, I'll offer from the Space Force perspective, being just over 5 years old, we took a concerted effort to market what a guardian is and more importantly, what they do specifically for the joint fight. So, I acknowledge your point. It's one of the focuses that we have right now. We've actually built a planetarium show that we're debuting in a month at planetariums around the Nation, to get after exactly your point, which is, does the average American know what the Space Force is, and that they can join it as its newest service.

Senator SCOTT You think they do?

Lieutenant General MILLER. Our data right now shows us that we have a brand awareness problem. Absolutely.

Senator SCOTT That's right. That's what I would say in Florida. Yes.

Lieutenant General MILLER. Yes. Space Force, for sure, sir.

Senator SCOTT Yes. So, have so the marines continued to be successful. After the problems that we had, did the other branches—did they follow what the marines were doing? Did you guys look at what the marines were doing as it's nice to be the one who never has a problem.

I used to be the one that never had a problem. I was doing business. I always wanted to be number one. You know, I always wanted to be the one that nobody ever questioned my numbers.

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. Senator from a Navy perspective, we did take a little bit of a look at what the marines had done. We had already been involved in increasing the quality of our recruiters. In talking to my good friend here, you know, that manifests in what they're doing.

So, the communities that provide our officer recruiters have increased the quality of those commanding officers that go to recruiting the Commodore that oversee them, and we do provide a large amount of incentives for our enlisted sailors to head out to recruiting and the quality there is increasing as well.

Lieutenant General MILLER. Senator, from the Air Force perspective, we absolutely did look at the marines and their recruiting and the way that they attack it, and that they do put their best and brightest on there. So, we did modify that over the last year, when we added additional 400-plus recruiters, and that you have to be selected to be there as opposed to just throw your name in the hat because you thought it would be fun to do so. Yes, sir. We did do that.

Ms. KELLEY Senator, if I may, I would be remiss if I did not go on the record and note that the Space Force has made its recruiting numbers for the last 5 years, albeit small. We are absolutely focused on finding the talent where it is and leveraging some technical ways to connect directly with those potential guardians.

Lieutenant General EIFLER. Yes, Senator. The Army took into a consideration even further professionalizing the recruiting force. So, creating a new MOS, a new warrant officer that you know, taking some things from industry training with industry and how they do that, how do they relate, to get a little bit better, and selecting. Not everybody is a good recruiter, some people are better than others, and we're just making sure that we're putting the right people in the right places to access the people that we're trying to bring in.

Senator SCOTT Thank you for what you do. Thank you, Chairman.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Thanks Senator Scott. Senator Duckworth.

Senator DUCKWORTH Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for keeping the hearing open so that I can make it here. I appreciate it. Each of our services claims to build the best and most capable leaders within the world's greatest fighting force, capable of thinking critically, navigating the fog of war and leading diverse teams in times of uncertainty. But how can the department train leaders to make decisions for themselves if it is actively banning books from Service Academies, and micromanaging their access to information?

This Administration's obsession with removing diversity within the force has now expanded into attacking diversity of thought. Censorship does not produce stronger leaders; it produces brittle ones. Suppressing ideas is not a sign of might, it is an expression of fear and if we allow fear to drive policy, we fail not only our cadets and servicemembers seeking to develop themselves as leaders,

but also the American people who count on them to lead with wisdom and critical thinking.

For each witness, do you believe our future commanders will be fully prepared to navigate the complexity of tomorrow's warfighting environment, if we continue to micromanage their exposure to the world and different perspectives? Should we be limiting their perspectives and banning books in our academies? Would that make them better leaders?

Lieutenant General EIFLER. Oh, no, Senator,

Senator DUCKWORTH Thank you.

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. Senator, I'm generally familiar with the issue you're talking about, but I've not seen specifically the issues at the Naval Academy, or nor have I talked to Admiral Davis about that. What I can tell you, I agree with you. You know, I believe the Naval Academy should have everything they need to create future naval officers. Within my domain, I'm certain that we have everything we need to make sure every sailor is qualified to do their job.

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. Yes, ma'am. Nice to see you. I'm a proud graduate at one of those Service Academies, and it,—

Senator DUCKWORTH I could never make it in, I'm an ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps] guy.

[Laughter.]

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. But it matters to us in the sense we take 25 percent of that class, of that Naval Academy class that comes into the Marine Corps, and we get eye-watering talent. So just inspiring, attracting our top young Americans to attend that school is important to us, and I just wanted to put a plug for how important that school is, how much it means to us.

Senator DUCKWORTH Thank you. General Miller?

Lieutenant General MILLER. Yes, ma'am. I would concur. You know, I don't know exactly what they're doing at the United States Air Force Academy (USFA) as far as the libraries and going through the curriculum, but I do know that we have the best airmen and a large portion of them come from the academy. I think that we need to make sure that we continue to draw similar to the Marines and Navy, the best individuals from the United States.

Senator DUCKWORTH But they need to be exposed to all elements of thought and we should not be banning books in our training of our servicemembers.

Lieutenant General MILLER. I think they should definitely be—they should have all trains of thought. Yes, ma'am.

Senator DUCKWORTH Thank you, Ms. Kelley.

Ms. KELLEY Ma'am, I agree with your point. Absolutely.

Senator DUCKWORTH Thank you. I do think that we owe servicemembers protection from moral injury by empowering them with the training to operate in complex wartime environments with life-or-death decisions for their brothers and sisters in arms, as well as civilians who find themselves caught in the middle.

But I heard some concerning things from the General counsel nominee yesterday regarding this Administration's commitment to the law of armed conflict. Will each of you commit to ensuring that servicemembers receive the appropriate training and education on the law of armed conflict?

Lieutenant General EIFLER. Yes, Senator.

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. Thank you, Senator. Yes, ma'am.

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. Senator, this is key to our warfighting effectiveness. Absolutely.

Lieutenant General MILLER. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. KELLEY Agree, ma'am.

Senator DUCKWORTH That is why we're the greatest fighting force on the face of the Earth. We set the standards for the rest of the world. I'd like now to pivot to the Indo-Pacific. I'd like to shift your attention specifically to the current makeup of our active reserve and guard forces, and whether our forces are prepared for the reality of fighting and sustaining large-scale conflict in the Indo-Pacific region.

For each of you, do you believe your service currently has the force structure, and personnel necessary to meet the demands of such a fight in the Indo-Pacific? If not, given our current personal projections and plans, are you confident your service will be prepared to execute large-scale mobilization and sustain power projection across contested domains? What can this committee do to ensure you're fully supported? Because I would tell you, it is a bipartisan issue.

We have talked about this in a bipartisan way, and I want to make sure you have the ability, I think probably the Army and the Marines would be most on this, Navy obviously, as well. But can we sustain the fight where we are right, now, and what kind of support do you need?

Lieutenant General EIFLER. Thanks, Senator. Yes, we can, but I'm not satisfied. I don't think we're satisfied that we need to continue to transform to prepare for that even more, and as you know firsthand, the more readiness, the better we're going to be. We have to transform, not just our modernization, our force, but how we do things in large scale combat operations.

So, when our Chief says, hey, transformation and contact or continuous transformation, that's what we're doing. We can't rest on our laurels. We can't say we, hey, we won the last war, we're good. We have to continually look and adapt, because as we've seen in the battlefields across the globe, things are changing faster than our budget cycle. They're faster than how we can acquire equipment, for the acquisition. So, we have to be faster. So, we can't say, hey, we're ready, we're good, stop. No, we actually need to keep getting more ready, keep adapting.

I think your support absolutely with your oversight, but also with the proper appropriations and flexible funding so that when something changes, like we're talking about with counter Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS), and that technology that is changing so frequently inside that budget cycle, we've got to be able to adjust and not get consumed by buying this one thing that was good for that time and is no longer, and it's obsolete. So that's what I would say we need help with.

Senator DUCKWORTH Thank you,

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. Senator, thanks for the question. I believe in our operators, I'm certain we'll get the mission done. That being said, the Navy is on a journey. One of our lines of effort is to make sure that we're very much aligned within our maritime op-

eration centers. We want to fight from those operation centers in the future.

There's a lot of things going on in here with hardware, software, people. From my portfolio, I'm sure I'll need more people in those specific skill sets when it comes to the information warfare (IW) community, the crypto audit community, the intel community, the space community. So, we're on a growth profile in those areas. Additionally, I know working closely with the chief of Navy Reserve, Admiral Lacore, they are organized around the fight from the mock concept.

So, the training that they do is so they're able to fight, you know, fall in on those mocks when trouble is brewing, so they can support the fight as well. So, we're modernizing the entire approach toward the fight from the mock, and we just look forward to continue to working with this committee to get that done.

Senator DUCKWORTH General Borgschulte.

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. Senator, thanks very much. The Indo-Pacific theater is one of the most challenging theaters. In my last job before this role, commanding aviators, you know, the distances at which we may need to fight in that theater makes it very difficult with the geographical dispersion.

As you know, 6 years ago we started down this path with General Berger and now General Smith on force design. Force design was clearly meant to grow the force to the right type of marine, right skillset, divest to invest. Now we're into the invest phase, where we have the right numbers of marines, capacity, and capability. We don't have the capacity we need, so we are on a plan.

So, to your question, I really appreciate that, is to grow our end strength, and we have a plan to get there, but it's quite frankly, not fast enough, and so, any help that you can provide us, in funding really for that end-strength we would applaud. Thank you.

Senator DUCKWORTH Thank You, General.

Lieutenant General MILLER. Yes, we too are shifting to the Pacific. The tyranny of distance is a challenge for us because we have tankers and where we're going to put them and how we're going to fight from there. So, we are doing large scale exercises to make sure that we're ready. But we too need to increase our end strength probably, and then we just have to have the right kit forward, and so that's our challenge right now.

Senator DUCKWORTH If we're going up the People's Republic of China (PRC), it's not going to be dominating the skies. We're going to have to fight our way in and fight our way out, same with the surface warfare.

Lieutenant General MILLER. Yes ma'am.

Ms. KELLEY Senator, I'd just like to add that from this space perspective, the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) fight is absolutely enabled by the space capabilities that our warfighters need. So, the ability for this service that is now 5 years old to continue to grow with the support of this committee, is going to be very critical, because the space enabling warfighter has got to be part of what we deliver for the fight.

Senator DUCKWORTH Thank you. You've been incredibly generous, Mr. Chairman.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Thank you. Senator Duckworth, I just have one more question here before we finish. Mainly for the NDAA. Specifically talking about bonuses and special pays, retention. Obviously y'all want to recruit new people, but we also have to recruit the people we already have in the service.

So, I'll start. General Miller, in the Fiscal Year 2024 NDAA Congress authorized the Air Force to increase aviation retention bonuses up to \$50,000 for pilots who agreed to extend their contracts earlier than initially planned. Could you give us some kind of update on the status of how these are working?

Lieutenant General MILLER. Yes, Senator. Actually, they're working incredibly well. We are right now across our rated population, we are where we need to be with exception of the 11AFs, which are fighters. However, we have completely closed the gap based on a lot of the aviation bonuses.

Additionally, we're looking at the how the trainers—were a little bit short on the trainers, so we're training by simulators too and we're finding that we're closing that gap. We expect that we will get there relatively quickly. But thank you very much for that NDAA, it's been very helpful.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Yep. So, we'll start down here. General, just what you think recruiting-wise in terms of bonuses for retention, or what do you think we could do in the future for just normal recruiting?

Lieutenant General EIFLER. Yes, I think the support for the Future Soldier Prep Course has been great. That's tapped into another population that we haven't been able to access before funding for that. Again, I hate to keep beating that horse on the funding for those type of things that are not accounted for typically in the budget cycle. So, I think that supports the bonuses, obviously that's huge for retention as well as recruiting and getting the people that we want to get into the service. I think if you continue to get that support and oversight for us, that'll be definitely helpful.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Admiral.

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. Senator, thanks for the question and allowing me the ability to highlight the importance of these special incentive pays, the bonuses and such. It's incredibly important to the retention game. We're doing very well in retention, but we still shorten our manpower accounts right now, so we're going to have to move some money around to make sure we meet our obligations to our sailors and we don't get to the point where we create an IOU situation.

I would like to highlight as we move into fiscal year 2026. If we start the year with a continuing resolution fiscal year 2026, this will be problematic for that account. Right now, you know, I appreciate the 10 percent pay raise for our junior enlisted sailors that's funded for fiscal year 2025 only. If we move into fiscal year 2026 with a CR only, it'll severely depress the manpower account, and I'll have trouble paying those bonuses, which are obligated to our sailors.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Thank you. General.

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. Yes. Senator Tuberville, thanks very much for this question. The aviation bonuses are key, so are all the other bonuses. As Vice Admiral Cheeseman had men-

tioned, the selective retention bonus, some are really exquisite skilled senior enlisted and middle grade enlisted that have cyber signals intelligence. Those type are really difficult to retain.

But for the pilots in a sense, the bonuses are—it's kind of a combined arms effect. It's the bonuses are important, but it's also climate, culture and it really just selling that, hey, flying a commercial aircraft is one thing, but flying a gray aircraft with a trigger is another thing. We got to have the bonuses that's important, but it's climate and culture as well. Thanks for your support there.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Ms. Kelley.

Ms. KELLEY Senator, I would add for the Space Force, the targeted bonuses are crucial. The space, cyber and Intel skill sets, that is essentially the guardian population that we have in the Space Force, are exquisite skills themselves. Much like the other colleagues here today, the ability to retain and attract and hold that type of exquisite skill is critical. The targeted incentives help us do that.

Senator TUBERVILLE. You just go to General Miller and say, well, who's your best ones? I need your best ones. Right? That's actually, she does that, right?

Lieutenant General MILLER. Yes,

Senator TUBERVILLE. I would too.

Ms. KELLEY People want to join the Space Force, sir.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Thank you. I apologize for all the rigmarole here, but we got more hearings and people in—you notice the lines outside. They're rather big.

But thanks for what you do. You have a great responsibility. I don't think people really understand that the responsibility, you know, you win with people and you know, obviously we got weapons and all that, but you got to have good people, and we thank for what you do.

Admiral Cheeseman, thank you for your service. I will tell you this, I did the same thing. I retired and after a few weeks, my wife walked by my couch, when I was drinking coffee one morning, she says, hey, this has been my house for 40 years, go get you a damn job.

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. I'm hearing it already. Yes, sir.

Senator TUBERVILLE. But thanks for what you do, and we want to help as much as we can. That's one reason we had this today. A lot of people will watch this on video, a lot of our members. So, if there's anything that we can do to help in your capacity, we want to help.

We're in harm's way every day and we got a lot of enemies out there, but the bigger and better we have our military, the less problems we'll have, because they don't want to mess with the United States of America. We sure want them to know that, but you're the beginning of it.

So, thank you all, and look forward to visiting with and working with you many, many times. Again, Admiral, good luck. Thank you.

This hearing's adjourned. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 3:59 p.m., the Committee adjourned.]

[Questions for the record with answers supplied follow:]

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR TED BUDD

PILOT SHORTAGE

1. Senator BUDD. Lieutenant General Miller, a RAND Report titled “The Relative Cost-Effectiveness of Retaining Versus Accessing Air Force Pilots” concludes that “retaining pilots is more efficient than accessing new ones.” Why does the Department choose to focus efforts on increasing accessions and training throughput rather than retaining the pilots already in service?

Lieutenant General MILLER. The Air Force currently uses a tiered retention bonus structure, offering up to the Congressional limit of \$50,000 per year. Pilots in critically manned specialties who commit to additional 8 to 12-year service agreements are currently eligible for the maximum authorized amount. Therefore, given we are already operating at the maximum authority granted, current efforts are focused on increasing accessions and training throughput to build a robust pilot force.

2. Senator BUDD. Lieutenant General Miller, title 37 U.S. Code, section 334 (c)(1) provides statutory limits for aviation incentive pay and bonus programs. Can you please provide the Department’s analysis on structuring aviation incentive pay and bonus programs, and why the Air Force restricts these offerings to values less than the statutory allowances?

Lieutenant General MILLER. The Air Force is currently executing the retention bonus in a tiered structure that offers the Congressional monetary cap of \$50,000 per year. The tiered structure is built to incentivize longer Active Duty service commitments. Pilots in critically manned specialties who commit to serving an additional 8 to 12 years currently have access to the maximum amount authorized by Congress.

3. Senator BUDD. Lieutenant General Miller, in the last three fiscal years (fiscal year 2022 to fiscal year 2025), Active Duty pilot retention has held steady between 40 to 43 percent, beneath the required rates of 54 to 61 percent for the same years (according to an Air Force Briefing on March 13, 2025). You testified that “we have deliberately and effectively used monetary and non-monetary authorities granted by Congress to stabilize the force.” Can you please explain further how the retention incentives authorized by Congress, which have been offered in varying formats during these years, have yielded an appreciable change?

Lieutenant General MILLER. Despite recent historically high rates of hiring in the commercial sector, the United States Air Force has continued to maintain a stable pilot retention rate by using both monetary and non-monetary incentives. Prior testimony of stating “we have deliberately and effectively used monetary and non-monetary authorities granted by Congress to stabilize the force” is accurate, but the retention rate has stabilized at a level below what is necessary. A healthy year-group of pilots requires the United States Air Force to train an average 1,500 pilots each year. Over the past several years, the Air Force has only produced on average 1,250 pilots each year. When the Air Force produces a year group that is smaller than required, the standard retention rate (40 to 43 percent) is insufficient, and the United States Air Force requires a higher retention rate (54 to 61 percent). The current stable rate of retention, while significant, does not compensate for the smaller size of the recent year-groups.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR MAZIE K. HIRONO

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION PROGRAM ROLLBACK

4. Senator HIRONO. Lieutenant General Eifler, Vice Admiral Cheeseman, Lieutenant General Borgschulte, Lieutenant General Miller, and Ms. Kelley, rollbacks of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives, including termination of related training and office closures, have raised alarm about their effect on morale and trust in leadership, especially among female and minority servicemembers. Are the Services tracking how the rollback of DEI programs is affecting morale and trust?

Lieutenant General EIFLER. The Army’s personnel practices will continue to provide fair treatment, access, opportunity, choice and advancement for all soldiers and civilians. The Army’s merit-based system will continue to reward soldiers and civilians for their skills, qualifications and performance. The Army focus is on prioritizing lethality, meritocracy, accountability, standards and readiness to ensure equal opportunity for all based on merit, not demographics or immutable characteristics. By focusing on these priorities, we will attract the best talent and maintain our position as the world’s premier fighting force. Using the Defense Organizational

Climate Survey (DEOCS), the unit commanders are able to assess and improve the climate within their units. However, due to the DEI Executive Order, signed on 20 Jan 2025, the DEOCS is under review and will be made available in September 2025. Once the DEOCS is approved for use, the survey will begin collecting data again on morale and trust in leadership across the entire force.

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. As these changes are relatively recent, we have not collected any data to date that shows changes in morale and trust. Our 2025 Health of the Force Survey, which will be available this fall, will provide an update on morale and trust across the Navy.

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. The Marine Corps is a standards-based organization. Those who enter our ranks understand they are part of a team. We have not seen a drop in recruiting or retention numbers this year. In fact, we have had historic recruiting and retention. Marines understand they have support, when necessary, within our equal opportunity offices.

Lieutenant General MILLER. The United States Air Force values its servicemembers and has routinely been on the leading edge of positive change within the Department of Defense. All airmen expect us to treat them with dignity and respect, as we will continue to do, regardless of changes to the DEI policy. The United States Air Force will continue to seek to identify and understand any changes in morale or leadership trust in upcoming assessments.

Ms. KELLEY. DAF routinely monitors trends in morale and leadership perceptions through the Defense Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS) and other command climate assessment data. By leveraging both quantitative survey feedback and comment data, Space Force will seek to identify and understand any changes in morale or leadership trust observed in upcoming assessments this Fall as part of our continual process for improving the readiness and effectiveness of our personnel.

5. Senator HIRONO. Lieutenant General Eifler, Vice Admiral Cheeseman, Lieutenant General Borgschulte, Lieutenant General Miller, and Ms. Kelley, have you seen changes in climate survey results or retention data among underrepresented groups since the rollback?

Lieutenant General EIFLER. Short answer: During second quarter of FY25, we have not seen any significant changes in retention behavior among underrepresented groups in the Active Component. Overall retention was higher in second quarter, which has been a trend for several years, but the increase from first quarter to second quarter was higher for minorities/under-represented eligibles.

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. The next window for unit/command climate surveys will be August to October 2025. Our 2025 Health of The Force Survey will provide insights into the work environment, climate, and retention intentions. The results will be available this fall.

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. No. We have not seen any changes in climate survey results with respect to retention for our marines. Retention remains at a historic level. We have already met our retention goals for this year. Once a marine becomes a marine, they want to remain a marine—that says a lot about our climate, culture and ethos.

Lieutenant General MILLER. The Defense Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS) is administered August 1 to November 30 each year. The Air Force will evaluate any shifts in morale and trust once the 2025 DEOCS survey results are published.

Ms. KELLEY. To date, the Space Force has not seen changes in command climate survey results or retention data among underrepresented groups since the issuance of the Executive Orders. Currently, retention is 1 percent higher than expected and the Service is on track to meet end strength for the third year in a row.

RECRUITING BEST PRACTICES

6. Senator HIRONO. Lieutenant General Eifler, Vice Admiral Cheeseman, Lieutenant General Miller, and Ms. Kelley, I recently met with the Commandant of the Marine Corps, and one of the reasons he mentioned for the Marine Corps' consistent success in recruiting is the emphasis you put on assigning high-performing personnel to recruiting billets, along with stringent accountability metrics. Are you implementing similar personnel practices within your organizations?

Lieutenant General EIFLER. Yes, we implemented the Recruiting Candidate Assessment and Selection Program, which was designed to select soldiers best fit to be career Recruiters in our new 42T MOS (Talent Acquisition Specialist) by evaluating each individual for the attributes needed to be successful in recruiting. This assessment program continues to be refined to ensure we have the best talent serving on recruiting duty.

Army Recruiting has also experienced a surge in soldiers volunteering for recruiting duty, displaying strong motivation and desire to recruit America's best and brightest to serve alongside them. All volunteers are also assessed based on cognitive, non-cognitive, and personality factors to ensure their best fit to be successful in today's challenging recruiting environment. Several performance metrics are maintained for each Recruiter and their chain of command holds them accountable for their performance.

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. Yes, our priority is to assign only top-performing sailors to recruiting billets. Two key tools we use to support top-tier personnel in recruiting is the Meritorious Advancement Program and Command Advance to Position. These provide a pathway for sailors to advance in rank ahead of their peers. We additionally call out recruiting as a priority assignment in the precept documents that guide our advancement selection boards. To retain high performing recruiters on recruiting duty, we encourage the very best to apply to join the Career Recruiter Force (CRF). The CRF is a cadre of exceptional recruiting managers that provide consistency and leadership in the Navy's recruiting effort. Recruiter performance is measured through established metrics, rewarded for excellence and reviewed by performance boards to encourage success. A key accountability tool is the Daily Production Review, a structured meeting which assesses daily goals, tracks performance, recognizes achievements, and adjusts strategies for recruiters. Navy Recruiting Command's National Inspection Team also conducts detailed assessments at the command and individual recruiter level to ensure accountability and alignment with organizational standards.

Lieutenant General MILLER. Air Force recruiters are selected via the Developmental Special Duty (DSD) process. This process allows the Recruiting Service to select the best possible talent from a pool of those nominated to compete for DSD by their Wing leadership. This process ensures a large talent pool to fill recruiting and other special duty positions. Recruiting commanders are hired from a list of board-selected nominees. DSD is a process where only airmen who meet specific criteria, such as having exceptional performance records, showing a high capacity to lead, and demonstrating the Air Force core values can be nominated. All recruiting personnel are held to stringent accountability standards up and down the chain of command using established monthly recruiting goals. If a recruiter falls short on their portion of the monthly recruiting goal, mandatory performance reviews and supplemental training requirements are used to account for and improve the members performance.

Ms. KELLEY. In 2024, the Space Force trained its first cohort of Guardian Recruiters after a multi-stage process designed to ensure only the most qualified and talented guardians were selected. As the Service continues to build this dedicated Recruiting Squadron, development and implementation of specific accountability metrics is a key component for evaluating effectiveness and identifying areas of improvement to ensure the achievement of its recruiting goals.

TRANSGENDER SERVICE BAN

7. Senator HIRONO. Lieutenant General Eifler, Vice Admiral Cheeseman, Lieutenant General Borgschulte, Lieutenant General Miller, and Ms. Kelley, the reinstatement of the transgender service ban has prompted concern about its effect on unit cohesion, morale, and the military's ability to attract and retain talent, especially among younger, more diverse populations. How has the transgender service ban impacted recruitment, especially among Gen Z recruits?

Lieutenant General EIFLER. The key factors impacting the decision to join the military have been consistent: fear of leaving home fear of being injured, fear of being passed by peers, and fear of behavioral health issues. With these factors in mind, the Army based its marketing strategy around highlighting the opportunities available through Army service, including advertisements that gain attention, spark interest, and inform potential recruits, while also generating leads for recruiters.

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. Navy is not aware of any negative impacts on recruitment from the policy changes. Recruiting is always hard, but we have seen good success for about the last year. Navy continues to focus on prospecting talent from every zip code where it exists, building trust-based relationships and closing the deal to change lives for the better.

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. We are awaiting DOD guidance on new gender dysphoria policy. We have seen no impact of recruiting. The Marine Corps is winning at recruiting—meeting our mission and exceeding all DOD quality standards.

Lieutenant General MILLER. Despite the policy changes regarding transgender individuals, there have been no changes to recruiting which remains high, with Delayed Entry Program numbers at a 10-year high.

Ms. KELLEY. Since the signing of Executive Order 14183, the March preliminary injunction and the most recent Supreme Court ruling to enforce the ban on transgender people serving in the military, there has been no evidence of impacts to recruitment. Any specific impacts on recruiting would be speculative until more time has passed. Space Force will seek to identify and understand any changes in unit cohesion or morale through the Defense Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS) and other command climate assessments this Fall.

8. Senator HIRONO. Lieutenant General Eifler, Vice Admiral Cheeseman, Lieutenant General Borgschulte, Lieutenant General Miller, and Ms. Kelley, would each of you agree that losing qualified personnel from your units detracts from military readiness?

Lieutenant General EIFLER. I would not agree that losing qualified personnel always detracts from military readiness. People flow through the Army in a lifecycle that allows them to become better trained, assume positions of greater responsibility, and get promoted. At some point everybody will voluntarily or involuntarily leave the Active Army. Readiness is impacted when the flow of personnel does not provide adequate replacements. We strive to retain the best, most-qualified personnel. However, some will voluntarily leave because they find the Army is not for them, they have other options they want to explore, or they leave the Active Army to join the Guard or Reserves. Most who leave involuntarily are being separated because they have a disqualifying medical condition or because they have failed to maintain an Army standard, whether a standard of conduct or aptitude. Such involuntary separations are necessary to maintain a high State of readiness and discipline.

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. Loss of qualified personnel may run the risk of affecting a unit's military readiness. Medical qualifications are a vital aspect of ensuring military readiness and lethality. Redundancy is also key to military readiness when it comes to equipment, resources, and personnel. The Navy will manage any personnel losses related to the ban on transgender servicemembers recent policy changes in the same manner as any other personnel loss and will ensure we remain able to effectively engage in combat and complete mission assignments.

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. Yes, the more marines who are deployable—and the higher our manning levels—the more lethal and ready we are as a service. Marine Corps readiness is about having a force that is trained, equipped, and deployable to fight. Readiness is measured by a marine's ability to perform their duties, maintain physical and mental fitness, and deploy.

Lieutenant General MILLER. It is an unavoidable truth that every organization, even the most effective military forces, experience the loss of valuable personnel for various reasons. Great organizations proactively prepare for these transitions. Our airmen represent a significant investment in training, experience, and expertise. Maintaining a highly ready and effective force requires recruiting top talent and retaining experienced professionals who form the backbone of the organization. To that end—readiness isn't accidental; it's built on a solid foundation of three key elements: clearly defined requirements that clearly communicate what everyone understands; sufficient resources allocated to meet those requirements empowering everyone to succeed; and enabling policies that streamline processes and facilitate efficient execution. Focusing on these elements mitigates the impact of personnel losses and maintains operational momentum to ensure mission success even in the face of unavoidable attrition.

Ms. KELLEY. Military readiness is a multi-faceted assessment. The Space Force continues to set standards to maintain readiness and mitigate detractors, while building the force of the future. The Space Force does not anticipate negative impacts to readiness as a result of the Executive Order directing the prioritization of military excellence and optimization of the civilian workforce.

SPACE FORCE PERSONNEL IN INDO-PACIFIC

9. Senator HIRONO. Ms. Kelley, U.S. Space Forces—Indo-Pacific provides critical command and control of space operations in support of combatant command priorities in the Indo-Pacific Area of Responsibility (AOR). What is the status of U.S. Space Forces—Indo-Pacific staffing and personnel readiness in U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) Headquarters?

Ms. KELLEY. There are 74 military, and 7 civilian billets aligned to SF-INDOPAC, 10 military billets aligned to SF Japan and 17 military billets aligned to SF-Korea for FY2025. SF-INDOPAC is currently manned at approximately 83 percent, but Space Force anticipates SF-INDOPAC will be fully staffed (at 100 percent or better fill rates) with the Summer 2025 assignment cycle.

10. Senator HIRONO. Ms. Kelley, are there additional resources and personnel that U.S. Space Forces—Indo-Pacific needs to be at full personnel capacity?

Ms. KELLEY. Yes, and the information will be provided with release of the Fiscal Year 2026 President's Budget.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR ANGUS S. KING, JR.

TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

11. Senator KING. Lieutenant General Eifler, Vice Admiral Cheeseman, Lieutenant General Borgschulte, Lieutenant General Miller, and Ms. Kelley, would it benefit retention efforts to provide flexibility with participating in Transition Assistance Program (TAP) class within 6 months rather than within 12 months of separation for first term or second term recruits, or officers with less than 5 years of service?

Lieutenant General EIFLER.

- A reduction in time would not benefit the soldier leaving active service. It does not allow a soldier adequate time to prepare for civilian life, which includes securing a residence, having time to move themselves and/or family (perhaps cross county), securing employment, health providers, and a host of additional real-world elements for a normal life.
- A properly transitioned soldier is our BEST recruiter.
- For the seventh year in a row, the United States Army has met or exceeded its retention goal. This time, the accomplishment comes nearly 6 months ahead of schedule. The Army reportedly retained 15,600 soldiers eligible for reenlistment, 800 more than the original goal of 14,800. "The early success in [fiscal 2025] reenlistments, combined with the targeted retention strategy, is allowing the Army to effectively manage personnel requirements," said Sgt. Maj. Enrique Rose, a senior Army career counselor."

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. Yes, this adjustment would benefit not only retention, but also manning and mission readiness. First-and second-term enlisted members often receive selective reenlistment bonuses, but may not plan to reenlist until closer to three to 6 months before their loss dates. Under the current policy of 12 months, commands are required to send these individuals through TAP more than 12 months prior to the end of their enlistment, even when they intend to reenlist. Currently, Navy Career Development Boards provide sailors with retention and transition-to-civilian-world information 15 months before their enlistment is scheduled to end.

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. This proposal may be beneficial because it would give the marine more time in service prior to making decisions about transition. I believe that some marines, while going through TAP, may not be fully decided on separating and that re-enlistment topic may assist with overall retention efforts.

Lieutenant General MILLER. Whether the servicemember is separating after the first term of service or retiring, long-term planning helps them to transition smoothly into civilian life or continue their military careers with clarity. Participating in TAP class within 12 months of separation allows sufficient time to develop a comprehensive and strategic plan, thereby reducing stress and mitigating risks related to financial, career and emotional adjustments. Delaying transition planning can negatively impact retention by limiting access to essential resources, increasing stress levels, and decreasing overall preparedness. An untimely approach may hinder servicemembers from gaining the confidence and readiness necessary to make well-informed decisions about their future.

Ms. KELLEY. While this strategy may help retain our most junior guardians, it may cause them to be less prepared when they separate. Programs like TAP are most beneficial to servicemembers when they provide them adequate time to make informed decisions. Ensuring all guardians have opportunities to excel as veterans strengthens our ecosystem because they are more likely to recommend serving in the USSF and are more eager to return to support Space missions as civilians or contractors.

12. Senator KING. Lieutenant General Eifler, Vice Admiral Cheeseman, Lieutenant General Borgschulte, Lieutenant General Miller, and Ms. Kelley, what potential negative second and third order effects occur should these cohort groups participate in TAP closer to their separation?

Lieutenant General EIFLER. Participating in Transition Assistance Programs (TAP) too close to one's separation date can trigger a cascade of negative second-

and third-order effects. Transition preparation 12 to 18 months before an anticipated separation—with structured TAP engagement, individualized counseling, and targeted skill building—is essential to avert the negative downstream effects of “just-in-time” transition planning.

Leaders at all levels and TAP counselors also work to ensure that soldiers on shorter timelines maximize remaining time for a successful transition. This should be the exception and not the norm due to extenuating circumstances.

- Veterans who leave service at younger ages (17 to 19 years) or with shorter total service exhibit nearly five times the suicide hazard rates compared to older or longer-serving peers. Condensing TAP into the final weeks of service deprives these high-risk groups of the sustained preparatory support shown to mitigate suicide risk during the critical post-separation window.
- If needed, the inability to participate in a CSP/SkillBridge and prepare for employment/career training, potentially increasing unemployment rates and unemployment compensation claims.
- Participating in TAP closer to separation could affect unit manning readiness (inability to properly request for personnel manning fills for positions identified).
- Many Army MOS credentials don’t map directly to civilian roles, participating in TAP closer to separation will result in soldiers having insufficient time to gain new career skills needed—often leading to prolonged job searches and underemployment.
- Other drawbacks include: lack of clear goals and direction, insufficient time for skill development and improvement; inability to network properly, decreased confidence; insufficient time to hone their time management skills and adapt to changes by enhancing their resilience and preparedness for unforeseen challenges; reduction in job satisfaction and financial stability; increased stress during transition. No time for counselors or commanders to impact warm handovers in a timely manner to a governmental agency which could cause an increase in homelessness and lack of proper medical care (specialized, physical, mental, dental etc.).

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. There is a tradeoff between finding the best time to complete Transition Assistance Program requirements to support the individual sailors’ needs, mission requirements and retention. Ideally, we want our sailors to have sufficient time to prepare for their transition to civilian life. While these sailors would still have access to all opportunities and the option to attend TAP earlier than 6 months if they choose, some sailors may be rushed in their transition preparation, particularly if they are still considering continuing service.

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. If TAP is scheduled too close to the date of separation or retirement, marines may find themselves juggling numerous responsibilities, such as relocation plans or personal arrangements. This could potentially hinder their ability to fully engage with and retain the critical information provided in the TAP classes. There are options identified during TAP, e.g. Skillbridge, that demand substantial lead time to fully leverage. Job application deadlines, networking events, and career fairs also require advance notice to be most effective. We support the right balance between the needs of the service and the marine and acknowledge that all marines may not require the same level of transition assistance.

Lieutenant General MILLER. Delaying TAP until shortly before separation can result in several negative second and third order effects, including inadequate preparation, heightened mental health concerns such as stress and anxiety, limited access to resources, financial difficulties, strain on family relationships, potential homelessness, unemployment or underemployment and increased risk of suicide. Initiating the transition process well in advance of the anticipated date can significantly reduce associated risks and help prevent a cascade of challenges that may require years to resolve. Proactive planning promotes more seamless transitions for servicemembers, their families, and their communities.

Ms. KELLEY. Shortened timelines to prepare for separation narrows the window for guardians to utilize available resources. Limited access to these resources aimed at reducing stress during transition, mitigating financial instability and ensuring connection with family and community increase risk of harmful behavior. Also, in the long term, guardians who struggle to transition into a post-military life are less likely to recommend Service to potential recruits, potentially impacting future recruiting efforts.

13. Senator KING. Lieutenant General Eifler, Vice Admiral Cheeseman, Lieutenant General Borgschulte, Lieutenant General Miller, and Ms. Kelley, what other recommendations do you have to improve the flexibility of the TAP program to meet the needs of separating servicemembers?

Lieutenant General EIFLER.

- Recommendation: Retention starts at 18 months, which could enhance retention and provide career counselors the opportunity to show open requirements that are realistic instead of hypothetical; waiting until incentives are loaded in the retain system of record. A pilot would provide the detail if this course of action is effective or not.
- Continue to offer the TAP program in a distributive or asynchronous model setting. The distributive model allows soldiers and Leaders the flexibility to participate in TAP according to their own timeline and to meet their individual needs.
- The Army continues to look at improving the transition process of our soldiers. As the Army identifies ways to improve the soldier for Life TAP process, we will communicate any authorities or appropriations needed from Congress to take better care of our soldiers if needed.

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. Considering the significant changes made to TAP over the past 5 years, full implementation was complicated by COVID-19 until commands resumed normal in-person program operations. The required TAP changes have now been implemented, and we recommend allowing time for these updates to mature and produce measurable results before considering further legislative adjustments.

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. The Marine Corps is open to improvements in the program that further tailor preparation to individual career paths and perhaps offer conversation about continuing a Marine Corps career. We are also considering the possibility of including a discussion of re-enlistment opportunities during TAP; I believe that some marines, while going through TAP, may not be fully decided on separating and that including a re-enlistment discussion may assist with overall retention efforts. We already have a robust process that ensures marines understand their retention opportunities and we have made a concerted effort to educate our marines both prior to and during TAP on the tangible and intangible benefits of our Direct Affiliation Program into the Marines Corps Reserves. This provides transitioning marines with more stability during transition and employment opportunities, while increasing total force readiness.

Lieutenant General MILLER. The United States Air Force continues to enhance the integration of the Military Life Cycle to include TAP components throughout a servicemember's career. This proactive approach ensures preparation for separation or retirement is not concentrated solely at the end of their career but is instead embedded at various stages, enabling a more seamless and effective transition.

Ms. KELLEY. We could better utilize prescribed forms to more thoroughly understand why members are not compliant with TAP timeliness or completion to help report, mitigate or eliminate those reasons. Understanding reasons for noncompliance could also highlight system and reporting limitations versus not meeting servicemember needs.

14. Senator KING. Lieutenant General Eifler, Vice Admiral Cheeseman, Lieutenant General Borgschulte, Lieutenant General Miller, and Ms. Kelley, TAP participation remains a concern and in my view a matter of leadership. What actions are uniformed leaders taking to improve participation in TAP?

Lieutenant General EIFLER.

- Increased Leader Commander Engagement: involvement in quarterly CSA Career Readiness Standard, Progress Report (Time), and CSP/SB quarterly reports that allows command teams to see and influence, Command Policy letters, include TAP topics an LPD.
- Command teams take advantage of their HRC visit and schedule and attend TAP brief.
- The Army added a TAP Block of Instruction to the CDR / 1SG Course.
- "Military Leader's Guide" has been recently published by MCTO. The guide educates military leaders on TAP so that they understand the importance of the program, provide adequate support to their soldiers and ensure they participate in TAP.

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. Navy Transition Assistance Program participation rates are strong, with 96 percent of sailors completing program requirements, however, we are working to improve sailors meeting the timeliness metrics. To assist

with awareness, the Navy is adding a new dashboard for commands to track a sailor's timeliness metrics. Additionally, The Office of Secretary of Defense Military to Civilian Transition Office has introduced a new resource: the "Military Leader's Guide to TAP," which introduces military leaders to TAP, offering an overview of the transition process and providing recommendations and resources for supporting transitioning servicemembers.

Lieutenant General BORGSCULTE. Commanders play a critical role in ensuring servicemembers participate in and comply with the TAP. To support this responsibility, commanders appoint unit transition coordinators (UTCs), who are integral to the internal coordination of the program. The UTCs assist commanders by identifying eligible marines and initiating notifications 20 to 18 months before separation. They are tasked with ensuring that marines fulfill each requirement, addressing any challenges that may arise, and keeping commanders informed of issues by attending leadership meetings. This includes highlighting cases where marines are unresponsive or at risk of noncompliance with the prescribed timelines.

Lieutenant General MILLER. The United States Air Force leadership actively champions the importance of TAP participation, highlighting its relevance even if servicemembers feel well-prepared/confident about their transition planning. Leaders can help break down any misconceptions by reinforcing that TAP is not just a formality but a gateway to essential resources, career guidance, and long-term benefits. The DAF (United States Air Force and United States Space Force) collaborated with Departments of Defense, Labor, and Veterans Affairs, along with the military services in April 2025 to field a Military Leaders Guide to TAP. This guide assists military leaders in supporting their transitioning servicemembers and their families. The DAF consistently maintains a 98 percent compliance rate of the congressionally mandated transition requirements as evidenced by the installation's monthly compliance report.

Ms. KELLEY. USSF is building personal readiness into our culture. Furthermore, Space Force leaders amplify our core value of connection through engagement with guardians at pivotal life and career moments, including transitioning out of the Service.

15. Senator KING. Lieutenant General Eifler, Vice Admiral Cheeseman, Lieutenant General Borgschulte, Lieutenant General Miller, and Ms. Kelley, what specific actions have you and your senior enlisted leader taken to raise participation levels? Lieutenant General EIFLER.

- Implemented Transitioning Servicemembers and Counselors Reporting System (TSCRS) allows commanders at all levels better visibility of their soldiers TAP participation and provides transitioning soldiers with access to Army schedules, resources, and tracking to reach their transition goals.
- The Adjutant General sends out GO (1–2) Star and G1 Notes monthly and quarterly.
- Briefed at Pre-Command Courses, Company Commander and First Sergeant Course for AC, USAR, and ARNG.
- Ensure The Adjutant General has installation specific TAP data for installation visits, Conduct IG inspections. *

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. Navy Transition Assistance Program (TAP) completion rates are strong at 96 percent. Our efforts to enhance timeliness include:

- Monitoring the in-house Navy Retention and Monitoring System (NRMS) reports and updating them to capture values for each tier and track completion for timeliness.
- We are capturing reasons why sailors are not meeting the timeliness metrics to better understand the problem. Some of these reasons are fact of life issues such as short notice separations for medical and legal reasons and sailors on deployment/extended deployments.
- During fiscal years 2023 and 2024, the Navy conducted 26 area site visits training over 2,161 counselors on requirements and timeliness. Eight additional site visits are budgeted for FY25.
- Including TAP on the Navy Inspector General inspection list.

Lieutenant General BORGSCULTE. To increase participation, we conduct inspections of TAP through Inspector General of the Marine Corps (IGMC) inspections to assess the health of the program at the command level and to ensure commanders are adhering to the prescribed timeframes. These inspections also allow us to provide training and mentorship to the commanders and their appointed UTCs on executing TRP procedures, verifying Career Readiness Standards (CRS), and guiding

UTCs in building accountable, effective programs. We also empower local TRP offices to lead command outreach, distributing materials, leveraging local marquee, and incorporating TRP updates into leadership briefings. Local offices, in conjunction with the commands, ensure marines are notified of eligibility and reinforce key transition requirements with both UTCs and servicemembers throughout each stage of the process.

Lieutenant General MILLER. The DAF is active in communicating to commanders the significance of their role in facilitating a successful transition for their personnel. This includes encouraging the distribution and utilization of the Military Leaders Guide to Transition among all commanders. The guide provides an overview of the process, emphasizing the importance for leaders to understand and actively support timely involvement in the TAP process. The DAF also underscores the vital influence that a well-structured transition plan has on a servicemember's ability to achieve long-term objectives, including financial stability, improved quality of life, community engagement, and overall well-being.

Ms. KELLEY. We provided the Military Leaders Guide to Transition (MLGTT) to our new Delta Commanders and Senior Enlisted Leaders. With the guide we delivered a brief on how to leverage the Commander's Key Support Program. The goal of this two-prong approach was to increase spouse awareness and participation in TAP.

MORALE, WELFARE, AND RECREATION PROGRAMS

16. Senator KING. Lieutenant General Eifler, Vice Admiral Cheeseman, Lieutenant General Borgschulte, Lieutenant General Miller, and Ms. Kelley, what benefits do Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) programs provide to servicemembers and their families?

Lieutenant General EIFLER. Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) activities boosts morale and enhances esprit de corps by offering soldiers healthy outlets for stress relief, fostering camaraderie and unit cohesion. MWR programs enhance quality of life by providing recreational opportunities, family support services, and personal development programs; MWR contributes to a positive work-life balance for soldiers and their families. Robust MWR programs can be a significant factor in attracting and retaining talented individuals in the Army and their experience. In addition, MWR plays a crucial role in preparing soldiers and their families for the unique challenges of deployment, offering pre-deployment briefings, family support programs, and resources for reintegration after deployment.

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) programs offer a wide range of benefits to servicemembers and their families, enhancing their quality of life and supporting their well-being. Here are some key advantages:

- Fitness and Wellness: MWR programs promote physical health through fitness centers, sports leagues, and wellness programs, contributing to overall warfighter readiness and resilience.
- Boosting Morale: MWR programs provide recreational activities, sports, and entertainment that help servicemembers unwind and recharge, especially during challenging times like deployments or relocations.
- Community Building: By organizing events and activities, MWR programs foster camaraderie and strengthen bonds among servicemembers and their families.
- Affordable Recreation: From discounted tickets to amusement parks and concerts to outdoor adventures like camping and boating. MWR programs make leisure activities more accessible. In addition to prices that are usually lower than off-base alternatives base alternatives (when those alternatives are even available), government-run MWR activities are generally exempt from State and local taxes.
- Available Recreation: Many MWR programs and services are available even at remote, isolated, overseas, and deployed locations.
- Deployed and Contingency Environments. MWR deploys with the warfighter and programs are available downrange. The Military Exchanges also operate at downrange and contingency (flood, hurricane, or other acts of God) areas.

These programs are designed to address the unique needs of military life, ensuring that servicemembers and their families have the support and resources they need to thrive.

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. Our embedded and installation-based morale, welfare, and recreation programs enable our marines and their families to adapt to the changing circumstances of our operational tempo and missions, successfully re-integrate post-deployment, and maintain readiness to deploy again. The Marine Corps primary prevention delivery mechanism is Marine Corps Total Fitness

(MCTF). MCTF strengthens marines, sailors, and families comprehensively across four domains: social, spiritual, mental, and physical fitness. Strengthening marines and enhancing resilience across all domains will prevent and reduce harmful behaviors and are a benefit from MWR efforts across the force.

Lieutenant General MILLER. Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) programs deliver essential support to servicemembers and their families at home station and in deployed locations by promoting well-being, improving quality of life, and fostering community connections. They contribute to personal development, strengthen family relationships, support retention, and enhance overall readiness. Through personalized services and recreational activities MWR provides valuable opportunities for relaxation, leisure, and relationship-building—ultimately supporting unit cohesion and family stability.

Ms. KELLEY. Operated by the Air Force on Space Force Bases, MWR programs offer a wide range of benefits to guardians and their families that enhance their overall quality of life and well-being. Key benefits include:

- Fitness and Wellness through fitness centers, sports leagues, and wellness programs.
- Boosting Morale through recreational activities, sports, and entertainment.
- Family Support resources such as child care, counseling, and educational opportunities.
- Skill Development through classes and workshops.
- Community Building through organized events and activities.
- Affordable Recreation via discounted tickets to amusement parks and concerts, as well as outdoor adventures like camping and boating.
- Available Recreations even at remote, isolated, overseas, and deployed locations.

17. Senator KING. Lieutenant General Eifler, Vice Admiral Cheeseman, Lieutenant General Borgschulte, Lieutenant General Miller, and Ms. Kelley, how do these programs directly contribute to warfighting lethality and readiness?

Lieutenant General EIFLER. Soldiers and their families are entitled to the same quality of life afforded the society they are pledged to defend. Army Family and Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) programs directly support readiness by delivering social, fitness, recreational, and educational activities that enhance community life, foster soldier and unit readiness, and promote mental and physical fitness. Many of these activities satisfy basic physiological and psychological needs of soldiers and their families by providing community support systems that make military installations temporary hometowns for a mobile military population. This sense of home and belonging, promotes retention in the force, which ensures the lethality and readiness of the Army.

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. MWR (Morale, Welfare, and Recreation) programs play a vital role in enhancing warfighting lethality and readiness by supporting the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of servicemembers. Here's how:

- Physical Fitness: Many MWR programs provide access to fitness centers, sports leagues, and recreational activities that help servicemembers maintain peak physical condition, which is essential for combat readiness.
- Mental Resilience: Recreational activities and leisure opportunities offered by MWR programs help reduce stress and improve mental health, enabling servicemembers to stay focused and resilient in high-pressure situations.
- Family Support: MWR programs often include family oriented services, such as childcare and family events, which strengthen the support system for servicemembers. A stable home environment contributes to a sailor's overall readiness.
- Skill Development: Some MWR initiatives include educational programs and workshops that enhance professional and personal skills, indirectly boosting the effectiveness of military personnel.
- Community Building: By fostering camaraderie and teamwork through group activities and events, MWR programs help build strong unit cohesion, which is critical for operational success.

These programs ensure that servicemembers are not only physically prepared but also mentally and emotionally equipped to perform their duties effectively.

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. Our embedded and installation-based morale, welfare, and recreation programs bolster lethality, combat readiness, Marine Corps Total Fitness (MCTF) (social, spiritual, mental, and physical), and resiliency through adaptable, affordable, and accessible services and resources for marines, attached sailors, and families, including behavioral health, personal and professional development, family care, and fitness and recreation. MCTF is a force multiplier

and directly enhances the individual warfighter's lethality, enhances the unit readiness, and directly contributes to lethality and readiness of the Marine Corps.

Semper Fit/Warrior Athlete Readiness and Resilience (WARR) provides an integrated system of health, wellness, prevention, and performance capabilities that enable the readiness, lethality, and resilience of individual marines, serve as force multipliers for marine units, and enhance well-being and quality of life for marine families.

Lieutenant General MILLER. MWR programs support operational effectiveness and personnel readiness by fostering resilient servicemembers. Through access to fitness centers, swimming pools, and wellness activities, we promote physical conditioning. Additionally, outdoor recreation initiatives encourage personal development, facilitate reintegration, and strengthen family relationships following deployments.

Ms. KELLEY. MWR programs enhance readiness and operational effectiveness by providing access to physical fitness, mental resilience activities, and family support. When guardians know their families are cared for, they can remain focused and mission-ready without distraction.

PERMANENT CHANGE OF STATION MOVES

18. Senator KING. Lieutenant General Eifler, Vice Admiral Cheeseman, Lieutenant General Borgschulte, Lieutenant General Miller, and Ms. Kelley, the new global household goods contract has negatively impact morale and readiness. Although a U.S. Transportation Command (TRANSCOM)-led issue, this directly impacts all personnel. What are you doing to address the negative impacts this has had on servicemembers and their families?

Lieutenant General EIFLER. The Army, in close coordination with U.S. Transportation Command and the Joint Service community, remains fully engaged in addressing any adverse impacts of the Global Household Goods Contract (GHC) transition on soldiers and their families. While GHC is a USTRANSCOM-led initiative, the Army Enterprise recognize its direct implications on soldier readiness and family quality of life, and we are taking deliberate action to mitigate disruptions and preserve operational effectiveness.

To ensure continuity of support, the Army has retained the authority for transportation offices to re-award shipments through the legacy Tender of Service (TOS) program. In response to capacity shortfalls HomeSafe, the GHC prime, has recently experienced. As of this fiscal year, over 95 percent of Army shipments have been executed through legacy channels. DOD will operate both the legacy TOS program and GHC simultaneously through the 2025 peak season, with less than 20 percent of total volume projected to be moved under GHC.

The Army is continuing to actively engage for advocacy of flexible execution policies, while elevating field-level feedback to the Defense Personal Property Management Office for policy refinement and rapid issue resolution. We are also leveraging legacy system exemptions, to shield high-risk and complex shipments—such as Non-Temporary Storage, BLUEBARK (shipments of personal property belonging to a deceased military member or civilian employee of the Department of Defense), Safety and Wounded Warrior moves, and shipments to/from OCONUS (including Alaska and Hawaii)—from GHC execution until operational risk is reduced. Additionally, GHC phase-in of nine key Army installations has been deferred until after the 2025 peak season to minimize disruption. These include Fort Bragg, Fort Irwin, White Sands Missile Range, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Rock Island Arsenal, LRC Miami, McAlester Ammunition Plant, Red River Army Depot, and Pine Bluff Arsenal.

The Army remains steadfast in its commitment to safeguarding soldier and family relocation experiences during this period of transition. We continue to hold our industry and agency counterparts accountable, while taking every measure to ensure the resilience of the Personal Property Program in support of force readiness and quality of life.

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. The Navy strives to ensure our sailors and their families experience healthy Permanent Change of Station (PCS) moves. While we value the work of TRANSCOM, the Navy Personnel Command surveys our sailors and their families on their experiences from their moves. To mitigate any adverse situations, our sailors and their families have access to a range of support services provided by their commands and the Navy Fleet and Family Support Centers throughout their moves.

It is important to note that Navy has significantly reduced the number of out-of-area PCS moves to increase geo-stability for families and reduce overall PCS costs since fiscal year 2023. Over the past fiscal year, this change has led to a 10 percent reduction in PCS moves. As a result, sailors and their families experience fewer negative impacts.

Lieutenant General BORGSCHULTE. Our Deputy Commandant for Installations & Logistics—and the other services—have worked with USTRANSCOM to develop processes and procedures to support moves that we deem are “at risk” of missing important performance standards, such as missed pickups and missed deliveries. Those offices are constantly monitoring shipments to reduce the disruptions as best they can. They have had discussions with USTRANSCOM to determine a more effective way ahead until such time as the contractor can stabilize and demonstrate higher shipment pickup and delivery success rates.

Lieutenant General MILLER. While the Global Household Goods Contract (GHC) is a U.S. Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM)-led initiative, we fully recognize the significant impact its challenges have had on servicemembers and their families. DAF has taken several proactive steps to mitigate negative effects and ensure a stronger focus on quality relocation experiences. This includes increased oversight of Joint Personal Property Shipping Offices and local Personal Property Processing Offices to ensure timely communication and support throughout the move process, while maintaining direct coordination with USTRANSCOM to quickly address and field concerns. To offset staffing gaps, we have prioritized training and the use of experienced counselors and quality assurance personnel during the peak season for household goods movements, with real-time monitoring of shipments at all DAF locations for consistent service. Performance monitoring has been strengthened through enhanced quality assurance programs and emphasis on the generation of Contract Discrepancy Reports to track and correct poor contractor performance. Our transportation professionals also solidify member support through direct engagement, increased customer service touchpoints, expanded use of feedback from surveys and examination of the contractor’s Key Performance Indicators. Additionally, Military and Family Readiness Centers (M&FRCs) on each installation offer the Relocation Assistance Program (RAP). RAP provides proactive planning and education on the permanent change in station (PCS) and pre-arrival orientation workshops, during which an emphasis on potential delays assists in mitigating the negative impacts for members and their families.

Ms. KELLEY. USSF has not received any direct concerns or complaints about the new global household goods contract from guardians in the field. We will remain vigilant and offer assistance if we learn of it impacting servicemembers and their families.

19. Senator KING. Lieutenant General Eifler, Vice Admiral Cheeseman, Lieutenant General Borgschulte, Lieutenant General Miller, and Ms. Kelley, what specific steps are being taken ahead of the busy ‘summer moves’ period to mitigate impact to the morale of the force because of difficulties with executing the global household goods contract?

Lieutenant General EIFLER. In preparation for the high-demand summer Permanent Change of Station (PCS) peak season, the Army is executing a multi-pronged mitigation strategy to preserve soldier morale and minimize disruptions, stemming from challenges associated with the Global Household Goods Contract (GHC). While U.S. Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM) leads the program, the Army and other Services, are taking proactive steps to ensure mission continuity and family support remain the most essential aspects of central execution. USTRANSCOM has assured the Military Services that both the legacy TOS and GHC will be available for the Services to leverage during peak season to support servicemember moves.

Key actions include:

- *Maintaining Dual-System Operations:* The Army continues to leverage both the Global Household Goods Contract (GHC) and the legacy TOS to preserve operational flexibility. This dual-option approach allows transportation offices to reassign shipments in the Defense Personal Property System, the TOS program when the GHC prime’s capacity is unavailable or insufficient, ensuring maximum support to soldiers and families. DPS acts as a critical backstop, absorbing demand overflow and safeguarding the PCS process from contractor-related disruptions.
- *Targeted Reduction of GHC Service Areas:* In partnership with U.S. Transportation Command and coordination with the GHC prime, HomeSafeAlliance, over 28,000 ZIP codes have been deactivated from the GHC service network and will instead be serviced under the legacy TOS program. This deliberate action elimi-

nates high-risk or low-capacity areas from GHC servicing. Shipments in these deactivated areas continue to be executed through the TOS program, leveraging the experience and geographic reach of legacy providers.

- *Field-Level Coordination*: Army transportation offices are actively collaborating with USTRANSCOM (Defense Personal Property Management Office) to elevate issues in real-time, apply targeted solutions, and document Performance Work Statement violations.
- *Enhanced Strategic Communication and Messaging*: The Army is supporting USTRANSCOM-led efforts to improve transparency and manage expectations through a robust communication strategy and activities. The Army regularly uses the GHC Communication Toolkit USTRANSCOM has published specifically for local transportation offices to engage with unit leaders and military families about this major change. Other activities include regular social media posts to inform and educate servicemembers and families, active participation in media roundtables to address public concerns, and the publication of routine press releases that provide status updates on GHC rollout and ongoing mitigation measures. These efforts aim to build trust, manage morale, ensure the broader military community remains informed and engaged, and facilitates aligned messaging across all military services.

The Army remains committed to protecting soldier and family morale throughout this transition, while continuing to work closely with all stakeholders to uphold the highest standards of care and service our soldiers, civilians and families deserve.

Vice Admiral CHEESEMAN. A positive PCS move is a retention driver and factor for our sailors' quality of life. The Navy is alleviating any negative impacts by performing actions such as ensuring PCS orders are released in a timely manner and including points of contacts for household goods on orders to ensure that sailors have access to key PCS personnel as required. By doing so, sailors and their families are able to arrange their move dates when PCS orders are received. Additionally, when a sailor receives orders, they are also provided information on overseas/sea duty screening, special programs screening, passports, and security clearance requests. Providing key information and timely orders execution allows our sailors and their families to more seamlessly transition housing, childcare and other key quality of life items that often are most stressful. While negative impacts such as delayed PCS funding and household goods contracts are out of the Navy's control, we prioritize the needs of our sailors and their families within the levers that we have.

Lieutenant General BORGSCULTE. Marine Corps leadership recognizes that peak moving seasons can have capacity issues. There are mitigating levers being used for the legacy program to ensure we utilize all available capacity. We communicate often and clearly with marines and other servicemembers and consistently meet and discuss issues with USTRANSCOM. Further, we have well-trained inspectors on the road to validate the services being provided to our marines and their families. Finally, we are continuing to review performance indicators and monitoring shipments to ensure our marines and their families have a good PCS experience.

Lieutenant General MILLER. The USAF leadership consistently receives updates on the GHC, outlining challenges and mitigation efforts. These communications stress the need for transparent information flow to help commands support servicemembers and families effectively. The United States Air Force has urged installation leaders to strengthen communication with local traffic management offices, use base-wide messaging to inform families, and ensure Quality Assurance personnel are accessible for support. To mitigate the impact on readiness and morale, we coordinate closely with USTRANSCOM to monitor the venter's performance and adjust shipment allocations based on capacity and reliability. During this peak relocation period, installations are categorized based on their level of participation in the GHC: full participation, no participation, and partial participation in both GHC and the legacy household goods movement program. Participating installations have clear guidance on how to support members experiencing delays; or who have unique move requirements. Additionally, we have implemented a robust oversight process, including formal discrepancy reporting and shipment revocation thresholds, to hold the venter accountable and ensure timely service. To protect the relocation experience for our families, shipments will be revoked and offered to legacy providers when the venter indicates an inability to provide service. Additionally, M&FRCs on each installation offer RAP. RAP provides proactive PCS planning education and pre-arrival orientation workshops, during which an emphasis on potential delays assists in mitigating the negative impacts for members and their families.

Ms. KELLEY. USSF approves Report No Later Than Date (RNLTD) adjustments and can delay or adjust RNLTDs in coordination with gaining/losing commanders to allow flexibility for guardians. If guardians and/or their families are impacted by any issues related to the new global household goods contract, we will work directly with the individuals impacted to adjust their RNLTDs.

