

**DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
PRESENTATION TO THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL
UNITED STATES HOUSE**

SUBJECT: "Sustaining The Health Care Benefit"

**STATEMENT OF: GENERAL JOHN D. W. CORLEY
VICE CHIEF OF STAFF
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE**

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UNITED STATES HOUSE**

Introduction

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee, the Secretary of the Air Force and Chief Moseley welcome this opportunity to outline the Air Force's concerns regarding this critical issue. The Air Force appreciates your outstanding efforts in support of our Airmen and their families. Their sacrifices deserve a first class health care system and it is a moral imperative that we provide it for them. Having a sustainable health care system is a priority for the Air Force and it is an important element in maintaining a sustainable force.

The challenge faced by the Department is experienced across the nation – delivering a cost effective yet equitable health care system. The Air Force is concerned about ensuring that our Airmen have quality health care especially while fighting the Global War on Terror. We are concerned that their families' needs are met while they are deployed. We are concerned about increasing health care costs and their potential effects on retention, recruiting and modernization efforts. We are concerned about maintaining the goodwill of the men and women that have bravely served their country.

The numbers tell the story: DoD health care costs have doubled in five years – from \$19 billion to \$38 billion this year. We agree with Secretary Rumsfeld's comment that, "Indeed, if current trends continue, health funding pressures will soon cut into budgets for training, equipment, and a range of other investments vital to winning the War on Terror and maintaining the quality of life for our troops and their families."

Clearly, we must provide for our military members and their families, but we must find the right balance among our investments in Global War on Terror operations, our dedicated and brave Airmen, and the critically important need to recapitalize our air and space assets. The Air Force believes the proposals before you will help us achieve this balance and we fully support them.

Secretary Rumsfeld stated that “We have a terrific health care system, and we want to keep it. And the only way we can keep it is to put it on a basis that’s sustainable.” The Joint Chiefs of Staff unanimously support these statements. By “re-norming” beneficiary contributions to TRICARE, we can help assure the continued high level of access to care and quality enjoyed today, second to none in the health care industry. Under the proposed changes, TRICARE will remain the best value in health care insurance in terms of cost, quality and access.

The Air Force agrees that it is appropriate that active duty troops and their families only be minimally affected by new legislation. The Air Force is working diligently to protect our deploying troops through many highly acclaimed force protection efforts, to include screening them before, during and after deployments. We’ve recently added post-deployment health reassessments that follow-up with our troops several months after re-deployment to assess both their physical and mental health.

We are grateful to the Congress for their efforts in supporting our troops, and in strengthening the military health care system. The recent TRICARE Reserve Select legislation was the right thing to do for our reserve component

personnel who play such a significant role in our defense. Our Active Duty Airmen, Air National Guardsmen, Air Force Reservists, Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, retirees and all of our military family members deserve an outstanding medical benefit. The proposals being presented are fiscally sound and the right thing to do. They are based on the best possible estimates of health consumption dynamics and places the Department of Defense on a solid approach to creating a fiscally responsible yet equitable military health care system. We look forward to working with this Committee as we strive to create the right balance between the critically important investments in military health care with the equally important investments in operations and recapitalization that serve to protect our nation.