

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

SUBJECT: AIR FORCE RECRUITING, RETENTION AND END STRENGTH

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Introduction

Madam Chairwoman, members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to discuss the Airmen who serve in the world's most respected Air Force. Our Airmen have been continuously deployed and globally engaged in combat missions for over eighteen straight years—since the first F-15 touched down in Saudi Arabia in August 1990. Today, Airmen are fully engaged in joint operations across the globe and stand prepared for rapid response to asymmetric as well as conventional conflicts.

While we remain committed to winning today's fight, and preparing for tomorrow's challenges, we've further refined our priorities. We are focusing on reinvigorating the Air Force nuclear enterprise; partnering with the joint and coalition team to win today's fight; developing and caring for Airmen and their families; modernizing our Air and Space inventories, organizations, and training; and, recapturing acquisition excellence. These priorities will shape the strategic landscape that currently foreshadows significant challenges to our organization, systems, concepts, and doctrine. We are at an historic turning point demanding an equally comprehensive evolution. The future strategic environment will be shaped by the interaction of globalization, economic disparities and competition for resources; diffusion of technology and information networks whose very nature allows unprecedented ability to harm, and potentially, paralyze advanced nations; and systemic upheavals impacting state and non-state actors, and thereby, international institutions and the world order.

Due to increased operations, maintenance, and personnel costs, we financed a massive and critical recapitalization and modernization effort for our aging air and space force from within the existing Air Force budget. Fiscal pressures forced difficult choices to ensure that the

Air Force would maintain the right balance across our personnel, infrastructure, readiness and investment portfolios.

The Air Force undertook significant personnel reductions to generate billions of dollars to reprogram towards recapitalizing and modernizing essential air, space, and cyber systems, congruent with our priorities. The impact on our warfighting Airmen has been significant. We were compelled to make some very tough decisions with respect to our people. Fewer platforms that require fewer operators and maintainers were part of the equation. We are continuing to take a hard look at all our processes and streamlining our organizations. However, we want to ensure that we continue to attract, recruit and retain high caliber men and women who are the cornerstone of our Air Force, and that we properly shape the force to fulfill our priorities.

End Strength

As of the FY09 President's Budget, current approved active duty (AD) end strength is 316,600 effective FY09 through FY13. Summer 2008, Secretary Gates announced a halt of active military drawdown at 330,000. As of 31 January 2009, active duty actual end strength is 329,651 (64,524 officers, 260,697 enlisted and 4,430 cadets).

We are working to include a Total Force end strength of 683,446 (331,700 AD) effective FY10 and growing to 688,542 (332,700 AD) by FY12-15 to support Defense Health Program and new/emerging & ongoing Air Force missions. New/emerging & ongoing missions include Intelligence, Surveillance & Reconnaissance (Reaper, Distributed Common Ground Systems, and MC-12); B-52/Nuclear Enterprise (Air Force Global Strike Command, new Assistant Chief of Staff Strategic Deterrence & Nuclear Integration, and Barksdale Weapon Storage Area); Cyber NAF; SOCOM; Aircraft Maintenance; and OSD/Joint.

In the short term to properly shape the force for these new and emerging missions, we are finding innovative ways of re-vectoring already trained personnel and training new accessions.

One example is unmanned orbits. Currently, 97% of the 34 unmanned Combat Air Patrols (CAPs) are flown from personnel at Creech remotely flying the Predator and Reaper aircraft. That mission will rapidly grow until we reach 50 CAPs. A vital component to continued success in the Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) arena is to provide a steady flow of trained personnel into the Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) mission. The rapid growth in ISR has temporarily strained our ability to produce and train sufficient numbers of UAS personnel which led to the current 'stop movement' policy. This policy will continue to remain in place until we meet the 50 CAP requirement with exceptions being made on a case-by-case basis.

We have taken several paths to meet this growing UAS requirement for the long term. First, the AF is standing up a new training schoolhouse at Holloman AFB this year to produce more UAS crews. Although the stand up will initially draw manning from Creech, it will increase our ability to train more personnel. Second, the CSAF announced two new initiatives to increase trained operators into the program. One initiative is to redirect 100 newly-minted pilots per year from Specialized Undergraduate Pilot Training (SUPT) directly into the UAS career field for one tour. Previously, we filled all UAS training with pilots who have flown other manned aircraft after graduation from SUPT. Another initiative is the UAS Beta test program to train officers with no previous manned flying experience to control Predators and Reapers. 10 officers are currently in the Beta test program and 10 more will enter training this summer and potentially be part of a new UAS-specific career field.

These programs will allow us to lift the 'stop movement' policy at Creech in the near future. Until then, operators currently at Creech will be required to extend their tours to maintain the level of experience required for this vital mission.

Recruiting

To continue engaging current and emerging global threats, our recruiting mission goes beyond finding the right numbers. It also includes ensuring the right quality and right skills are present in potential candidates so they can effectively perform and support the Air Force's diverse missions. One key component of our recruiting effort is a renewed commitment to diversity. We must focus on attracting and recruiting from all backgrounds so we capitalize on the talent available in America's youth to represent the changing demographic landscape. We are working on a game-plan with our recruiting and accession sources to tap into our diverse eligible population. Today, only 27% of the American youth population between the ages of 17 and 24 are qualified for military service (Woods & Pooles, 2006). However, we will continue to apply rigorous selection criteria to those approaching the Air Force in order to effectively match future Airmen skills and attributes with our essential combat requirements.

Our recruiting force continues to achieve the enlisted active-duty accession mission with integrity and excellence. Since 2000, the Air Force has enlisted 288,583 Airmen against a goal of 285,059 for 101% mission accomplishment. For Fiscal Year 2009, the enlisted active-duty requirement is 31,980, and 11,827 new Airmen have accessed. There are 9,334 more signed and waiting to enter Basic Military Training, for a current total of 66% of the annual enlisted active duty accessions goal. To date in FY09 we have achieved 100% of our accession goals.

The Air Force Recruiting Service has also had 100% success at filling every requirement for physically demanding and highly skilled "hard-to-fill" jobs since 2001. With Congressional assistance and our recruiter's hard work, we continue to meet all requirements for Combat Controller, Para-rescue, Tactical Air Control Party, Explosive Ordinance Disposal, Security Forces, Linguist, and Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape instructor. Recruits who choose

to enter these career fields are offered an Initial Enlistment Bonus ranging from \$2000 to \$13,000, depending on the job and term of enlistment. These are the only fields offering enlistment bonuses for Fiscal Year 2009.

We have achieved mission goals in our active-duty line officer accession programs, but we continue to struggle with health professions officer programs. In Fiscal Year 2008, the line officer active-duty requirement was 3,276, and we produced 100% of our line specialties: Pilot, Combat Systems Officer, Air Battle Manager, and Technical/Non-technical. For Fiscal Year 2009, the line officer active-duty requirement is 3,459 and 985 new officers have already assessed, so we are on track for 100%.

For Fiscal Year 2008 health professions, we recruited 42 doctors (18.4% of requirement), 28 dentists (37.8%), 226 nurses (69.5%), 128 biomedical scientists (39.9%), and 36 medical administrators (102.9%). For Fiscal Year 2009, we have currently recruited 15 doctors (12.7% of requirement), 14 dentists (66.7%), 136 nurses (49.5%), 65 biomedical scientists (19%), and 35 medical administrators (100%). Considerable challenges exist for attracting candidates from this lucrative civilian market. Therefore, we've implemented a long-term "grow our own" strategy by offering more medical school scholarships in student-based markets. In Fiscal Year 2008, we filled 431 of 437 available scholarships (98.6%). For Fiscal Year 2009, we have 449 available scholarships and 203 are already committed (45.2%). Since spring medical school acceptance letters have yet to be released from most institutions, we are on goal for this year.

Retention

We are on track toward meeting our priorities by continuing to invest in retaining the high caliber men and women we recruited, trained and developed. While the FY08 overall Active Duty enlisted retention rates finished below annual goals, the Active Duty officer corps

met or exceeded all other aggregate retention goals. This positive trend has continued into FY09; as of the end of the 1st quarter, FY09 (December 2008) we were meeting or exceeding goals. Although, the first quarter of FY09 shows overall active duty retention is trending slightly upward, some of our critical/stressed specialties continue to experience significant shortfalls and we continue to rely heavily on bonuses and quality of life initiatives to resolve these shortages.

While retention is strong within our officer corps, a few pockets of concern exist among the Medical Corp, Control & Recovery, and Contracting. An additional \$65M in medical bonuses targeted to General Surgeons and Biomedical Specialists and a new Control & Recovery Critical Skills Retention Bonus (CSRB) was approved to address FY09 challenges. Also, a Critical Skills Retention Bonus package is currently awaiting approval for contracting officers.

The Air Force's ability to retain experienced healthcare personnel past their initial commitment has declined—compounding our recruiting challenges. The retention at the 10-year point is ~ 27% for physicians, ~40% for dentists, ~31% for nurses, ~33% for biomedical sciences officers and ~64% for administrators. The Air Force continues to develop both accession and retention incentives to ensure the right mix of health professionals.

Despite finishing below FY08 goals in September 2008, FY08 marked a turning point for enlisted retention which has since trended upward in all three zones. We are however, still slightly below goal in Zones A (17 months through 6 Years of Service) and C (10 Years of Service through 14 Years of Service). Even with this success at the aggregate level, some individual enlisted specialties in the active Air Force did not achieve their overall retention goal, including: Aerial Gunner, Mid East Crypto Linguist, Imagery Analysis, Operations Management, and Contracting. Our most critical warfighting skills require a special focus on retention to maintain combat capability due to critical manning and the demands of increased operations

tempo placed on career fields including Pararescue, Combat Control, Tactical Air Control Party, and Explosive Ordnance Disposal. Budget support for retention programs is critical to effectively manage the force and preserve needed warfighting capability. These programs are judiciously and effectively targeted to provide the most return-on-investment in both dollars and capability.

The Selective Reenlistment Bonus (SRB) continues to be our most effective monetary retention tool. We appreciate continued Congressional support for our efforts. Selective Reenlistment Bonus funding budgeted for FY09 is sufficient to address current retention concerns and address grade/skill imbalances. AF is now well-positioned (considering the \$88.8M plus up in the Selective Reenlistment Bonus budget) to meet FY09 retention goals and ensure we retain the right Airmen, with the right skills, at the right time in order to meet our expeditionary requirements.

Our Airmen are committed to serving, including those experiencing high deployment rates. Combatant Commander (COCOM) requirements and the GWOT levy a high demand for pilots, navigators, intelligence, control and recovery, contracting, civil engineers, and security forces officers as well as enlisted Airmen in aircrew, special operations, intelligence, vehicle operators, civil engineering, and security forces. Despite an increased operations tempo and deployment rate, with continued emphasis, the Air Force continues to achieve acceptable retention levels across the officer and enlisted force.

Finally, we understand that support to families is vital to Air Force retention. Working together with their spouses and families, Airmen make a decision to stay in the Air Force based on many factors, one of which is the quality of service they and their families receive. We have found that caring for families has a direct impact on mission readiness from available and

affordable child care to dependent education support to spouse employment assistance. When families are taken care of, Airmen are free from distractions and are better able to focus on the mission at hand. We are committed to ensure our Airmen can rest easy, knowing the Air Force family is taking care of their family.

Conclusion

Today's Airmen are doing amazing things to meet the needs of the joint warfighter, execute the Air Force mission and keep the Air Force on a vector for success against potential future threats in an uncertain world. We are ready and engaged today, but we must continue to invest to ensure tomorrow's air, space, and cyberspace dominance. Our aim is to improve capability while maintaining the greatest combat-ready Air Force in the world. We will accomplish this through dedication to my five focus areas: Manage end strength efficiently to maximize capability; Recruit and retain the highest quality and diverse Airmen; Maximize Continuum of Learning throughout the Airman life cycle; Continue focus on Quality of Life programs for Airmen and their families; and maximize efficiencies of business processes through evolving IT solutions.

The Air Force provides unique options to our nation's Joint Force commanders. The Air Force must safeguard our ability to: see anything on the face of the earth; range it; observe or hold it at risk; supply, rescue, support or destroy it; assess the effects; and exercise global command and control of all these activities. Our Airmen make this happen. Rising to the 21st Century challenge is not a choice--it is our responsibility!

We appreciate your unfailing support to the men and women of our Air Force, and I look forward to your questions.