

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
PRESENTATION TO THE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL
UNITED STATES SENATE

SUBJECT: RECRUITING AND RETENTION

STATEMENT OF: LIEUTENANT GENERAL DONALD L. PETERSON

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UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

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INTRODUCTION

Mr. Chairman, Senator Allard and members of the Military Personnel Subcommittee, as you know, this is my first appearance before this subcommittee in my new position as Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, United States Air Force. It is a tremendous honor to be here to represent the men and women of our United States Air Force, the finest aerospace force in the world. This is an exciting time to be in uniform, and I am pleased to report to you on the status of our people and to talk with you about military recruiting and retention. Today, I echo the testimony of General Mike Ryan, our Chief of Staff. Air Force people are motivated, morale is high, and they are continuing to answer the call around the world. In fact, today 15,000 Air Force men and women are deployed around the world and another 80,000 are forward based on permanent assignment. Visiting our men and women in uniform, you see hard working people pulling

together as a team to produce the top combat ready air force on the globe today. We truly are one team, one force, one family...our great Air Force.

In his testimony, General Ryan has said, without a doubt, people are our most critical readiness issue. I agree. I also believe our number one people issue is recruiting and retention. Our number one recruiting and retention issue is compensation. Our number one compensation issue is retirement, followed closely by pay.

As you clearly see, recruiting and retention are tightly interwoven with our ability to compensate our members (retirement and pay) and sustain the nation's fighting force. For that reason, I will follow my report on the Air Force's recruiting and retention efforts with a brief discussion of compensation issues.

Our number one people issue is recruiting and retention...

RECRUITING

The Air Force is committed to recruiting and retaining high caliber people. Only once since the inception of the All-Volunteer Force (1975) has the Air Force missed its annual recruiting goal (FY79). In 1998, we achieved our recruiting goal of 31,300 new recruits—99 percent were high school graduates and 77 percent scored in the top half of the enlistment test. Despite this achievement, it is getting more difficult to meet our goals both in terms of quantity and quality. The number of eligible youth is constant, smaller percentages are interested in joining the military, and they have many other choices in a robust economy. Also, we cannot overstate the recruiting task our Services face. An important challenge lies in not only recruiting the right number of people, but in recruiting enough people with the right aptitude, at the right time, in order to maintain a proper training flow and a ready force.

Quantity

In FY99, because of retention downturns, we were forced to increase our recruiting goal by eight percent to 33,800 recruits. So far in FY99, we have missed our monthly goal three out of four months—currently, we are 696 recruits short of goal for the year, as we enter what has historically been the most difficult recruiting period of the year (February through May). If this trend continues, the Air Force could miss its FY99 target by 2,000 or more recruits. The Air Force likes to enter each fiscal year with 43 percent of the annual goal in the Delayed Entry Program (DEP), or “the bank,” but we began FY99 at just 37 percent. This means that at the start of the year, the number of airmen already scheduled to enter basic training was

approximately 2,000 short of our goal. This caused a two-fold effect on recruiters—increased accession requirements for FY99 and increased DEP or “bank” needs to meet the FY00 target. Today the bank is almost 3,000 short. Figure 1 shows this shortage while Table 1 displays the Air Force active duty recruiting results since FY91, to include projected accessions for FY99 and FY00.

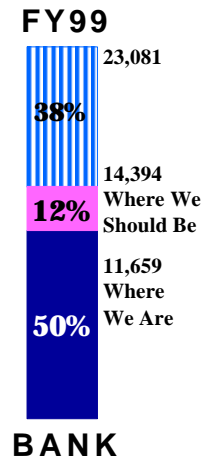


Figure 1

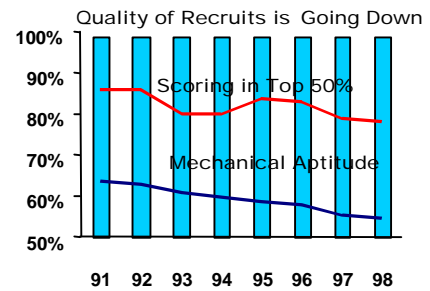
Enlisted Accession History/Projection									
FY91	FY92	FY93	FY94	FY95	FY96	FY97	FY98	FY99*	FY00*
30,000	35,100	31,500	30,000	30,894	30,700	30,200	31,491	33,800	32,400

*Lower than projected retention increased FY99 accessions by 1,000 and FY00 accessions by 1,300 to current number.

Table 1

Quality

In terms of our recruit quality, our success has been mixed. While we continue to access over 99 percent high school graduates, since 1991 the Air Force has experienced a nine percent drop in the quality of our new recruits—those scoring in the top half of the enlistment test. In an Air Force dependent upon technically qualified airmen, this trend causes concern. Compounding this concern, as shown in Figure 2, average Mechanical scores



(Armed Service Vocational Aptitude Battery subtest composite score), dropped 14 percent since 1991 (from 64 in 1991, to 55 in 1998). Sixty-three of our 200-plus enlisted career fields require a mechanical qualifying score.

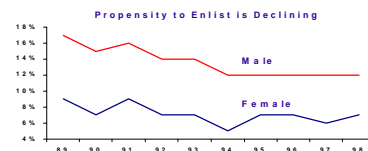
Challenges

Our recruiters face many diverse challenges in today's environment. Ample opportunity to attend college and a robust economy combined with a constant-sized population and reduced propensity to enlist shrinks the pool of qualified and interested potential recruits.

In addition to this shrinking pool, competition from civilian and military organizations has increased. The most qualified – mentally and physically – have greater opportunities in a prosperous economic environment and are in great demand. Today's young men and women have different options and in many cases they are making choices that don't include an Air Force career for their future. A perceived decreased national

security threat, low unemployment, increasing educational opportunities, smaller number of military role models, and the growing positive expectations of today's youth – all these factors have made our recruiting mission more challenging

than ever. As displayed in Figure 3, this is reinforced by the drop in young people's propensity to serve as noted in annual youth attitude surveys—although recently stable, since 1991, interest has dropped 23 percent.



Initiatives

Recruiters experience these challenges each day as they discuss the Air Force as a viable choice with young men and women and their influencers (parents, teachers, coaches, guidance

counselors, etc.) across the country. To bolster our recruiting efforts the Air Force implemented several initiatives.

First, we restored the advertising budget after a significant drop in the early nineties. The Air Force greatly appreciates the congressional increases that we received in FY98 and FY99 to further assist our advertising efforts. Despite these increases, the size of our enlistment bank and the quality of our new recruits continue to decline. Additionally, our Air Force “Aim High” slogan recognition has consistently dropped over the years with our target market of 16-24 year olds. This year we are at a low of 76 percent for males and 55 percent for females. This can be compared to the Army’s “Be all you can be” recognition rate of 92 percent for males and 88 percent for females. As a result, for the first time in the Air Force’s history, we dedicated \$54 million to conduct paid television campaigns beginning this spring. Of the \$54 million, \$17 million will purchase airtime for FY99, and \$37 million will allow us to pre buy quality airtime for FY00. (The Air Force relied, up to now, on television Public Service Advertising, print and radio.) The significant increase in advertisement funding is displayed in Table 2.

Advertising Dollars														
91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05
8.6	8.7	7.7	7.8	13.0	14.3	15.7	17.2	76.0	58.4	59.2	39.8	40.3	40.7	41.2

Note: Dollars represented in millions. Includes print and radio.

Table 2

Second, to raise our recruiter manning, we are freeing up more volunteers to re-train into recruiting duty. Currently, overall recruiter manning is at 82 percent, and although our recruiter school house is at capacity, we will not near 100 percent until FY01. Air Force Recruiting Service has increased their production recruiter manning by implementing programs to enhance the number of recruiters in the local communities. They have done this primarily by shifting

personnel in overhead positions to field recruiting requirements. In addition, to help recruiters in the field, we made significant improvements in their quality of life by providing cellular phones, laptop computers, and information support systems that allow immediate update of applicant data and access to supporting data systems. Housing (preference on base) and pay initiatives (Special Duty Incentive Pay, (SDIP)) have also helped to lessen the financial burden of serving in high-cost areas.

Third, thanks to your help, we expanded the enlistment bonus program in Oct 98 to all critical career fields to help attract quality applicants. The number of specialties eligible for enlistment bonuses increased from 4 to 115. In FY99, the Air Force allocated an additional \$83M for this program. For six-year enlistments we raised the maximum amount of enlistment bonuses from \$6K to \$9K while offering a minimum of \$2,000. Those individuals choosing a 6-year enlistment bonus career field will also be awarded an early promotion to E-3. In addition, the Air Force began offering \$1K for 4-year enlistments in critical hard-to-fill career fields. The Air Force sees this as an important program to incentivize potential recruits for hard-to-fill skills, specifically those specialties requiring mechanical or electronic aptitude.

The Air Force has also dramatically expanded our Prior Service recruiting program. This has been used sparingly most of this decade due primarily because of personnel force reductions. However, during this period of relative force stability, we can expand this effort, bringing back former quality Air Force members in selected critical career fields.

These initiatives may take time to show results as their effects are cumulative. As a result, the Air Force may experience an accession shortfall in FY99, but we are hopeful these initiatives will help reverse our downward trend.

The Air Force must continue to recruit high quality men and women capable of meeting the needs of our Expeditionary Aerospace Force. Our recruiters are out there working very hard—visiting schools and making contacts. Paid television will help bolster the Air Force image and remind Americans that their United States Air Force is on the job 24-hours a day, 7-days a week, 365-days a year, protecting our country. Ample advertising funding is critical to support our recruiting mission.

RETENTION

Attracting quality people is the first step in building and maintaining the world's finest aerospace force, but retaining them is just as important. The training we provide makes our airmen very desirable in the civilian marketplace. However, we must retain a large percentage of our trained and qualified personnel to maintain our readiness posture. Today's robust economy, along with a 400 percent increase in operations tempo, has challenged our ability to retain highly motivated and technologically adept airmen. Because the majority of today's Air Force members have families, quality health care, safe, affordable, and adequate housing, community programs, and expanded educational opportunities are very important. Upon leaving the Air Force, our members often tell us they are torn between service to their country and the needs of their families. Therefore, we must remember that while we recruit individuals we must retain families.

Enlisted Retention

Retention of our highly trained, experienced members is the cornerstone of our enlisted force structure and management. In FY98 we missed our retention goals in all three enlisted categories (First Term 55 percent, Second Term 75 percent and Career Airmen 95 percent). This

is the first time in 18 years (FY81) the Air Force missed retention goals in all three categories when we were trying to make it (not in a drawdown period). As shown in Table 3, we missed all three goals one other time (1990), but that was at the height of the drawdown and we were not trying to retain to that level. Since FY95, retention rates have declined in all three categories. This is especially alarming because in the next four years 275,000 airmen, 93 percent of the enlisted force, will face a reenlistment decision.

Enlisted Retention Rates*									
Category/FY	FY91	FY92	FY93	FY94	FY95	FY96	FY97	FY98	<i>AF GOAL</i>
1st Term	59%	58%	61%	59%	63%	59%	56%	54%	55%
2nd Term	77%	76%	82%	81%	77%	76%	71%	69%	75%
Career	95%	96%	97%	96%	96%	95%	95%	93%	95%

Table 3

Although reenlistment rates are down in all categories, our second term rates are a major concern. In order to sustain our enlisted force with the appropriate experience levels we need to retain 75 percent of eligible second-termers. (These members represent the core of our highly skilled maintainers, trainers, deployers and supervisors.) For FY98 our second-term reenlistment rate of 69 percent was below the goal of 75 percent, and down eight percentage points from FY95, an eight-year low.

At the end of FY98, 111 of 210 enlisted specialties, 53 percent, were below the 75 percent goal for second-term reenlistments. Many of our key warfighting skills such as avionics, air traffic control, and security forces retention rates were even lower. For example, the second-term reenlistment rate for our air traffic controllers was 51 percent, avionics was 57 percent, and security forces was 66 percent.

Why is enlisted retention so important? Our analysts estimate that if second term retention rates drop from the current rate of 69 to 60 percent and Career retention rates fall from 93 to 90 percent, we would require an additional 17 percent increase in recruits and another \$95 million in increased infrastructure and training costs. However, we would not be able to replace the loss of experience as it takes eight years to grow an NCO with eight years of experience. The impact of reduced retention and loss of experience can be seen in our 5-level manning figures. At the end of FY98 our 5-level manning was 90.8 percent; the lowest it has been since FY87. We are concerned because our 5-level personnel represent the corps of NCOs that are trained maintainers, trainers and deployers.

Attrition is a major concern and is our first true retention challenge. Our goal is to retain all recruits through completion of their initial contract without sacrificing our quality and performance standards. Basic Military Training (BMT) and post-BMT attrition combined,

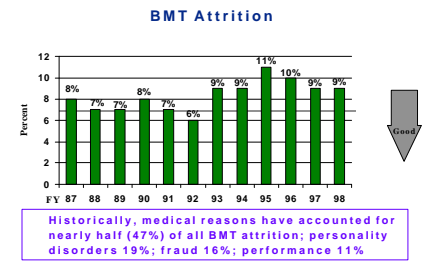


Figure 4

averaged 31 percent since FY88. In that time, our BMT attrition rate averaged 8.5 percent. Historically, medical problems account for nearly half (47 percent) of BMT attrition (Figure 4).

To reduce these losses, we introduced special pain rehabilitation classes for minor injuries, added a combat boot break in period, and introduced stress management classes. We also simplified reentry for airmen who left with medical conditions that were resolved. Our efforts have started to pay off as we finished FY98 with

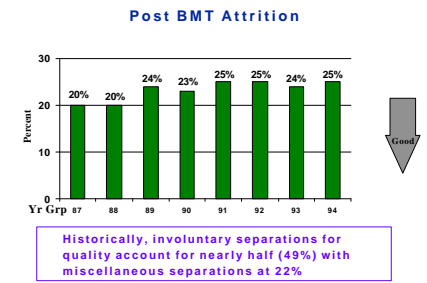


Figure 5

medical attrition at 39 percent, 8 percentage points below the historical average.

Post-BMT attrition averaged 24 percent since FY88 (Figure 5). Involuntary separations for quality account for nearly half (49 percent) of post-BMT attrition. After examining the cases, we found that they involved multiple infractions and discharge was appropriate. Additionally, historical data show that miscellaneous separations accounted for 22 percent of all post-BMT attrition. We discovered that many commanders were still operating under liberal miscellaneous discharge guidelines in effect during the drawdown. Now, after proper communication with our commanders, miscellaneous discharges are down 76 percent since the first quarter of FY98 to first quarter FY99.

To address our reenlistment shortages we have more than doubled the dollar amount allotted for the Selective Reenlistment Bonus (SRB) program. Our policy on awarding SRBs is based on retention trends, current and projected manning levels, and year group shortages in critical skills. In FY95, we offered SRBs for 48 skills at a cost of \$24 million. During the latest SRB review for FY99, we expanded to 117 skills (57 percent of enlisted skills) and a budget of \$53 million. For the first time since 1988 we are offering SRBs to our NCOs with 10-14 years of service. As retention continues to be a top priority, expanded monetary inducements will be required to keep our highly trained and experienced personnel in the Air Force. We greatly appreciate the support you have provided in making this possible by funding this important retention tool. Retaining an adequate budget allows for the distribution of bonuses to alleviate manning shortfalls.

Officer Retention

Like the enlisted force, overall officer retention was down in FY98. While a great deal of attention has been focused on the pilot shortage, we are also experiencing lower retention for navigators, non-rated operations officers, and mission support officers (Table 4). All indications

point to a challenging retention environment. From FY96 to FY98 retention rates for navigators dropped from 75 percent to 62 percent, for non-rated operations officers it dropped from 62 percent to 56 percent, and for mission support officers it dropped from 50 percent to 41 percent.

Officer Retention Rates

Category/FY	FY91	FY92	FY93	FY94	FY95	FY96	FY97	FY98
Navigator	70%	54%	28%	84%	86%	75%	73%	62%
Non-rated Ops	65%	43%	20%	70%	54%	62%	59%	56%
Mission Supt	58%	37%	21%	61%	51%	50%	45%	41%

Table 4

Pilots are often described as the operational capability of the Air Force and we are very concerned about our rapidly decreasing pilot inventory. Over the past 3 years we have seen pilot separations increase 240 percent. In FY97, we had 632 pilots separate from the Air Force. That grew to 1033 in FY98, and 940 have already separated or requested separation in FY99. In simple terms, for every two pilots that walk in, three walk out. All of these losses have a minimum of 8 years operational flying. These pilots are the tip of our combat spear and are very expensive to replace (average \$5.9M per pilot).

Our leading indicator for pilot retention continues to be the number accepting the Aviator Continuation Pay (ACP), often referred to as the pilot bonus. The ACP Program offers additional compensation to stay in the Air Force beyond their initial 8-year commitment after pilot training. We closely track the number of pilots accepting long term contracts that commit them to remain in the Air Force through their fourteenth year of commissioned service (see Table 5).

Aviator Continuation Pay Take Rate (Long-term contracts)

	FY91	FY92	FY93	FY94	FY95	FY96	FY97	FY98
Eligible	1665	1169	1021	718	434	802	747	1070
Accepted	658	803	806	584	332	469	247	293
Rate	40%	69%	79%	81%	77%	59%	35%	27%

Table 5

Over the past 3 years we have seen the bonus take rate drop 65 percent. We ended FY98 short 648 pilots. If this trend continues, the Air Force will suffer a shortage near 2,000 pilots by FY02 (Figure 6).

The competition from the airlines is fierce. Almost all of our separating pilots are transitioning to commercial aviation and airline hiring is expected to continue at record

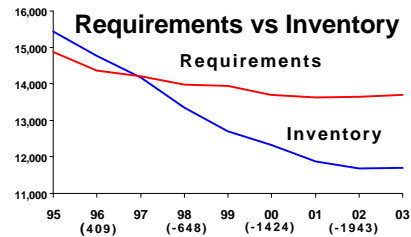


Figure 6

high rates. In 1993, the 14 major airlines hired only 463 pilots. In contrast, just the major airlines hired 3,854 in 1997; 3,646 in 1998; and are forecasting 3,760 new hires in 1999! Today, if every Air Force, Navy, Marine, and Army fixed-wing pilot left after their initial active duty service commitment, we would not meet the requirements of the 14 major airlines. Unlike the past, the demand for a seasoned military pilot is not for a short term. The major airline demand is expected to remain well above 2,000 pilots a year through 2004.

We surveyed our pilots to find out why we are losing them. The number one reason is our high operations tempo followed closely by quality of life (QoL). Phrased another way, too much time, often unpredictable, away from their families. Armed with this survey data, the Air Force initiated a comprehensive 4-star retention gameplan in April 1997. The plan targets reducing operations tempo; improving quality of life; increasing pilot production while decreasing pilot requirements; and improving compensation and personnel programs,

Here's three highlights of our gameplan. First, to preserve our future combat capability, the Air Force increased the active duty service commitment for pilot training from 8 to 10 years. Second, to better manage our high-operating tempo and improve quality of life for our members

and their families, we are changing the way we organize and deploy our combat forces through the creation of Expeditionary Aerospace Forces (EAFs). This new approach incorporating the Total Force (active, civilian, Reserve and Guard) should go a long way to restore predictability and stability across the force. Last, but not least, we initiated a 1-year test of Phoenix Aviator 20. Phoenix Aviator 20 recognizes our pilots are a national asset. It encourages our mid-level pilots to stay with the Air Force by showing that the Air Force is committed to assisting our pilots, who faithfully served our nation for a full career, and desire to transition to commercial aviation.

The additional monetary incentives you provided in the FY99 NDAA have had positive results on retaining our aviators, but it has not completely stemmed the tide. Increases in flight pay (Aviation Career Incentive Pay) and the pilot bonus have not gone unnoticed by our flyers. So far in FY99, 25 percent of our bonus eligible pilots have reached their decision window...48 percent have accepted the long-term bonus and 20 percent short term. People ask me why we are seeing such a significant increase in accepting the bonus? I tell them it may well be the cumulative effect of our retention game plan initiatives and recent dialogue from our nation's senior leaders, military and civilian, supporting an increase in military retirement and compensation. The men and women of our Air Force are glad to see their leadership and Congress go to bat for them. We are cautiously optimistic about these results and are anxiously waiting the next three months when larger portions of bonus eligible aviators make their decision.

There is no single "fix" for our current retention situation. Other programs may be needed to help alleviate the pilot shortage. As a nation, we must continue to realize that pilots are a national asset and consider paying bonuses past the 14-year point. (Before FY95, only one in 14

separated after 14 years. Last year one in four separated.) We must also examine the feasibility of increasing the mandatory retirement age of commercial airline pilots from 60 to 65 and open a dialogue between the military, federal aviation officials and commercial airlines about producing enough pilots to meet the national requirement.

Our number one recruiting and retention issue is compensation...

Our number one compensation issue is retirement, followed closely by pay

RETIREMENT

The Military Retirement System (MRS) is an integral part of DoD's Compensation Triad (Figure 7) and an important part of the Air Force's Quality of Life focus. It must provide a strong foundation in developing a fair and equitable compensation package and a reasonable retirement for a member's service. Since 1980, the value of the MRS has been reduced by 25 percent. Also causing concern is the perceived instability of

the retirement benefit. In the last 5 years there have been 17 different attempts to reduce the benefit. Many members are concerned that their current retirement system will not be in effect when they actually retire. We are seeing the impact of these actions today.

In the 1996 Careers Survey we asked members how the current retirement system ranked as a "factor to stay." Officers and enlisted members under the 50 percent formula ranked the retirement benefit number one and two, respectively, as a reason to stay in the Air Force. In contrast, officers and enlisted members under the Military Retirement Reform Act (MRRA or "Redux") ranked the current system number four and six, respectively, as a reason to stay. The

Compensation Strategy

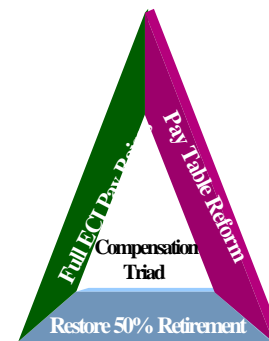


Figure 7

1997 Quality of Life survey results had similar results. Only one in eight young airmen and one in three young officers agreed that the retirement system was “fair and equitable”.

In December 1998, we surveyed over 600 officers and enlisted members with established separation dates between January and June 1999 (1998 Separation Survey). Four out of five did not feel the current MRRA was “fair and equitable.” Enlisted members who took the survey ranked MRRA as their number one factor in making their decision to leave the Air Force. Officers ranked MRRA as the number three reason they left (behind “Compatibility with family needs” and “Moves / assignments”).

How important is retirement in a member’s decision to stay or leave the Air Force? One in three enlisted members and one in eight officers surveyed in December said that they would remain in the Air Force if placed under a 50 percent retirement plan. Based upon these data, it is clear MRRA is a major factor in a member’s decision not to stay in the Air Force for 20 years – failing in its original stated goal of encouraging members to stay to 30 years.

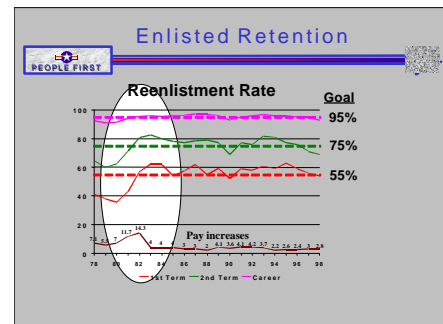
PAY

Military pay, like military retirement, has also lost much of its value. Since 1982, military wages failed to keep pace with inflation. Currently, military pay increases still lag inflation. We were pleased to see a 3.6 percent pay raise in 1999 when the 1998 inflation was only 1.3 percent. The proposed pay raise of 4.4 percent in the President’s FY00 budget will close that gap. While this closes the inflation gap, another, much larger, gap still exists.

1982 was the last time military and private sector wages were comparable. Since then, military members’ wages have lost ground when compared to private sector wage increases. Today, the difference between military wages and private sector wages has increased to 13.5

percent. Obviously, this is an aggregate rate and the difference is much greater for many of the Air Force's highly technical specialists.

Will increased pay influence retention? Historical evidence suggests that the answer is yes. Sustained pay increases helped to turn around significant declines in enlisted retention in the early 1980's (Figure 8). In 1981



and 1982 the military received pay increases of 11.7 and 14.3 percent respectively. After these pay increases, retention of 1st term increased by 60 percent and 2nd term airmen increased by over 30 percent (Figure 8). It is interesting to note that the difference between military wages and private sector wages prior to the wage increases in the early 1980's was 12 percent, less than today's pay gap of 13.5 percent. The impact of these wage increases were highlighted in a 1989 Congressional report that stated in part, "Although several factors contributed to the turnaround, the large pay raises in October 1980 and 1981 played a paramount role ..."

Survey data also indicates pay influences the retention decision of officers and enlisted members. The 1996 Careers Survey found that only 16 percent of the enlisted members and 22 percent of officers believed pay was "as good or better than the private sector." In the 1997 Quality of Life survey, less than one in three enlisted members felt that pay was "fair and equitable."

The 1998 Separation Survey found similar results. Forty-one percent of the enlisted members and 12 percent of the officers surveyed cited military pay as a major reason they decided to separate. Many members realize the current restriction on pay (Employment Cost Index (ECI) less 0.5 percent) puts them at a constant economic disadvantage. Interestingly enough, over half

of enlisted members separating (55 percent) and almost one-fifth (19 percent) of the officers separating stated they would stay if they were guaranteed “annual pay increases equal to or higher than private sector wage growth.”

Since the inception of the All-Volunteer Force in 1975, pay has been an important part of recruiting and retention. In *A Report to the President on the Status and Prospects of the All-Volunteer Force*, Nov 82, the Military Manpower Task Force recognized, “The Administration and Congress must ensure military pay is maintained at reasonable competitive levels.”

A final aspect of military compensation is pay table reform. Reforming the pay table, as proposed in the President’s Budget, gives greater weight to promotion and advancement verses longevity. Pay table reform recognizes the unique education, training, experience and leadership of our mid-grade NCOs and officers.

QUALITY OF LIFE

Obviously, recruiting, retention, and compensation are not the only priorities in today’s Air Force. Increased tempo and its impacts on our forces’ Quality of Life (QoL) are concerns to our members and their families. To offset these negative impacts, we continue to champion a wide variety of QoL initiatives to support our airmen. In January 2000, we will implement the EAF concept which will increase stability and predictability in service life.

The Air Force views compensation as part of a program not only to improve retention but also to provide an adequate quality of life for our members. Since 1995, we have developed an annual QoL Focus Paper that clearly articulates our people concerns and areas of concentration. There are seven areas in our QoL effort. Two of those areas are fair and competitive compensation and the retirement systems. However, our commanders and first sergeants tell us

that these are not the only issues facing our Air Force members today. Our members and their families depend on us to help them balance the impact of high tempo levels, provide access to quality health care, provide access to safe, affordable, and adequate housing, support community and family programs and expand educational opportunities and access. As we examine Air Force recruiting and retention challenges we need to also pursue these vitally important quality of life concerns and initiatives.

CLOSING

People remain our most vital resource. The intense demands placed on them require special individuals who are highly motivated, well trained, and responsibly led. Our people are watching closely as we deal with the key issues of recruiting, retention, compensation, and other quality of life concerns. As you consider the FY00 budget proposal, we believe it is vitally important to recognize the sacrifices our military members and families have made for our country. They've gone where we have asked them to go—they've been warriors and peacekeepers and humanitarians around the world and their efforts have directly contributed to the economic prosperity we all enjoy. The men and women of today's Air Force are America's best, and we must do what it takes to support them as they serve and deploy without a moment's hesitation. We're not asking the American people to make our military rich; rather, we seek to provide the right incentives to continue to recruit and retain the best and brightest our Nation has to offer. You have provided many of the tools we need and your continued support is critical. I look forward to working with each of you in the coming year as we, together, take care of America's Airmen. Thank You.