

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE

PRESENTATION TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SUBJECT: RECRUITING, RETENTION, AND COMPENSATION

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Introduction

Madam Chairwoman, Congressman McHugh, members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to discuss our efforts to ensure we recruit, develop, and retain high quality Airmen for the world's most respected air, space and cyberspace force. Our Airmen have been continuously deployed and globally engaged in combat missions for over seventeen straight years—since the first F-15 touched down in Saudi Arabia in August 1990. Today, Airmen are fully engaged in the interdependent joint fight and stand prepared for rapid response and conflict across the globe as our nation's sword and shield.

Our priorities are clear: winning today's fight; developing and caring for our Airmen and their families; preparing for tomorrow's challenges. Today's confluence of global trends already foreshadows significant challenges to our organization, systems, concepts, and doctrine. We are at an historic turning point demanding and equally comprehensive revolution. 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 have been forced to self-finance the centerpiece of future dominance—a massive and critical recapitalization and modernization effort for our aging air and space force. Budgetary 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 three key mission priorities. The impact on our warfighting Airmen has been significant. We have been compelled to make some very difficult choices with respect to our people. Fewer platforms that require fewer operators and maintainers are part of the equation. We are taking a hard look at all our processes and streamlining our organizations. At the same time, we want to improve the training and professional development of our Airmen.

However, maintaining a Required Force of 86 modern Combat Wings will also be significantly impacted by current programmed reductions in Air Force end strength. The Air Force has submitted a report to Congressional defense committees on Total Force end strength requirements due to new and emerging missions. This report identifies our Total Force end strength requirement of 681.9K in FY 09 growing to 688.5K by FY 15 to operate, maintain, and support a Required Force of 86 modern Combat Wings and how the AF will fund these requirements.

Recruiting

As we prepare for an uncertain future, we are transforming the force to ensure we are the right size and shape to meet emerging global threats with joint and battle trained Airmen. We are becoming a smaller force, with a critical need for specific skills. In order to dominate in the domains of Air, Space and Cyberspace throughout the 21st Century, we must recruit, develop, and organize America's diverse and brightest talent for the complex, multinational, and interagency operations of the future.

Our recruiting force has met their enlisted recruiting mission through persistence and dedication. Since 2000, the Air Force has enlisted 258,166 Airmen against a goal of 254,753 for 101 percent mission accomplishment. For Fiscal Year 2008, the active-duty requirement is 27,800 and 9,258 new Airman have accessed up to this point with 9,461 waiting to enter Basic Military Training. We're on track to meet our goals. To date for Fiscal Year 2008, we've accessed 100% of our active duty goal, and accessed 100% and 114% of our Reserve and Guard accession goals, respectively.

The United States Air Force Recruiting Service continues to find the right person, for the right job, at the right time and this is clearly evident in our most critical skills. Recruiting Service has filled every requirement for Combat Controller (CCT), Pararescue (PJ), Tactical Air Control Party (TACP), Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE), Fuels systems, Security Forces, Armament Systems, Munitions Systems, Utilities and Linguists since 2001. This has been accomplished through hard work and the significant assistance of the U.S. Congress. Recruits who choose to enter these career fields are offered an Initial Enlistment Bonus (IEB) ranging from \$1.5K to \$13K, depending on the job and length of enlistment. No other enlistment bonuses are offered.

The Air Force Reserves exceeded its recruiting goals for the seventh consecutive year in FY07. However, BRAC, Total Force Initiative and PBD 720 cuts will pose significant challenges in 2008. Aggressive measures will be needed to stand up new missions at Pope, MacDill and Elmendorf AFBs. While we've benefited from active duty Force Shaping initiatives we anticipate tougher days ahead as the prior service recruiting pool will be smaller forcing us to rely more heavily on non-prior service (NPS) individuals. Competing for the NPS pool against other reserve and active duty components that may have more attractive bonus packages will add to recruiting challenges. Funding for advertising and bonuses will play a key role in meeting manning requirements.

The majority of our officer programs have also met with mission success, with the exception of medical recruiting. Last year the Air Force recruited just under half of its target for fully qualified healthcare professionals. Broken down by specialty, we recruited 68 doctors (17.4% of target), 45 dentists (25.5%), 222 nurses (62.5%), 125 biomedical scientists (62.8%), and 34 medical administrators (97%). These significant challenges exist due to lucrative, private sector salaries, which are continuing to rise. Currently, the Air Force's Medical, Dental and Nurse corps have significant manning challenges that are directly attributable to recruiting and retaining these personnel. These challenges are made all the greater because the Air Force has deployed over 8000 medical officers in support of the Global War on Terror (GWOT) since 2001. Since 9/11, Air Force Recruiting Service (AFRS) and Air Force Medical Service (AFMS) have been working together to implement innovative ways to address our shortfalls in medical recruiting, to include increasing the number of available health professions scholarships and developing a "Career Field Champions" network of medical professionals to assist with our recruiting effort.

Retention

In Fiscal Year 2007, we continued to manage and shape the force across and within skills. Maintaining acceptable retention levels through targeted programs continues to be critical to this effort. Force shaping ensured active duty end strength met our longer term requirements.

For FY07, active duty Air Force officer retention finished 11% above goal (excluding force shaping losses), while enlisted retention fell below goal (92.7% of goal), still within acceptable margins. The AF Reserve fell short of its enlisted retention goal by 3%, attaining 97% and was .2% shy of the officer retention goal, attaining 99.8%. The ANG met their overall officer and enlisted retention goals for FY07. Even with these successes, some enlisted specialties in the active Air Force did not achieve their overall retention goal, including Air Traffic Control, Mid East Crypto Linguist, Structural Civil Engineering, and Pavement and Construction Equipment Vehicle Operations, 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, 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.

Retention rate in the Air Force Reserves is also becoming a concern although we missed our goal in FY07 by only a slight margin (99.8%). However, this marked the second year in a row that we didn't reach our AFRES retention targets. We've seen an increase in the turnover rate via gradual decreases in First Term and Career Airmen reenlistments over the last three years with reenlistments dropping nearly 10 points. We believe this is partly due to fallout from BRAC and PBD 720, but will monitor closely to identify opportunities to influence our Airmen's behavior as they reach key career decision points.

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 ~26% for physicians, ~18% for dentists, ~34% for nurses, ~36% for biomedical sciences officers and ~52% for administrators. The Air Force continues to develop both accession and retention incentives to ensure the right mix of health professionals.

Our warfighting 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, 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, the Air Force continues to achieve acceptable retention levels across the officer and enlisted force.

Finally, we understand that support to families is a critical part of 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 life they and their families deserve. With a strategic plan that highlights the importance of "Taking Care of People", Air Force recognizes that families are vital to retention.

Force Development

As part of our Air Force Transformation, we are reviewing and synchronizing our development efforts to realize efficiencies in how we utilize developmental tools --

educational, training or experiential -- to produce Airmen (military and civilian; officer and enlisted; active and reserve). We're dedicating resources to ensure our "most important weapon system" is prepared to deliver Air, Space and Cyberspace power wherever and whenever it is needed. Synchronized, deliberate development relies on a common language, a common framework and enduring processes. We are finalizing this common language and framework by publishing our Institutional Competency List and Continuum of Learning framework. Next, we must review our developmental processes to ensure they describe requirements, align programs, and link investments with outcomes. As an example, we eliminated redundancies in legacy ancillary training reducing training time to 90 minutes per Airman ultimately saving 8 hours, per year, per Airman, for a total of over 6 million AF work-hours per year.

We are synchronizing processes to meet requirements for the skills Airmen need in an expeditionary environment. Starting in 2011 we'll send select Airmen to the Common Battlefield Airman Training course to enhance the expeditionary skills they learned in Basic Military Training. We are teaching Airmen self aid and buddy care so they can take care of each other when their bases take mortar fire or when teams come under fire while performing their duties "outside the wire." We've established a Center of Excellence for Expeditionary Ground Combat to ensure our pre-deployment training is responsive to the changing tactics and techniques used by our enemies in the AOR. We are extending Basic Military Training to 8.5 weeks, to teach Airmen skills to defend an Air Base and to operate in the expeditionary environment of the 21st Century.

We established the Air Force Culture and Language Center at Maxwell AFB, AL, unique in its mission to develop expeditionary Airmen by synchronizing education and training across our Professional Military Education Schools and deployment training venues. We are teaching language training and enhancing regional studies at our Air Command and Staff College and Air War College. We've also implemented regional studies at our Senior NCO Academy, NCO Academy, and Airmen Leadership Schools. We are consolidating Air Force Specialty codes to provide broader skill sets and enabling flexibility in GWOT and support of COCOM missions.

We have also placed a great focus on culture and language training at our officer accession sources, with the objective of developing officers with acute cultural understandings, able to forge partnerships and alliances. A majority of Air Force Academy and ROTC Cadets are enrolled in foreign language education and are now able to participate in study abroad programs, not only at foreign military academies but also local universities. One force development strategy is to target foreign language speakers, primarily focusing on AFROTC detachments that sponsor foreign language programs. Currently, we have 54 cadets enrolled as Language Majors, with another 629 scholarship cadets majoring in technical degrees and taking languages as an elective. Another 100 cadets annually participate in foreign culture and language immersions in countries of strategic importance. Beginning with cadets contracted in August of 2006, AFROTC scholarship cadets majoring in non-technical degrees must now complete 12 semester hours of foreign languages. Further, USAFA cadets who are technical majors are taking 6 semester hours in a foreign language and non-technical majors are taking 12 semester hours in a foreign language.

Conclusion

Today's Airmen are doing amazing things to execute the Air Force mission, meet Air Force commitments, 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 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 Airmen; Maximize Continuum of Learning throughout 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 is often first to the fight and last to leave. We give unique options to all 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. Rising to the 21st Century challenge is not a choice. It is our responsibility to bequeath a dominant Air Force to America's joint team that will follow us in service to the Nation.

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