

Not for publication until released by the Committee

PREPARED STATEMENT

OF

**THE HONORABLE GILBERT CISNEROS
UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR PERSONNEL & READINESS**

**MS. VIRGINIA PENROD
ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR MANPOWER & RESERVE
AFFAIRS**

**DR. DAVID SMITH
PERFORMING THE DUTIES OF ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR
HEALTH AFFAIRS**

**MS. BETH FOSTER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF FORCE RESILIENCY**

**REGARDING
FISCAL YEAR 2023 DEFENSE PERSONNEL POSTURE**

BEFORE THE

**SENATE ARMED SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL
April 27, 2022**

Chairwoman Gillibrand, Ranking Member Tillis, and members of the Personnel Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you along with the other leaders of the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel & Readiness (OUSD(P&R)) to discuss the Department of Defense's greatest strength – our people. We are proud to represent the 2.4 million Active and Reserve Component Service members and over 700K DoD civilians who defend our nation every day, not to mention their families and dependents who sacrifice right alongside with them.

In Secretary's Austin's earliest Message to the Force and actions related to addressing sexual assault, he made clear that taking care of people is not only the right thing to do, especially during our Nation's challenging years of the COVID-19 pandemic, but it is imperative for our national security. While past Administrations and DoD leaders have acknowledged the importance of the workforce, I believe President Biden, Secretary Austin, and Deputy Secretary Hicks have truly shown in their words and actions that DoD will invest in our greatest strategic advantage, our people. This is evident throughout the FY23 Defense Budget.

To ensure our national security in both the near future and long term, during FY23 Budget hearings last week, Secretary Austin identified three overarching ways in which we will carry out the newly released 2022 National Defense Strategy (NSD) priorities – integrated deterrence, campaigning, and building enduring advantage. While these three specific initiatives have different focus and goals, essential to each is having the right people today and in the future to carry out these strategic requirements. To quote Secretary Austin, “[s]trategies mean little without the right people to execute them.” Therefore, specifically under the umbrella of building enduring advantage, the Department with P&R at the forefront, will focus on investing and building the best future force, strengthening readiness through resilience, enhancing accountable leadership, and supporting our Service members and their families.

RECRUITING THE RIGHT TALENT

A critical component of building enduring advantage is maintaining the flow of highly qualified recruits through the accession pipeline. We must invest in human capital initiatives to compete for, hire, develop, and retain highly skilled experts in the ever-changing talent acquisition landscape. However, more so than in the recent past., the Department is in fierce competition for technical and innovative talent to cultivate a technologically dominant force that is strategically ready, globally relevant and flexibly sustainable. Especially given the tight labor market exacerbated by the residual effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and general military-civilian disconnect, the Services are facing a challenging recruiting environment. Furthermore, the size and quality of the youth market has changed very little in ten years. Only 23% of today's youth are eligible for military service without a waiver, and only 2% are eligible, high-quality, and likely to serve. Youth propensity has declined over the last several years, from 13% in 2018 to 9% in 2021. This decline represents approximately 1 million fewer youth propensed for military service. It is likely that recruiting challenges will be present for the foreseeable future.

To address these challenges, during the COVID-19 pandemic the Services modified recruiting and basic training activities for the health and safety of applicants, trainees, and recruiters, and capitalized on innovative initiatives to leverage digital and virtual recruiting tools and engage prospective recruits. The FY23 Defense Budget reflects the Services' required resources to support the primary recruiting levers (recruiters, marketing, and bonuses) in order to help offset the difficult recruiting environment.

Working with the Services, P&R is focused on overcoming the ever-widening gap between the American people and the military by bolstering the strategic tools needed to expand outreach efforts to reach a diverse pool of youth across the nation. We are ensuring that the Services have the necessary authorities, both in policy and legislation, to recruit the most qualified cohort of Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Airman and Guardians reflective of our nation's tremendous talents and diversity. The only way for us to compete, deter, and win in today's complex global environment is to find the most innovative and open-minded cadre of recruits from every part of this great nation. We are marketing to those who have not traditionally considered military service as a career option and reaching out to influencers who may help or support a young person's decision to join the military. We are also leveraging other outreach programs as recruiters' access to high schools have become more difficult over the years.

As you will hear directly from the Services on their outlook to meet their current fiscal year recruiting goals for Active and Reserve components, we believe the FY23 Defense Budget, including the 4.6% military pay raise, will help address some of the upcoming challenges. Ensuring we have the right number of people with the right skills has the highest attention of the Secretary and across DoD leadership as you heard in testimony last week. We are committed to not only meeting our military recruiting targets but finding the most qualified and mission ready talent this great Nation has to offer.

DoD Civilian Workforce

As critical enablers of our warfighters, DoD civilians perform functions in intelligence, equipment maintenance, medical care, family support, base operating services, and other activities that directly support the military forces and readiness. The DoD civilian workforce possesses capabilities, expertise, and skills that directly impact DoD's operational capabilities, employing those skills all over the world, in direct support of military operations. The Department continuously strives to improve its ability to recruit, retain, develop, and reward the civilian workforce to support the warfighter and encourage innovative best practices throughout the armed forces.

One of the Department's biggest civilian workforce challenges is the competition for talent in innovation and cutting edge fields that are in high demand across the public and private sectors, and are critical to the support of DoD's national defense mission. Therefore, the Department continues to seek flexibilities to better compete and overcome market demands for these critical skills, including increased pay and other incentives. To that end, we thank Congress for providing streamlined direct hiring authorities (DHA) for critical scientific,

technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), cyber, medical, and other positions. This is a critical tool to compete against the private sector by reducing our time-to-hire and allowing us to target the talent needed in these key areas.

The Department is exploring other options to narrow the talent gap between defense strategy and emerging technologies, to include resourcing the innovation workforce and to recruit, upskill, reskill, and retain tech-savvy, data-skilled civilian talent, through public-private partnerships, working with universities, and other opportunities. We are also proactively growing and developing the pipeline of future talent and have seen great success in the use of a variety of internship, scholarship, and fellowship programs managed both at the enterprise and component levels, such as the Science, Mathematics, and Research for Transformation (SMART) program, the John S. McCain Strategic Defense Fellows Program, and the National Security Education Boren Scholarship and Fellowship programs. We must ensure that strategic workforce planning and human capital management activities support the Department's need to shape a professional, agile, and ready civilian workforce.

RETAINING THE RIGHT TALENT

Not only do we have to recruit the right talent, but we need to retain and invest in our people to meet mission-critical needs now, as well as emerging mission requirements of the future. However, similar to recruiting, Services are also facing some retention challenges in certain high demand, low-density fields due to a strong economy and high operational tempo. To address these specific skills challenges, we continue to use a mix of tailored retention bonuses and non-monetary incentives to enhance retention and fill military occupational specialty gaps. And thanks to Congress, we have recent legislative authorities that allow us to go beyond the traditional up or out structure, as well as allowing lateral entry of certain specialized skills and career intermission programs for Service members who need to step away from Active service to pursue other opportunities or to address personal priorities. These incentives allow DoD to compete with the private sector for high-demand and critical talent. Another key retention and people focus area, with the highest attention by the White House and Secretary Austin, is economic security and ensuring appropriate compensation for our Service members.

Compensation and Economic Security

Ensuring that we are appropriately compensating our workforce and the overall economic security of Service members and military families are critical to mission readiness. While we believe that the current military compensation package is fair and compares favorably with the private sector, in order to remain competitive, we must keep pace with private-sector wage growth. The 4.6% across-the-board basic pay raise included in the FY23 Defense Budget request does just that. With low unemployment and increasing private-sector wages, we have to remain vigilant to ensure military compensation remains attractive so we can recruit and retain the force we need.

And while the data shows that Service members are paid above most of their civilian counterparts, we know that individual circumstances vary and there are those who are struggling to make ends to meet. To that end, Secretary Austin issued a memorandum in November 2021, announcing Department-wide efforts to strengthen economic security in the force. The Department recognizes some Service members and families are experiencing economic challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic and increasingly competitive housing markets. To ease the financial burden of rising housing costs, we authorized temporary increases in Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) rates for 56 Military Housing Areas. BAH is a fundamental part of the military pay package and BAH rates must be based on the costs of adequate housing for civilians with comparable income to members in the same area. The temporary BAH rate increases were available to Service members in areas where the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on rental housing costs until the updated 2022 BAH rates were put into effect.

We are also grateful to Congress for recent legislation included in the FY22 NDAA authorizing Basic Needs Allowance (BNA), which supplements a Service member's compensation up to 130 percent of federal poverty guidelines for those whose household income falls below this threshold. This primarily affects junior Service members with large families. The Department is currently in the process of implementing this incentive and the first BNA payments are scheduled to go out in January 2023, as authorized by Congress.

While additional data collection and analyses are underway to understand the full scope of the issue, particularly around food insecurity, the Department is implementing solutions to aid those in need. With the understanding that a military family's economic security is critical not only a Service member's well-being, but to command climate and mission readiness, the Military Departments and Service leadership are educating leaders at all levels of command to identify Service members experiencing economic insecurity, and direct them, and their spouses, to military and community resources. Department support in this area includes, among other things: financial assessments and counseling; improved access to and increased assistance with child care; education subsidies and employment support for spouses; and increased access to nutritious and affordable food options. All these efforts are designed to reduce stigma, increase financial help seeking behaviors, and increase stability for Service members and families. The Department created a web-based Economic Security toolkit for commanders and service providers on Military OneSource to provide military leaders with existing resources and flexibilities to address housing availability, financial well-being, and food security.

To address many of these issues, we will be working with the White House to initiate the 14th Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation later this year. This next iteration of the Commission will serve as a great opportunity to thoroughly review and assess our military compensation system to strengthen our members' economic security and better attract and retain Service members and their families.

Likewise, our investments in the civilian workforce focus on the importance of federal employees as an element of the Department's Total Force. The 4.6% requested pay raise is

critical to compete for, hire, develop, and retain highly skilled experts. The requested increase allows the Department to achieve and maintain technical and intellectual superiority and remain competitive with private industry in attracting and sustaining the talent workforce.

In conjunction with the requested federal pay increase, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) issued a memorandum on January 21, 2022 to Executive departments and agencies, “Achieving a \$15 Per Hour Minimum Pay Rate for Federal Employees.” This change will impact over 67,000 federal employees, 57,300 of whom work at DoD. The affected DoD employees, including many military spouses, are in Nonappropriated Fund (NAF) activities, providing valuable contributions as sales clerks, day care workers, food service workers, laborers, and in many other occupations serving our DoD communities. The minimum wage increase will also have a positive impact on DoD Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) programs, allowing installations to attract, hire, and retain a high quality workforce and positively impact military families. Similarly, approximately 5,000 child and youth program employees have received a pay increase. Better wages for the employees who provide these important services will attract more caregivers and, as a result, increase capacity for care.

Military Spouse Employment

We are especially cognizant of the sacrifice military spouses make in their careers or education as they move from one duty station to the next with their Service member and other dependents. Therefore, DoD remains committed to providing military spouses with information, resources, and tools to assist in achieving their educational and employment goals. The Department’s Spouse Education and Career Opportunities (SECO) program augments the Military Service’s installation based programming through high quality virtual support. The Department continues to increase employment opportunities through the broadening of the Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP) with a focus on critical employment sectors such as information technology, education, and small businesses. Broadening the MSEP program to include small businesses in military impacted communities will provide more employment opportunities for the military spouses via a job search portal, offered by more than 500 companies and organizations that are committed to recruit, hire, promote, and retain military spouses. To date, MSEP has placed more than 220,000 spouses.

In addition, to assist military spouses with starting and maintaining meaningful employment and careers, the Defense State Liaison Office works with state legislators in all 50 states to improve and enhance state laws governing occupational license portability and reciprocity. Again, Congress has helped us in the FY20 NDAA, authorizing DoD to enter into a cooperative agreement with the Council of State Governments (CSG) to support professions developing compacts for licensure. To date, five professions (teaching, clinical social work, massage therapy, dentistry/dental hygiene, and cosmetology/barbering) have been provided grants of up to \$1 million each and CSG has started convening advisory groups for each profession from September 2021 – January 2022, and expects all compacts to be ready by January 2023.

Understanding that military spouses are usually part of a transient community, we are addressing the ongoing challenge of ensuring they are aware of available resources and support to assist them. And as directed by the FY22 NDAA, we are implementing recommendations from GAO to improve communications that engage military spouses with career assistance resources. Ensuring awareness across the force, from our youngest spouse to our most seasoned, is crucial to retaining our Service members and their families and ensuring family readiness.

Child Care Access and Expansion

Child care is a workforce enabler and a critical component of the readiness, efficiency, and retention of the Total Force. And our experience with COVID-19 also highlighted the importance of child care in contributing to the well-being and economic security of our families. Staffing shortfalls decreased the number of children cared for in both installation and community-based programs. However, affordable, quality child care continues to be a challenge facing many DoD families and the nation writ large. Child care is among the lowest paid occupations in the nation and child care professionals with a similar education earn less than those working in different fields which contributes to the persistent challenge of recruiting and retaining the workforce needed to meet the child care needs of our families.

To best support the child care needs of our Service members and civilian workforce, the Department will be investing in construction of on-base child development centers; expanding fee assistance programs; extending fee assistance programs to lower income DoD civilian families; and supporting public-private partnerships to increase child care capacity in high demand, low capacity areas. In December 2021, the Department adjusted the fee assistance amounts for which families would qualify and implemented the \$1,500 monthly per child provider rate cap to match to the traditional community-based fee assistance program. This adjustment increased the amount of fee assistance for which families are eligible.

The FY23 Defense Budget included funding to continue a pilot program providing Service members financial assistance to offset the cost of in-home child care, such as care provided by nannies. The FY23 Budget also expands The Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood PLUS which utilizes the States Quality Rating and Improvement Systems as an indicator of provider quality, in lieu of national accreditation, broadening the pool of providers eligible to receive fee assistance on behalf of military families.

P&R continues to work in collaboration with the Military Departments on the development and implementation of initiatives aimed at improving child care availability, addressing child care staffing challenges, exploring public-private partnerships, identifying construction requirements, and expanding our child care community-based fee assistance program. Addressing child care access for all Service members as well as certain DoD civilians is another critical element to building enduring advantage, and the right thing to do to take care of our people.

Commissaries

We are aware that the current economic conditions and COVID-19 have directly impacted our Commissaries. However, access to grocery products worldwide remains a top-priority as the Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) which continues to manage amplified supply chain issues, coupled with inflationary pressures, and increased expenses due to ground transportation shortfalls and delays. DeCA is working with the U.S. Transportation Command (TRANSCOM) to prioritize shipments to overseas locations ensuring product availability for those serving in OCONUS environments and continues to work with suppliers and distributors to meet the demand.

The Defense Commissaries are DoD's first line of defense for families in need. Its primary purpose is to provide food security by offering healthy food at significant savings. The benefit enhances quality of life and readiness for military Service members, their families, retirees, Medal of Honor recipients, their authorized family members, and all veterans with a service-connected disability. Additionally, Defense Commissaries continue to create innovative approaches to increase customer convenience and educate patrons on the value and the savings generated by using their well-deserved benefit.

COVID-19 Efforts and Way Ahead

Mitigating COVID-19 will continue to be a top priority for the Department. We will align our activities with the White House, and federal partners, and our activities will be informed by the best science and evidence. The Department has met the COVID-19 challenge, harnessing our resources to provide needed support across the Nation and to stressed healthcare systems; administering millions of vaccines to over 90% of our Service members and millions of beneficiaries and workers; and procuring personal protective equipment, tests, therapeutics, and tests on behalf of the federal government.

The Department will continue to support vaccination requirements. Our Force must remain healthy and ready to defend the Nation. Vaccination against COVID-19 helps us achieve that goal, and will ensure we remain the most lethal and ready force in the world. This FY23 Defense Budget prioritizes the Department's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing us to be equipped for any future challenges COVID-19 may present, as well as other biological threats, to challenge the American people.

As our employees re-enter the workplace, we cannot expect to return to 'business as usual'. Throughout the pandemic, we embraced telework and flexible schedules to achieve new efficiencies, and will continue to employ successful practices to promote a resilient and productive workforce.

RESILIENCE AND ACCOUNTABLE LEADERSHIP

In Secretary Austin's March 4, 2021, Message to the Force, he specifically called out the need to build resilience and readiness and ensure accountable leadership under the broader goal

to “Take Care of Our People.” Much of P&R’s focus under his leadership has been addressing these issues that have historically fallen short in the Department. Starting with tackling sexual assault and sexual harassment with unprecedented level of leadership attention and resource investment, to assessing all obstacles in creating a more diverse, equitable and inclusive workforce at all ranks, and ensuring accountable leadership that calls out any and all behaviors hostile to our values that undermine our readiness and good discipline and order. The FY23 Defense budget and current ongoing policy efforts reflect these efforts.

Addressing Sexual Assault

Sexual Assault is not only a threat to our readiness at all organization levels but antithetical to who we are and what we stand for. We cannot compromise on this issue; to rebuild the trust with the Force we must get this right. Therefore, the entire Department continues to work collaboratively – across Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) Components and the Military Departments -- to operationalize Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military (IRC) Action Plans. In order to bring about significant change, it is clear the Department must make significant investments both in our efforts and resources to address sexual assault in the military.

Implementing all 82 IRC recommendations will require long-term culture change. And given the multi-pronged approach by and across every organization and installation worldwide, our plan reflects a conservative timeline to ensure we do this right and appropriately address any challenges or obstacles as we move across the tiers of recommendations. Many Tier 1 and Tier 2 recommendations are already ongoing or will begin in the short-term. We are now developing IRC Recommendation Implementation metrics that will track and demonstrate our progress implementing all 82 recommendations, to include:

- Reforming military justice to put prosecution decisions for sexual assault and other named offenses in the hands of trained, experienced attorneys.
- Fielding a specialized prevention workforce in every Service to address risk and protective factors for sexual assault and other readiness impacting behaviors such as suicide and domestic violence.
- Revising our response workforce to provide sexual assault response coordinators and victim advocates with independence and expertise to foster recovery-oriented support and ensure victims have the resources they need.

We believe our efforts will restore the trust and faith of our military members in our work to prevent this and other misconduct, assist victims with recovery, and hold offenders appropriately accountable. We also want to express our appreciation to Congress for the sexual assault and sexual harassment prevention and response legislation included in the FY22 NDAA, which validated the IRC recommendations and gave us the confidence that we are on the right path. Now we ask for your support for the FY23 Defense Budget request that will provide the necessary resources to make these historic changes to reform military justice, field the cadre of

the specialized prevention workforce, ensure we train and equip response coordinators and victim advocates with the right expertise, and are able to provide necessary resources to the victims.

On-Site Installation Evaluations (OSIEs) are another example of the unprecedented steps Secretary Austin has taken to eliminate the presence of harmful behaviors in the military, protect our Service men and women, DoD civilians, military families, and improve readiness. OSIEs are innovative, global, and recurring activities to help leaders up and down the chain of command identify key information to support improvements to command climates – not only to prevent sexual assault and harassment but also to prevent other harmful behaviors such as suicide. The Department has long needed to further enhance prevention of harmful behaviors, and this degree of visibility at our installations will better enable leaders up and down the chain to proactively address the risk of harmful behaviors before tragic incidents occur, and more quickly identify where additional tools or resources may be needed.

The inaugural OSIEs served as a pilot to establish a process and metrics that can be replicated in subsequent visits. The evaluations at 20 sites are now complete, and the 2021 OSIE Report includes findings from the on-site assessment, best practices and lessons learned, as well as actions the Department should undertake to improve and enhance our environments. Due to the success of the 2021 OSIEs, Secretary Austin has determined that this effort will continue on a biennial basis moving forward.

Suicide Prevention and Mental Health

Every death by suicide is a tragedy and weighs heavily on the military community. The Department is steadfast in its commitment to suicide prevention and the overall well-being of our Service members and their families. Suicide represents a complex interaction of psychological, biological, and environmental factors that vary among individuals. Because no two individuals are identical, our efforts seek to address a range of risk factors and enhance protective factors.

We are committed to addressing this issue - not only because it affects our missions - but, more importantly, because we have a moral responsibility to take care of our people. Our public health approach focuses on reducing suicide risk for all Service members and their families by targeting the various underlying risk factors (such as relationship, financial, and mental health challenges), while also enhancing protective factors (such as social connections, coping skills, and safety in one's environment).

We work to enhance holistic, data-driven suicide prevention through non-clinical policy, oversight, and engagement as well as clinical suicide prevention efforts and mental/behavioral health services. We are committed to addressing suicide comprehensively through a public health approach, which incorporates both community-based prevention efforts, - involving military leaders, family, peers, spouses, and chaplains - and clinical care to address suicide thoughts and behaviors, at the individual level.

One major challenge is that the demand for mental health services is outpacing the supply of mental health professionals nationwide. Mental health concerns, and demand for mental health care, appear to have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. DoD undertook rapid action to sustain mental health services, and continued to deliver care in a virtual environment, establishing Health Protection Condition linked guidance to standardize mental health operations during the COVID-19 response in order to protect providers, protect patients, and maintain routine care safely.

The DoD is working to develop a staffing model, which focuses on matching supply to demand, optimizing provider availability (supply) with the goal of treating 100% of Active Duty Service members (demand) in the Direct Care system. And to mitigate challenges in supply, we continue to rely on the civilian network, aiming to provide care within the access to care standards for appointment wait time.

And pursuant to Section 738 of the FY2022 NDAA, on March 22, 2022, Secretary Austin directed the creation of the Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Committee, which will conduct a comprehensive review of the Department's efforts to prevent suicide, visit multiple installations, and conduct additional information gathering to strengthen our actions. This effort supports the Secretary's continued focus on prevention, including complementarity and alignment with the recommendations from the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault.

Secretary Austin chose nine installations to ensure each Military Department is represented and to increase our understanding of the needs of various geographies, including geographically isolated and OCONUS locations, such as Alaska. The selection process was data-driven, and included feedback from the Services and the National Guard Bureau. Through this review, we will leverage outside experts to critically examine how we can improve our policies and programs to best support our military community. Their independent recommendations will help inform change across our force to prevent future tragedies.

The Department has the responsibility to support and protect those who defend our Country, and we must do everything possible to prevent suicide in our military community. We seek to encourage help-seeking behaviors, eliminate stigma, and enable access to mental health clinical services.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility

The Department of Defense (DoD) has faced challenges in achieving desired diversity across the Total Force, particularly at leadership levels. Actions taken to date have not yet translated to the change we desire. Additional steps are in progress to make improvements. To continue to improve, DoD is working to further to understand root causes in areas where we lack diversity, have measurable desired outcome metrics, maintain appropriate data to inform and target efforts, ensure environments are inclusive of all who serve, and have a strong governance structure to oversee these efforts.

Enhancing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) across our Department maximizes our ability to recruit and retain top talent, and DoD strives to ensure DEIA underpins every aspect of our approach to talent management. Over the last year, the Department continued to forge ahead in implementing recommendations made by the 2020 DoD Board on Diversity and Inclusion (D&I). Additionally, to facilitate, inform, and advance agency progress on issues relating to DEIA, DoD established the DoD Equity Team (DET) in April 2021. The DET addressed a broad range of DEIA issues, including the need for increased diversity within the talent pipeline; challenges pertaining to DEIA data collection, analysis, and management; and integration of D&I curriculum into leadership development training.

Furthermore, consistent with the President Biden's efforts, DoD carried out a number of actions corresponding with DEIA-related executive actions from the White House. In accordance with Executive Order (EO) 13985 and EO 14035, and through the efforts of the DET, the Department completed the DoD 200-Day Equity Assessment, developed the DoD Equity Action Plan, and completed the DoD Self-Assessment. These accomplishments contributed to DoD's progress in the DEIA space.

While DoD is focused on these DEIA efforts to bring about long-term changes, the Department will also focus on understanding the individual, interpersonal, and institutional factors that promote racial, ethnic, and gender diversity and inclusion in the military and eliminating any causal factors that prevent this diversity or lead to discriminatory practices. We are taking steps to ensure our Service members and DoD civilian employees are provided an opportunity to achieve their professional goals based on merit, remove any barriers that prevent equal opportunity, and ensure a cohesive and ready force that reflects the diversity of our Nation.

SUPPORTING THE SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION FROM MILITARY

When citizens enlist in our All-Volunteer Force, they offer their lives for a number of years. In exchange, when they return to civilian life at the end of the commitment, they should be more competitive in the economic marketplace. This is the "social compact," and when DoD lives up to it, through programs like tuition assistance, credentialing, and SkillBridge, American society reaps the benefits. About 200,000 Service members transition out of the military each year. The transition from military to civilian life—especially the 365-days prior to the 365-days post separation—is widely recognized as a challenging and stressful time for Service members and their families.

Tuition Assistance/ SkillBridge/ Credentialing

DoD's Tuition Assistance (TA) program provides Service members with financial assistance to enhance their academic achievement (i.e., earn a degree or certificate) during their off-duty time which in turn improves job performance, promotion potential, self-development, and personal quality of life. While TA is not specifically designed in support of the Service

members' transition out of the military, it has served both as an effective retention tool as well as support for their potential career after their service.

DoD's Credentialing, Apprenticeships (the United Services Military Apprenticeship Program – USMAP) and SkillBridge Employment Training programs exist on the spectrum of how military training, experience, and skills relate to increased mission readiness and ultimately result in successful post active-duty careers. The demand for credentialing from Service members and industry continues to grow. Professional credentialing is an integral key of the Services' recruiting, in-Service development, promotion, retention, and transition strategies. SkillBridge allows providers to sponsor a Service member to participate in civilian training (certificate or non-traditional courses), apprenticeship, and internship programs, starting up to six months before separation.

Transition Assistance Program

TAP delivery is a collaborative effort between DoD and the Military Services, Department of Labor, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and Small Business Administration; each with a primary area of responsibility and focus. However, the program succeeds due to a robust interagency collaboration and communications strategy that encompasses the four agencies listed above, and three additional agencies--Department of Homeland Security, Department of Education, and the U.S. Office of Personnel Management. Working together, these seven agencies and the Military Services provide consistent messaging and ensure collaboration and synchronization in the delivery of the program.

During TAP, all transitioning Service members complete a Military Occupational Code (MOC) crosswalk. They compare their military skills to civilian career opportunities and identify any gaps in education and training that they can then address to enhance civilian employability and marketability. Many transitioning Service members know that they want to pursue a specific course of education, a certain career field, or go into business for themselves. Others are undecided and could use more exploration and assistance in their career search. The MOC crosswalk is set up to help all transitioning service members refine their goals.

TAP also addresses transition-related risks and barriers as part of the initial counseling with a personal self-assessment administered by the Services. The self-assessment indicates potential risk and levels of support required. If an assessment indicates the need or desire for follow-on support, the Service member is connected via a warm handover to the appropriate agency or support organization for specialized assistance targeted the specific needs.

DoD-VA Collaboration

The DoD and VA relationship is stronger now than ever before, as both Departments leverage shared resources and interconnected processes to support Service members, Veterans and their families. DoD and VA renewed our commitments publishing a five-year joint strategic plan focusing on healthcare, benefits and service delivery, job training, transition, and modernized business practices.

A goal within both Departments is to enhance the transition and post-separation experience for Service members. VA and DoD have designated the 365-days prior to transition through the 365-days post transition as the critical transition period. During this period, collaboration efforts will focus on a comprehensive, timely, and personalized approach for Service members transition. A common undercurrent to joint DoD-VA work is the sharing of data and analytics between Departments. A recently signed DoD-VA Joint Data and Analytics Strategy sets the path for VA and DoD to optimize data, and coordinate and share analytics. This will empower both agencies to make better decisions directly impacting Service members and Veterans.

CONCLUSION

There is a significant milestone ahead of us – we will be celebrating 50 years of All-Volunteer Force (AVF) in 2023. When this country eliminated the draft in 1973, we could not have imagined the success story of the AVF that has created the most educated, professional and capable military force in history. The Department has learned many lessons in the past 50 years, but as we look forward to the next 50, it is imperative that we do not take for granted what makes our U.S. Military unparalleled and unmatched. It is the people – the Active, Reserve, National Guard, DoD Civilians, and all of their families who are willing to serve this country. And all of us here today will not forget that as we do our jobs every day.

Thank you for your continued support of our Service members and their families, I look forward to your questions.