

NOT PUBLIC UNTIL RELEASED BY THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT OF
VICE ADMIRAL JEFFREY J. CZEREWKO
CHIEF OF NAVAL PERSONNEL AND DEPUTY CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
(PERSONNEL, MANPOWER, AND TRAINING)
UNITED STATES NAVY
BEFORE THE
MILITARY PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE
OF THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
CONCERNING
MILITARY DEPARTMENT PERSONNEL CHIEFS: PERSONNEL POSTURE
APRIL 16, 2026

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon, Chairman Fallon, Ranking Member Houlahan, and distinguished Members of this Subcommittee. On behalf of the Navy's most vital warfighting asset – our Sailors and their families – it is my honor to be here today. Your bipartisan backing is the critical component of our success, and **YOUR Navy** is grateful for your commitment to our main mission of increasing the lethality and survivability of the United States Navy.

Your Navy is the most powerful Maritime Force in the world, a fact proven daily from the flight decks of our carriers to the engine rooms of our submarines. Every mission is achieved through the skill, dedication, and fighting spirit of our battle-ready Sailors. My mission is to uphold that readiness and that spirit.

As the Chief of Naval Personnel, I am committed to Sailor and mission success. In alignment with the Chief of Naval Operation's "*Sailors First*" approach, we are focused on building a cohesive, capable, and merit-based Force where every Sailor can thrive. This requires us to modernize the Sailor experience, ask the hard questions about our processes, and have the courage to fix what does not work. Our adversaries are heavily investing in technology and talent to erode our military advantage. To win, we must out-think and out-maneuver them. That work begins not with steel and fuel, but with our people. The lifeblood of our Navy is the Sailor. Sailors are not a supporting effort—they are the Navy's primary weapon system and the first link in every kill chain. A Navy that cannot recruit, train, support, and retain its people cannot fight, regardless of technology or platforms. Sailors First is therefore not a quality-of-life initiative—it is a warfighting imperative.

RECRUITING THE NATION'S BEST

Our accessions pipeline is built upon a Fleet-aligned talent strategy honed at every stage: recruit, train, retain, repeat.

To find the best, we must tell our story. Our marketing strategy is pivotal in engaging the nation, generating leads that support a range of career opportunities. This approach proved highly effective in Fiscal Year (FY) 2025, and to date in FY 2026, these efforts have already sourced over 50% of contracts, ensuring the Navy remains ahead of its recruiting targets. We are on pace to exceed our FY 2026 goal of 45,000 future Sailors. Building upon last year's success – where we beat our goal by nearly 3,500 Sailors – we are making real gains in shrinking operational manning shortfalls, projecting a 30% reduction by the end of this fiscal year.

This isn't about just hitting numbers; it's about finding the intellectual horsepower our Navy needs. We have increased recruiter manning to expand our reach, and with your support, have strengthened our recruiters' access to secondary schools. Enlistment bonuses have proven effective in attracting recruits for critical, hard-to-fill ratings, with Future Sailors eligible to earn up to \$140K in bonuses and loan repayments. For our officer candidates, a data-driven engagement strategy yielded significant success, especially in harder-to-fill specialties like Nuclear Propulsion, which saw a year-over-year increase in recruiting.

In alignment with Executive Order 14184, the Navy invited all 1,878 Sailors involuntarily separated for refusing the COVID vaccine to apply for reinstatement. As of April 6, 176 have expressed interest, and we have reinstated 80 Sailors, with many receiving advancements and backpay to restore their expected career trajectory.

FORGING BATTLE-READY WARFIGHTERS

Our record-breaking recruiting success created a positive challenge: a demand for training that exceeds our current capacity. We are aggressively expanding resources and creating efficiencies to meet this surge, ensuring every new Sailor is forged into a battle-ready warfighter.

Within the CNO's framework, our training commands serve as our cognitive foundry. This is where we forge an inherent intellectual advantage. One advantage is the Navy's Future Sailor Preparatory Course (FSPC). FSPC's mission is to increase the fitness and academic performance of potential recruits to meet or exceed Navy accession standards upon entry into Basic Military Training (BMT). It is a force multiplier that increases the fitness and academic performance of potential recruits. This program does not lower our standards; it raises the capabilities of motivated applicants to meet and exceed them. Graduates of the FSPC-Academic program increased their test scores by an average of 35 points, expanding their career options into our most advanced specialties. FSPC-Fitness participants accounted for 10% of the Navy's nuclear recruiting mission and 12% of the Navy's advanced electronics career field mission. To date, over 8,900 recruits have joined FSPC and advanced to Basic Military Training, where they are thriving. In FY 2025, 16 BMT Honor Graduates were FSPC participants and many more held leadership positions throughout the course.

The Navy NROTC program, hosted at 169 colleges and universities, builds the bench of tomorrow's officers, while our Navy JROTC program mentors over 82,000 cadets, with approximately 56% of graduating seniors intending to enter military service. To win the future fight, we mandate that 65% of all NROTC scholarship commissions graduate with STEM degrees, ensuring the next generation possesses the technical expertise to dominate in an increasingly

complex battlespace. In addition, Officer Training Command commissions approximately 1,000 Naval officers annually, after an intensive 13-week program.

Our standards are unwavering. Every Sailor who graduates from our training commands or learning centers is – and will continue to be – fully qualified, disciplined, and ready to contribute from Day One.

RETAINING FLEET EXPERIENCE

We are in a true growth mode. Supported by your authorities, the Navy exceeded retention goals in FY 2025 by retaining 37,000 separation-eligible Sailors, and we are on track to exceed that this year. This net gain results in a more experienced, more lethal Force. The hallmark of our retention is purposeful engagement that highlights rewarding career paths and advancement opportunities. Our latest initiative, *Full Power Navy*, directly engaged Sailors at career crossroads, successfully prompting over 3,200 who planned to separate to Stay Navy. Our enlisted retention remains high, with rates as of January 31 at 112.1% in Zone A (0-6 years), 119.9% in Zone B (6-10 years), and 107.9% in Zone C (10-14 years). Overall officer continuation topped 91% in FY 2025 – a steady increase over the previous three years.

While we leverage monetary bonuses, we continue to face retention challenges in specific, high-demand fields. Therefore, we appreciate your continued support of our budget, which preserves the incentives necessary to keep our most talented and experienced warfighters in uniform.

MODERNIZING THE SAILOR EXPERIENCE

This brings me to a concept that must become the lifeblood of our service: an innately ingrained focus on continuous improvement. It is the disciplined, relentless work of making our Navy better, one process at a time.

We are developing a more flexible and responsive enlisted talent marketplace through *Billet-Based Advancement (BBA)*. This merit-based process shifts from a vacancy-driven advancement system to a billet-based model, aligning a Sailor's skills with Fleet manning priorities. This is not just an administrative change; it is how we solve problems at their root. By closing supervisor gaps and paygrade misalignments, we ensure our teams are led by the right experienced leaders. As of the end of FY 2025, over 94% of Master Chief Petty Officer billets were filled at grade, compared to historic lows around 40%.

Modernizing the Sailor experience also means modernizing our personnel systems. It is a readiness imperative. When Sailors are distracted by administrative friction, readiness suffers. Our path forward will establish one secure, digital record for every Sailor. Too often, we are tempted to treat symptoms instead of digging deeper. By leveraging proven commercial solutions, we can fix flaws in the process and automate outdated systems. Addressing the root cause, not only prevents future failures; it enables Sailors to leverage more of their time, energy, and their focus toward the warfighting tasks that matter. We are focused on outcomes—ensuring every Sailor is supported, connected, and ready to fight.

CONCLUSION

Building upon a 250-year legacy, the Navy is forging a culture of warfighting readiness and continuous improvement. We are committed to developing Sailors at every phase, building their connectedness through trust and shared purpose, and preparing them to serve as ambassadors for our Navy.

We are committed to building a more capable, lethal, and survivable Naval Force, ready to deter aggression and win our Nation's wars. We are committed to recruiting, developing, and

retaining the talented warfighters required to maintain our advantage at sea. Most importantly, we are committed to prioritizing the Sailors and Civilians who serve our country.

The challenges ahead are immense, but my confidence in our future is absolute because of them. I look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure our Sailors, their families, and the Nation remain ready. With unity of effort and a relentless focus on warfighting outcomes, we will deliver a dominant Navy for our Nation. On behalf of our more than 600,000 active and reserve Sailors, Navy Civilians, and Navy families, I am grateful to this committee for your steadfast commitment to the United States Navy.