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HOUSE ARMED SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
UNITED STATES SPACE FORCE

PRESENTATION TO
THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SUBJECT: Personnel Posture

STATEMENT OF: Ms. Katharine Kelley
Military Department Personnel Chief
United States Space Force

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Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to represent the United States Space Force. Our mission is clear: to secure our Nation's interests in, from, and to space. As the space domain has fundamentally shifted from a benign environment to a contested warfighting domain, the Space Force remains focused on generating combat-credible forces capable of achieving space superiority in support of the Joint Force.

Readiness is the foundation of our ability to execute this mission. For the Space Force, readiness begins with our people. Guardians underpin all aspects of modern warfare and are foundational to the American way of life. The military and civilian Guardians of the United States Space Force operate, defend, and deliver space capabilities essential to national security, ensuring the Joint Force can deter aggression and, if necessary, prevail in conflict.

To meet the demands of an evolving threat environment, the Space Force must continue to build, develop, and sustain a ready and resilient force. As we prioritize acquisition reform, we must accelerate the growth of our acquisition workforce because warfighters must have both the skills and the cutting edge technology tools available to defeat and deter our adversaries.

We are committed to recruiting and retaining top talent, modernizing how we manage our workforce, and ensuring Guardians and their families are supported throughout their service. These efforts are essential to generating the combat-ready forces required to protect our Nation's interests in, from, and to space.

END STRENGTH

The Space Force must grow to secure our Nation's interests in a contested domain. Growth is not simply a matter of increasing numbers—it is a requirement to generate credible combat power. Advanced systems alone do not deliver capability; they rely on trained Guardians and reinforced infrastructure to operate effectively.

China and Russia remain our pacing threats, actively developing capabilities designed to hold U.S. and allied space assets at risk. In response, Space Force growth is deliberately threat-informed and aligned to the concept of competitive endurance, ensuring our ability to achieve space superiority while continuing to support the Joint Force.

The Space Force has achieved its authorized end strength for three consecutive years, demonstrating disciplined force management while building toward future requirements. We ask for your support as we continue to grow. Our focus is on developing a force that is larger, more capable, and more proficient—measured not only by total end strength, but by the generation of a combat-ready force structure.

In parallel, we are optimizing our civilian workforce by aligning personnel to mission-critical functions and retaining individuals with essential technical expertise. These efforts ensure the Space Force remains properly sized and postured to meet current and future operational demands.

RECRUITING AND RETENTION

The Space Force operates in a highly competitive talent environment, drawing from a limited pool of candidates with the technical skills required for space acquisition and operations. Despite

these challenges, the Service exceeded its Fiscal Year 2025 enlisted recruiting goals and remains on track to meet Fiscal Year 2026 targets. Innovative outreach and marketing initiatives continue to strengthen our ability to compete with both the private sector and other services.

Retention remains critical to sustaining readiness. The Space Force implemented service obligation measures to provide predictability and enable replacement of losses while also adding new end strength. The high retention enables targeted incentives, including Selective Retention Bonuses and assignment incentive pay, to retain highly skilled Guardians in key career fields where they are needed. These efforts have contributed to strong retention outcomes, with overall Guardian retention in FY 25 over 93%.

Equally important, retention is driven by ensuring Guardians understand their role as warfighters and their direct contribution to mission success. By reinforcing the value of their service and their impact on Joint Force operations, we strengthen both retention and readiness.

MANAGING TALENT

The Personnel Management Act (PMA) granted the Space Force the authorities to create full-and part-time positions for Guardians, merging “Active Duty” and “Reserve” personnel into a single component. This innovative approach enhances force agility, improves talent retention, and ensures the Space Force can access critical skills when and where they are needed.

Over the past year, the Space Force has made tremendous strides in implementing PMA authorities, including the transfer of Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard personnel into the Space Force. These efforts have preserved critical expertise, ensured continuity of operations, and strengthened our ability to meet operational and institutional demands.

Additionally, the Service is establishing Program Acquisition Executives (PAEs) and an organizational design that supports them. The Space Force is building the acquisition workforce into a selectively manned organization with a pipeline of military and civilian acquisition professionals who are highly trained, empowered, and warfighter-focused.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Developing Guardians capable of operating in a contested and dynamic space domain is central to maintaining readiness. The Space Force continues to invest in innovative training and development programs that equip our workforce with the technical expertise, operational understanding, and leadership skills required to succeed in the increasingly complex environments that define modern warfare.

We are also expanding opportunities for international collaboration, professional military education, and specialized training programs that enhance both individual performance and overall force capability. These investments directly support the generation of combat-credible forces prepared to execute missions across the full spectrum of operations.

PAY AND COMPENSATION

Competitive compensation remains an essential component of attracting and retaining a highly skilled workforce. We are grateful for Congress’s continued support in enhancing pay and

benefits for our service members.

The Space Force has expanded eligibility for key incentive programs, including Selective Retention Bonuses and special duty assignment pay, to better support Guardians in critical roles and challenging assignments. These targeted investments help ensure financial stability and reinforce the value of service.

Our approach to compensation is aligned with a broader commitment to merit-based recognition and performance management, ensuring Guardians are rewarded for their contributions to mission success.

QUALITY OF LIFE

The well-being of our Guardians and their families is the foundation of our readiness. Quality of life is a critical mission enabler, directly impacting retention, resilience, and the overall effectiveness of the force.

Our strategic partnership with the United States Air Force serves as a significant force multiplier. By leveraging established programs and resources, including fitness centers, and childcare services, we ensure Guardians and their families are supported while enabling the Space Force to focus resources on its unique operational mission.

We have continued to expand Guardian Resilience Teams through our Holistic Health Approach, comprised of three lines of effort related to Continuous Fitness Assessment; Performance Health Optimization; and Education. These teams are essential to maintaining a ready and resilient force and now support Guardians across Space Force installations, training environments, and geographically separated units worldwide.

CONCLUSION

Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for your continued support of the United States Space Force and the Guardians who serve our Nation.

As the space domain grows more contested, the need for a ready, resilient, and highly skilled workforce has never been greater. The Space Force must continue to grow to meet this

challenge—ensuring we have the personnel required to transform advanced systems into operational capability and combat power.

The investments already made in space capabilities are critical, but they must be matched by continued investments in both the Guardians who acquire, operate, and sustain those capabilities and the Air Force growth necessary to support a larger lethal and resilient Space Force. Together, these efforts will ensure the Space Force can generate combat-credible forces, support the Joint Force, and maintain the Nation's strategic advantage in space.

Our mission is ultimately about people—the Guardians who secure our Nation's interests and shape the future of space operations. With your continued support, we will remain ready to meet today's challenges and be prepared to deter and, if necessary, defeat tomorrow's threats.