

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE PRESENTATION
TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SUBJECT: MILITARY PERSONNEL POSTURE HEARING FOR FY24

STATEMENT OF:

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March 29, 2023

NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL
RELEASED BY THE COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Banks, Ranking Member Kim, distinguished members of this subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you and represent your United States Space Force. I am excited to share with you the progress our Guardians have made, in just our third year, building and managing a force capable of defending our Nation's vital interests in space. Winning in space requires equipping our Guardians with the tools, talents, and experiences necessary for space superiority, and the protection of the joint force, our allies, and our partners.

THE FORCE WE NEED

The United States Space Force (USSF) operates in a unique and dynamic personnel environment. We must be able to successfully build and develop a highly-skilled, inclusive, ready, resilient, and combat-credible force.

We have engaged in a modern approach to talent management incorporating education, training, and individualized development in addition to supporting a healthy work-life balance, holistic health and family programs. We continue to build on the principles outlined in the Guardian Ideal, amplifying the Guardian spirit by expanding on the Space Force values of character, connection, commitment, and courage.

The needs of the Nation require that we be operationally capable of deterring conflict and defending our Nation's interests immediately and boldly. To this end, we continue developing the training, systems, and experiences necessary to be the digital force required in any potential fight. At the same time, we are enhancing our end strength through new accessions to include inter-service transfers, lateral entry opportunities, investment in K-12 Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM), and higher education to generate our pipeline of talent, along with maximizing civilian personnel authorities. Our Guardians, both military and civilian, are our greatest strength.

END STRENGTH

The Space Force has requested 9,400 military end strength from Congress for fiscal year 2024. This is an increase of 800 from fiscal year 2023 enacted levels. We estimate that this is achievable given our understanding of today's recruiting and retention landscape for Space professionals. We are continuing to make interservice transfer opportunities available to members of the Air Force, Army, Navy, and Marines to meet the end strength challenge today and into fiscal year 2024. The Space Force will continue to manage military personnel inventory in support of new and evolving mission requirements to deter and defeat our adversaries in a contested space environment. We will seek to grow our end strength responsibly in the outyears through the Nation's investment in space defense architectures, programs, and mission areas for detection, tracking, and defense against others' gains in space.

RECRUITING AND RETENTION

The competitive market for STEM talent creates significant competition for those unique and essential capabilities necessary for the Space Force. Despite the environment, the Space Force, with

the help of the Air Force Recruiting Service, has met recruiting goals to acquire exceptional talent for STEM and cyber-related disciplines for this complex mission set. While we have been successful to date, the recruiting landscape is dynamic; there is a high demand for talent in these technical communities, across the Department of Defense, the United States (U.S.) Government, and industry. This year, the Department of Defense's Joint Advertising Market Research Studies program recorded an historic low of 10% propensity to serve. This low propensity for military service, along with the general lack of awareness concerning the Space Force "brand," require uniquely innovative outreach and incentive methods to attract and retain highly-qualified talent in a challenging marketplace. To address this, we are investing twelve million dollars in fiscal year 2023 to increase brand awareness and tap into key talent pipelines, and we plan to invest even more next year.

Our recruitment initiatives are focused on expanding the pool of potential STEM applicants through partnerships with colleges and universities. The Space Force University Partnership Program (UPP) offers the opportunity for a strategic partnership with the nation's top universities possessing high academic standards, nationally-ranked STEM degree programs, world-renowned space-related research and established Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) detachments. In 2022 at our 14 UPP universities, 22 ROTC graduates commissioned into the USSF, and we expect that number to increase annually. Additionally, the UPP schools' interests align with USSF's long-term science and technology priorities. The UPP's goal is to develop a diverse, highly capable STEM workforce and advance strategic focus areas of the USSF and to pursue critical science and technology topics that are important to our service. The UPP provides a broad range of scholarship, internship and mentorship opportunities for university students and ROTC cadets with the goal of recruiting and developing diverse officer, enlisted, and civilian Guardians with a particular focus on STEM.

In addition to the UPP effort, we are engaged in robust "STEM to Space" and "Guardian Enhanced Active Recruiting" or "G.E.A.R" outreach programs, which place Guardians in communities to message and advocate the USSF mission. "STEM to Space" was designed to facilitate virtual connections between Guardians and K-12 classrooms to share the importance of STEM careers related to space. Volunteers represent and present the Space Force in online forums, high school and college visits, and participate in marketing and other events that aid in raising awareness. Since its inception, volunteers have participated in more than 1,000 engagements across all 50 states, Washington D.C., Puerto Rico, Guam, South Korea, Japan, Belgium, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Italy. "G.E.A.R" is a Guardian-specific volunteer program geared towards matching actively serving Guardians with opportunities to showcase their expertise and share personal experiences. The "G.E.A.R" program exists to supplement recruiting and brand awareness efforts. To date, 96 Guardians, 58 in 2023 alone, have participated in the G.E.A.R program. Guardians also actively participate in numerous diversity and engagement forums, such as the recent Women's Air and Space Power Symposium and Black Engineers of the Year which highlight the role of previously underrepresented populations. Furthermore, to engage our increasingly technologically minded recruiting population, on the third anniversary of the Space Force, an entirely revamped spaceforce.com public outreach website came online, offering visitors a better insight into our roles, missions, and functions.

While we focus on STEM talent, we cannot afford to overlook individuals with those attributes consistent with Guardian values. To ensure we right-size our applicant pool and select future Guardians from the most diverse talent possible, we have instituted a national selection process that casts a wider talent net. Additionally, we have implemented expanded interview techniques

including diverse selection panels and behavioral assessments, to expand the tools used for a holistic approach to selecting future Guardians. These newly implemented Guardian selection efforts facilitate our ability to select the best-fit Guardians from the broadest reach.

The Space Force is also working with the Department of Defense and the Department of the Air Force to conduct a comprehensive review of accessions policy. This work will review all career field entry requirements and assessments to identify opportunities to expand the pool of potential applicants. We are especially focused on increasing the number of applicants from underrepresented groups.

While we do not yet have reliable retention data unique to the Space Force, for planning purposes we project a typical attrition rate and remain prepared to adjust our initial accessions, prior-service accessions, and workforce shaping tools as we see fluctuations in those retention patterns.

TAKING CARE OF GUARDIANS

Managing Talent

The Space Force continues to shape the Guardian experience and foster an organizational culture that empowers exercising mission command to secure American interests in space and contributing our unique space domain expertise in joint operations. The Space Force is laying the foundation to achieve the aspirational tenets of the Guardian Ideal, the Space Force's human capital plan in a multi-pronged approach. First, through building a competency-based requirement system and inventorying all competencies and levels of mastery for each Guardian, the Space Force can make informed and connected development and assignment decisions, leading to greater Guardian involvement in their careers and greater mission accomplishment. Additionally, while we continue to develop a new performance appraisal system to focus on contribution to the team and mission, including multi-sourced input where appropriate, we are implementing a Guardian-centric bridging strategy for evaluations tying our values to mission accomplishment.

We expect leaders at every level to take bold, purpose-driven, and data-informed actions, while making full use of their team's diverse abilities to overcome challenges to accomplish our mission as set forth in the National Defense Strategy and in line with Congressional intent.

Training and Development

The Space Force will shift from managing people within prescribed career fields only, to managing positions based on the competencies and experiences needed to succeed. We have implemented our beta test for aligning competencies and levels of mastery to requirements. As part of managing talent, we conducted our first development team event for Master Sergeants bringing all Senior Non-Commissioned Officers in line with this concept. Eligible Guardians were able to self-nominate for critical positions and state their career desires. Commanders provided recommendations for each eligible Guardian as well. During the event, key enlisted leaders assessed each Guardian's demonstrated performance, the Guardian's potential, the best interest for the Guardian, their family, and the service to match Guardians to key leadership and developmental positions. The inclusion of the Guardian's voice enables transparent high-quality architecture across the enterprise to meet both personal strengths and service needs.

The USSF is establishing intermediate-level education and senior-level education programs in collaboration with a private university, culminating in a Master of International Public Policy degree starting in Summer 2023. The programs are being designed to meet service and joint professional military education requirements and will be offered to USSF and officers and civilians of other services as well as international and interagency partners. This approach will allow the Space Force to tailor its education for leaders for unique space related issues and establish a mechanism whereby Guardians can earn a degree from a recognized private university. The collaboration will enable greater capacity to offer STEM electives, opportunities for laboratory research, and increased access to a wider range of commercial space sector engagements along with the traditional elements of joint professional military education.

Holistic Health Approach

The Space Force is preparing an innovative, science-based approach to health, emphasizing total fitness, preventive medicine, and education. We are retooling how we measure healthy living and providing Guardians and leaders with the resources, education, and skills they need to uphold the highest standards expected of military professionals. The goal is to move the USSF away from episodic fitness testing, while seeking to optimize overall health, maintain a higher level of individual and unit readiness, and increase positive behaviors through research-based skill-building, year-round cardiorespiratory fitness, muscular fitness assessments, injury reduction practices, and consistent purposeful physical activity.

Promotion and Evaluation

We are thoughtfully instituting policy and process changes to bring us into closer alignment to the future state described in the Guardian Ideal. For example, we have eliminated promotion testing, traditional stratifications, and forced distribution for non-commissioned officer promotions. Perhaps more notably, the Space Force has included personal preference into officer and enlisted development-team working to align Guardians to the right job at the right time in their career and with the right skills to be successful. We have accomplished this using MyVector, a web-based mentoring network, as a data collection tool through which Guardians can provide their personal preferences, as well as personal considerations, into the system to ensure that the talent management board members are cognizant and make assignment decisions that include the Guardian's voice. This places newly promoted guardians into appropriate positions commensurate with their new grade and in many cases into jobs they actually sought.

Connect to Care

Connect to Care aims to increase access to care, improve collaboration, and leverage the power of helping agencies to best serve service members, their families, and civilians seeking care and support. As part of our overall efforts, the Air Force launched the integrated Response Center Co-location Pilot at seven installations worldwide. Vandenberg Space Force Base was one of these installations, centralizing the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response and Family Advocacy helping agencies into a single facility and enabling a one-stop shop for all help related to domestic, dating, and sexual violence prevention and response. Repeated positive messages reinforce where to go for support if needed, addressing one of the primary issues identified that create barriers to seeking help. Pilot results include an increase in the reporting of activity, significantly increased foot traffic, greater awareness of programs and services, and ease for those seeking help. Additional

benefits and outcomes at Vandenberg include leveraging financial resources and connections to promote programs such as Domestic Violence Awareness and Prevention Month and Teen Dating Violence Awareness Prevention Month. It has also led to increased awareness of on-base programs to the community for those who may present with a military connection.

In parallel, the Space Force continues to implement recommendations from the Secretary of Defense's Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military. These recommendations increase awareness of issues and ensures that leaders and service members are held accountable for problematic behaviors but also set the precedent and expectation to engage in positive behaviors that benefit the unit as a whole. Leaders at all levels receive education on prevention strategies and delivering informed prevention messages that prepares our Guardians to improve the overall culture. This focus on core values and engaged leadership will enable Guardians to be successful as they are evaluated and held accountable for prevention activities.

PAY AND COMPENSATION

The Space Force is dedicated to ensuring that all Guardians are appropriately compensated for their service. Military compensation must be designed to recruit and retain talent. The Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation will be a critical forum to explore and develop innovative pay structures that make sense for today's military and the Space Force.

Total compensation -- including basic pay, the basic allowance for housing, the basic allowance for subsistence, health care benefits, retirement benefits, the tax advantage of entitlements, special and incentive pay and bonuses -- has greatly helped the Space Force manage existing talent. This network of pay, allowances, and other benefits is designed to compare favorably with private industry and civilian employment; however, given the highly technical workforce that makes up our Guardians, we must ensure salaries of those with commensurate civilian skills.

There remains an extremely high demand for talent in information and cyber warfare communities across the Department of Defense, the U.S. Government, and the commercial and private sectors. To support Guardian retention, the Space Force is offering selective reenlistment bonuses (SRBs), one of the tools the Department uses to retain highly skilled and trained personnel. Use of SRBs in critical Space Force specialties assists in the ability to counter retention challenges at a relatively low cost when compared to the cost of replacing Guardians lost to other organizations, industry, or the private sector.

As an additional benefit, the Space Force is planning to use special duty assignment pay (SDAP) to compensate Guardians serving in positions with extremely difficult duties that may involve specific degrees of responsibility or military skills. The Space Force is finalizing updates to SDAP in fourteen special duties critical to the success of the service.

Recent surveys have found food insecurity concerns at the most junior ranks. Congress acted to address these concerns with the basic needs allowance in the fiscal year 2021 National Defense Authorization Act and eased the threshold for members to qualify for this allowance in the fiscal year 2023 National Defense Authorization Act. The Space Force looks forward to implementing this pay for Guardians in need and is working with the Department of Defense and the other services to ensure the well-being of Guardians. Ultimately, we would like to see military pay evaluated through the Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation process with a goal to ensure Guardians

are appropriately compensated.

UNITED STATES AIR FORCE SUPPORT

The Space Force was established to be a mission-focused, agile force. As such, we continue to receive support from the Department of the Air Force in a wide range of activities and programs to include family care, well-being, and diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. Additionally, the six Space Force bases have approximately 8,000 Airmen providing base operating support to include finance, contracting, education and training, child and youth services, dining, fitness, logistics, communications, medical services, emergency services, and base security. We are a one team-one fight organization and are grateful for the continued efforts of all members of our team.

Quality of Life

Force readiness requires the recruitment and retention of superior personnel who are continuously able to perform their responsibilities. By empowering Guardians to maintain focus on the mission while enabling Guardians and their families, caregivers, and survivors to thrive, we believe our force is stronger. The Space Force is prioritizing childcare and spouse employment in its efforts to improve and sustain quality of life for all.

The Space Force is working directly with the Air Force to maximize available, affordable, and quality childcare options that allow Guardians to remain mission-focused, while also allowing spouses to pursue career opportunities. This integration also facilitates consistency of childcare support across the Department of the Air Force to ensure Guardians are taken care of at locations in which they may serve. We are doing this in partnership with the Air Force by improving access to childcare, increasing staffing incentives, adding family childcare providers, developing education and marketing materials, increasing community-based fee assistance, and targeted construction investments. Additionally, the Space Force is focused on continuing to characterize the unique aspects of Guardians' childcare needs by collecting baseline data on which to develop future childcare support strategies.

The Space Force recognizes that spouse employment is a significant factor in the family decision to continue military service. Yet spouse employment opportunities are often interrupted while supporting their military member and the lack of portability often leaves spouses unemployed or underemployed, creating financial uncertainty. Conversely, our core career fields in acquisition, cyber, engineering, intelligence, and space operations are all highly competitive, in-demand occupations, most with civilian direct hire authority being provided to facilitate streamlined hiring actions. We are appreciative of the enacted military spousal noncompetitive eligibility that was extended for five years in the FY23 NDAA. In 2022, we began work on the Guardian Family Career Program, meeting our initial goal of placement of five proactively-recruited spouses. The program offers spouses the opportunity to support fellow Guardians while advancing spousal careers with pre-identified remote or portable positions from one Space Force installation to the next. Opportunities are available at all levels and meet the spouse where they are in terms of experience and professional interest.

Additionally, our first cohort of 51 spouses are working through the Grow with Google program led by Mrs. Mollie Raymond, spouse of our former Chief of Space Operations, Gen Jay Raymond. This

is a career certificate program available to military spouses and non-degree individuals who have previously faced barriers to higher paying tech positions. The professional certificates are offered in in-demand fields of Data Analytics, Information Technology Support, Project Management, Digital Marketing & e-Commerce and User Experience (UX) design. The initial cohort is targeted for completion in the mid-summer timeframe.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

With the Guardian Ideal as the foundation, the Space Force is designing and implementing new personnel policies and processes to ensure diversity in our service and address the unique talent management needs of the Space Force. The Space Force Personnel Management Act proposal, outlined in the following section, would offer greater participation opportunities and, further, generating and engaging diverse talent by attracting candidates who want better ways to balance their personal life demands without having to sacrifice or put their careers on hold.

Through education and training, the Space Force has used resources such as the Leading Inclusive Virtual Experience, "L.I.V.E." virtual reality program to teach personnel to improve inclusion. Guardians have not only participated in training but hosted 35% of the sessions offered so far. With the financial support of Congress, we are developing a holistic diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility program and training curriculum for our intelligence career field. The program is focused on goals and actions that will help establish an inclusive environment based on a culture in which every member of the team is treated with dignity and respect, while being afforded the opportunity to achieve their maximum potential.

SPACE FORCE PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT ACT PROPOSAL

The ability to attract, recruit, and retain high caliber talent in the Space Force is essential to the success of our service. At a time when the propensity to serve is declining, exploring a shift in the paradigm of military service is vital to meet ever-changing and evolving mission requirements. The Space Force Personnel Management Act proposal (formerly known as the Space Component), proposes an alternative to established Department of Defense personnel systems by offering a simplified model of service. By eliminating the complexities of the traditional regular/reserve construct, offering full and part-time opportunities within one service makes it easier to serve.

This talent management model is tailored to meet the unique missions of the Space Force and enable recruiting while in a competitive talent market environment with private-sector space industry partners. The legislation aims to attract candidates with desirable skillsets, experiences, and diverse backgrounds to narrow gender gaps. With this new authority, the Space Force seeks the ability to retain certain critical Guardian skillsets by offering targeted part-time opportunities. We are competing for talent with the high-paying space industry; however, we need to build stronger connective tissue with industry and academia. The new Space Force design extends the continuum of service, enabling us to recruit and retain the exquisite, highly-technical force we need, in an efficient, effective, and fiscally sound manner, while decreasing overall bureaucracy. The Space Force is seeking to implement this ground-breaking approach to military human capital management and improve warfighting readiness with a consistent, coherent means to employ the force.

We realize that new statutory authorities are necessary to achieve these goals and we appreciate

your continued support.

CONCLUSION

Your Guardians, both military and civilian members, are preserving U.S. freedom of action in an increasingly contested space domain. This requires a military force specifically trained and equipped for the purpose. U.S. projection for space supremacy demands space capabilities our Guardians provide to this nation. Developing our force, both military and civilian, is a national imperative and a once in a lifetime opportunity. Guardian talent and expertise is our most important operational advantage. Additionally, amplifying the Guardian Spirit starts with taking care of our personnel and shaping their experiences. Doing so unleashes the creativity, innovation, determination, and patriotism of our force. We thank you for your continued support for our Space Force, its uniformed and civilian Guardians, and their families, caregivers, and survivors.