

HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON ACTIVE COMPONENT, RESERVE COMPONENT, AND CIVILIAN PERSONNEL PROGRAMS IN REVIEW OF THE DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION REQUEST FOR FISCAL YEAR 2009 AND THE FUTURE YEARS DEFENSE PROGRAM

Wednesday, February 27, 2008

U.S. SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 3:00 p.m. in Room SR-232A, Russell Senate Office Building, Hon. E. Benjamin Nelson, chairman of the subcommittee, presiding.

Members Present: Senators Ben Nelson [presiding], Webb, and Graham.

Committee staff members present: Leah C. Brewer, Nominations and Hearings Clerk.

Majority staff members present: Gabriella Eisen, Counsel, Gerald J. Leeling, Counsel, and Peter K. Levine, General Counsel.

Minority staff members present: Lucian L. Niemeyer, Professional Staff Member, Diana G. Tabler, Professional Staff Member, and Richard F. Walsh, Minority Counsel.

Staff assistants present: Ali Z. Pasha, and Brian F. Sebold.

Committee members' assistants present: Jon Davey, assistant to Senator Bayh, Gordon I. Peterson, assistant to Senator Webb, Sandra Luff, assistant to Senator Warner, Clyde A. Taylor IV, assistant to Senator Chambliss, and Andrew King, assistant to Senator Graham.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. BEN NELSON, U.S. SENATOR FROM NEBRASKA

Senator Ben Nelson: Good afternoon. This Personnel Subcommittee hearing will now come to order.

The subcommittee meets today to receive testimony on the active, Guard, Reserve, and civilian personnel programs in review of the Defense Authorization Request for fiscal year 2009 and the Future Years Defense Program.

I'm honored to continue to serve as chairman of this subcommittee, the subcommittee that's focused on the care and well-being of our servicemembers, their families, retirees, and Depart-

ment of Defense civilians. No aspect of our military programs is more important than taking care of our people.

I'm privileged once again to be joined in this effort by my ranking member, Senator Graham. He and I have worked together for several years now to do what's right for our servicemembers and their families, and will continue in this never-ending effort.

I welcome our witnesses here today. Secretary Chu, staff tells me this will be your tenth appearance before this committee. Is that right? Or, who's counting?

Dr. Chu: Right, sir.

Senator Ben Nelson: Okay. [Laughter.]

Senator Ben Nelson: We appreciate your service and dedication to our servicemembers and their families, and thank you for what you have done to provide continuity and steady leadership during your time as the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness.

We also welcome here today the military personnel chiefs of each of the military branches: Lieutenant general Michael D. Rochelle, United States Army; Vice Admiral John C. Harvey, Jr., United States Navy; Lieutenant General Ronald S. Coleman, United States Marine Corps; and Lieutenant General Richard Newton III, United States Air Force.

Admiral Harvey, this committee has already favorably acted on your nomination for another position, and your nomination is now before the full Senate, so I congratulate you on your very successful service as the Chief of Naval Personnel and your nomination to yet another position of trust and importance. Congratulations.

Admiral Harvey: Thank you very much, sir.

Senator Ben Nelson: And, General Newton, this is your first appearance before this subcommittee. As you know, you follow a long tradition of successful Air Force chiefs of personnel. I'm confident that General Brady gave you very wise counsel as he moved on to—[Laughter.]

Senator Ben Nelson:—a four-star position. General Rochelle and General Coleman, we welcome you back and thank you for your continued service.

The current stress on the All-Volunteer Force, Active and Reserve, is overwhelming and unprecedented. As we meet here today, we're entering our seventh year of combat. It is all the services can do to ensure the readiness and mission capability of forces—it's all that the services can do to ensure the readiness and mission capability of forces redeploying to Iraq and Afghanistan.

We continue the effort to increase the size of the Army and Marine Corps. Growing the force raises obvious questions about recruiting and retention, as well as the right mix of pay, bonuses, and benefits to attract and retain America's best young men and women.

Congress fully appreciates the sacrifices of—our servicemembers and their families are making. In recognition of this, Congress continues to improve military pay and benefits. The stress of military operations is not limited to our servicemembers, as we know. We must never lose sight of their families as we consider what measures to take to enhance the safety and well-being of our servicemembers. Their family is our family.

To help our military families, Congress passed a law last year requiring the establishment of a Military Family Readiness Council to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of military family readiness programs and to recommend improvements. Congress also passed the Wounded Warrior Act. This comprehensive, bipartisan, legislation advances the care, management, and transition of wounded and ill servicemembers, enhances healthcare and benefits for their families, and begins the process of fundamental reform for the disability evaluation systems of the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

All of this reflects the reality that we face today. Our servicemembers shoulder more responsibility and are increasingly asked to do more. With the increased requirements comes a cost that is difficult to bear. We absolutely must take care of our servicemembers, especially those who are wounded, and their families. We must ensure that our servicemembers are properly trained and equipped to perform the tasks we ask them to perform. On these issues, there can be no compromise. The issues we face, going forward, are difficult, but not insurmountable.

So, I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today on the programs and priorities the Department has identified to overcome these challenges.

With that, thank you. Senator Graham, do you have any—an opening statement?

**STATEMENT OF HON. LINDSEY O. GRAHAM, U.S. SENATOR
FROM SOUTH CAROLINA**

Senator Graham: Very briefly, Mr. Chairman, and it will begin the way all of 'em have, and that's thanking you. We've swapped roles a couple of times here, but nothing has really changed. I've thoroughly, thoroughly enjoyed working with you and your staff on this committee, as sort of a respite from partisanship. We seem to figure it out, how to get along for the common good here, and nothing could bring you together more quickly than the needs of the men and women in uniform and their families. So, I look forward to another year of trying to help those who are making us all safe.

Dr. Chu, thank you very much for your service. You've got a very demanding job, and you have been here many times, and I appreciate the knowledge and expertise you bring to the table in serving your country. I'm sure you could go other places and make more money. I just really appreciate you staying around and helping us figure out the challenges that we face.

Vice Admiral Harvey, good job. [Laughter.]

Senator Graham: You know, the proof's in the pudding. People recognized your work and your accomplishments, and—well done, and we look forward to dealing with you in another capacity, down the road, and definitely looking forward to hearing from you as—in terms of where we need to go this year.

General Newton, you're the new guy. I know how that feels. I can't think of a more important task right now—for the Air Force, in particular—to try to figure out, you know, the balance between planes and people and ever-increasing healthcare costs, how y'all reconcile that with the missions we assign you.

We have a great staff. I look forward to working with everybody. One of the highlights of our time together, I think, has been the Wounded Warrior Act. I think this committee, our staffs, put together the Wounded Warrior Act in a way that received a lot of bipartisan support, and hopefully will continue to deliver good service to those who have been terribly wounded, and the families who suffer alongside.

There's so much more to be done, and the question, I think, for the country, is, How much of the healthcare role should DOD provide? Should we, long term, look at having retiree healthcare separated and just focus on a very limited healthcare function within the military? I don't know the answer to that, but I do believe that the biggest challenge facing all of us is how to deal with the growing personnel costs, particularly in the area of healthcare, because, as you said, Senator Nelson, no one wants to retreat from quality, availability, and access, but, when you look at the demographic changes in the pie chart, the personnel costs, particularly the healthcare costs, are growing at a dramatic rate. And we're going to have to figure out how to balance that out.

So, I'll look forward to listening to the testimony, in terms of force structure, the number of people we have, the number of people we'll need—Who are we getting in, what kind of level of education do they provide, and is the force ready for the fight? The answer, to me, is overwhelmingly yes, because we're winning the fight; but, as Senator Nelson said, it's been a long, hard struggle for many years, and we're all aware of what the strain's been.

So, I'll look forward to receiving your testimony and working with Senator Nelson, put together a good package.

Senator Ben Nelson: Well, thank you, Senator Graham.

And, Dr. Chu, I hope you weren't listening too closely when he said you could make more money elsewhere. [Laughter.]

Senator Ben Nelson: We certainly—that's not an invitation to go anywhere, for sure.

The military coalition has submitted a written statement for the record, and, without objection, it will be included in the record. [The information referred to follows:] [SUBCOMMITTEE INSERT]

Senator Ben Nelson: With that, Dr. Chu, would you like to begin?

**STATEMENT OF HON. DAVID S. CHU, UNDER SECRETARY OF
DEFENSE FOR PERSONNEL AND READINESS**

Dr. Chu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Senator Graham. It's a great privilege to be testifying before you again, and I thank you for your kind words.

I am honored to be joined by my colleagues, the Deputy Chiefs of Staff for Manpower Personnel of the four services. We each have a formal statement, which we would like to submit for the record, if we may.

Senator Ben Nelson: That will be—that will be permitted.

Dr. Chu: Thank you, sir.

As you suggested in your opening comments, Mr. Chairman, this is a joint force. It's composed of our civilians, our Active Duty military, and our Reserve components. It's a force composed entirely of volunteers, and that All-Volunteer Force, I would argue, has served

us very well. We do set high standards for quality and entrance. We set high standards for motivation. I think we've seen the rewards of those high standards in the exemplary performance of American forces in the field, as celebrated in Senator Graham's comments, and we intend to maintain those high standards for this Department as we go forward.

The fact that we've been successful in sustaining this All-Volunteer Force across the last 7 years is due, I think, to the strong partnership between the executive and legislative branches to which you referred in your opening statements. You have given us authority for a new national security personnel system for our civilian. That's of extraordinary value to us as we try to reshape the civil workforce toward one that is more deployment, willing to go forward. And, just yesterday, I had the privilege of participating in the seminar in which the first of the Secretary of Defense Global War on Terrorism medals for civilians was awarded to 15 representative civilians of the 16,000 who have served forward in the current conflict.

Across the board, for both military and civil personnel, you have given this Department increased flexibility. You've enlarged the scope of our authority. You've given us greater limits, for example, in terms of age for entrance to military service; higher ceilings, in terms of bonuses and re-enlistment incentives; you've given us broad authority to reform the special incentive pays that we use to direct personnel to the high-priority and critical occupations of the Department.

If there is one single explanation that undergirds the success, I think it is this willingness to accord a substantial measure of flexibility to the Department. And, as you look at our fiscal 2009 proposals, I think you'll see that theme repeated, in terms of specific areas where we think there are remaining issues that it would be constructive to address.

You spoke about families in your opening statement. We could not agree more about their importance to our success. As was—as is observed frequently, it is really the family that makes the retention decision together. If the family is not satisfied with the military lifestyle, the military person is going to find it very hard to continue serving our country. We recognize that we ask a lot of the families, and we also recognize that it's our responsibility to, in turn, support them in the burdens that they are asked to carry, and the most important burden, of course, being the absence of their loved one in a risky and dangerous environment.

The President, in his State of the Union Address, as I know you appreciate, addressed two elements that we believe are most important to contemporary military families, in terms of their willingness to serve and see their family member don the Nation's uniform, and that—those two elements are the education of their children and the opportunity for a career for the spouse—not just a job, but a career, something that has growth and aspires to more important responsibilities over time. And the President advocated for a series of changes that we hope the Congress will enact, to allow, for example, the transferability of the individual members' GI Bill benefits to the spouse and children if that family should so desire, to give spouses a preferred status, in terms of Federal hir-

ing and Federal career opportunities, and to accelerate our already strong program of daycare for the children of military families by accelerating the construction of our daycare centers, which will require, we believe, some modest adjustment of statute, and by encouraging us to enter public/private partnerships for off-post daycare that would meet the same high standards that we set in the military, which, again, would require some changes to current authorities the Department enjoys.

Mr. Chairman, Senator Graham, we very much appreciate the partnership with this subcommittee, and the Congress as a whole, that has allowed us to continue to have, for this country, the finest military the world has seen.

Thank you, sir. [The prepared statement of Dr. Chu follows:]

Senator Ben Nelson: Thank you.

General Rochelle?

STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL MICHAEL D. ROCHELLE, USA, DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF, G1, UNITED STATES ARMY

General Rochelle: Thank you, sir. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee once again.

Chairman Nelson, Senator Graham, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to report on the Army's personnel posture for 2008 and entering 2009. And thank you for your continued support of America's Army.

Without question, our Nation's Army remains the best-trained, best-equipped, best-led Army in the world; and, I might add, quite resilient. And as we enter the seventh year of conflict, however, the third-longest period of armed conflict in our Nation's history, there's little question that our Army is, today, out of balance. Your Army soldiers and their families are remarkable, having endured lengthy and repeated deployments and hardships. Many have been injured, and many have made the ultimate sacrifice.

In spite of the tremendous burdens they bear, they remain resilient and committed to serving our Nation. Indeed, they are our Nation's heroes, truly a national treasure. And I look forward to our dialogue today regarding how best to support and sustain them. And thank you for this opportunity, once again.

Restoring balance and creating readiness is our top priority after winning the global war on terror. Regaining our "boxer stance," if you will, the ability to shift our weight and respond decisively, requires that we apply the Army Chief of the Staff of the Army's four imperatives: sustain, prepare, reset, and transform.

He is growing the Army to 547,000—point four—as soon as possible, and we are on track to do that by the end of fiscal '10. We are on target to meet this goal by '10, as I said, thanks largely to the support from this committee. Army growth will help us return to shorter deployments, increased time at home between deployments, and greater predictability for soldiers and families in both the active and Reserve components. We must grow, to become a modular, expeditionary force that is fully capable of supporting combatant commanders in meeting the full spectrum of contingencies.

Our efforts to grow the Army are challenging. Only three in ten of our 18- to 24-year-olds today are fully eligible for enlistment. The remainder fall short in some element of standards for health, education, or character. Our recruiting mission is difficult, given the lowest propensity for military service in two decades, declining support from those who influence our youth, opportunities for post-secondary education, and a competitive job market. In spite of what is happening in the United States, we are on track to meet our recruiting goal for fiscal '08.

I'm concerned about the Nation's ability to produce the highest-possible caliber of military recruits, and, I might add, the citizens that we will need to be competitive in the 21st and 22nd century. Declining high school graduation rates and alarming rates for—of obesity in our young adult population constitute a pending human capital crisis, a crisis that is—not only has the potential to undermine military readiness, but threatens our Nation's well-being, as a whole. I share your concerns about quality, and am committed to recruiting a quality force with the highest-possible educational attainment and aptitude scores.

Our current analysis and our commanders in the field tell us that soldiers assessed in fiscal '06 and '07 are performing exceptionally, and I would emphasize “exceptionally.” Every one of these soldiers is qualified in his or her military occupational specialty, and their demonstrated performance on the battlefield speaks for itself.

I believe that a willingness to serve in the Army today, a nation at war, at this place in time, portends a very unique aspect of quality that accession metrics simply cannot measure: the heart of a well-led, well-trained volunteer soldier.

While equipment and technology are certainly vital to readiness and transformation, people are the Army. Retaining soldiers starts at home. We must sustain soldiers and their families, as you both have spoken to, with a quality of life commensurate with the quality of the service they provide. This is absolutely essential to both near-term and long-term readiness.

With support from this committee and the Congress, the Army has made tremendous strides in this regard, from funding for improved housing facilities and essential services, to increased pay and benefits, and all are appreciated. Our soldiers and their families recognize, and deeply appreciate, actions taken by their military and civilian leadership, especially the Congress. These targeted improvements to policies, programs, and services delivery mitigate risks exacerbated by a prolonged conflict and the many stresses that conflict entails. We ask for continued congressional support for these programs that provide our soldiers and families with the quality of life they so richly deserve.

In closing, I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I thank you for the continued support. And I look forward to taking your questions. [The prepared statement of General Rochelle follows:]

Senator Ben Nelson: Thank you, General.
Admiral Harvey?

**STATEMENT OF VICE ADMIRAL JOHN C. HARVEY, JR., USN,
DEPUTY CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS (MANPOWER, PER-
SONNEL, TRAINING, AND EDUCATION), UNITED STATES
NAVY**

Admiral Harvey: Yes, sir. Chairman Nelson, Ranking Member Graham, distinguished members of this committee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today on behalf of the 330,000 Active Duty and 70,000 Reserve- component sailors currently serving our Nation.

Thanks in no small part to the extraordinary support and work of this committee and its professional staff, your Navy today is ready, relevant, and responsive. We are recruiting a high-quality force, and we are retaining those sailors we need to sustain a high-quality force, and we intend to keep it that way.

We're sustaining our Nation's engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan, both directly and in support of Army and Marine ground forces, and we are simultaneously strengthening our engagement around the world, in keeping with the guidance in our new Cooperative Maritime Strategy for the 21st Century.

I would like to give you an example of what your Navy is doing on any given day. Last week, on the 20th of February, the Nation's attention was focused on the USS Lake Erie, one of our Aegis cruisers, as it successfully engaged a failing satellite with a Navy standard missile launched by Fire Controlman Second Class Andrew Jackson, of Raytown, Missouri. But, also on the 20th of February, just as Lake Erie was engaging the satellite in an extremely challenging and complex real-world scenario, our Navy was also operating newly developed riverine forces in the Euphrates River, near the Haditha Dam. Navy SEALs were pursuing al Qaeda deep in Afghanistan and throughout Iraq, and the Harry S. Truman Carrier Strike Group and the Tarawa Expeditionary Strike Group, just entered through the Straits of Hormuz into the Gulf, supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

20 February was a day on which 127 of our 279 ships—about 46 percent—were underway or deployed, including two aircraft carriers and five big-deck expeditionary warfare ships. That day, your Navy had 54,000 sailors forward deployed overseas, including about 24,000 sailors in the CENTCOM area of operations, of whom 10,000 were afloat and 14,000 were boots-on-ground in various capacities. On that day, 1700 sailors from our Navy medical team—doctors, nurses, and corpsmen, of whom 400 are reservists—are deployed—were deployed to the EUCOM and CENTCOM AOR in support of OIF and OEF, from Landstuhl to Balad.

And on 20th of February, we had approximately 10,000 sailors on individual augmentation missions, serving in roles ranging from our traditional areas of expertise in intelligence, medical support, explosive ordnance disposal, and combat-zone construction, to delivering new capabilities in areas like civil affairs, Provincial Reconstruction Teams, running detainee operations, and combating IEDs while embedded in Army and Marine tactical units.

Also in the CENTCOM AOR on 20 February, three of our surface combatants were engaged in anti-piracy operations in and around

the Horn of Africa, attempting to ensure the flow of relief for famine and drought conditions in those bereaved countries.

Sailors in the NAVEUR region supported President Bush's trip to Africa with Operation Nomad Fire, while the USS Fort McHenry and highspeed vessel Swift continued the inaugural deployment in support of Africa partnership stationing in the Gulf of Guinea, where 14 percent of our Nation's oil is generated.

On the 20th of February, we had frigates and P-3s partnering with the Coast Guard, conducting counternarcotics operations in the Caribbean and off the coast of South America, an operation which has resulted in seizing 4.4 metric tons of drugs, just since December and January.

Closer to home, in Newport News, on the 20th, we saw construction continuing on our newest nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, the USS George H. W. Bush. And, finally, on that day, we had about 870 of our newest recruits conducting the battle stations-21 exercise at Great Lakes, the culminating experience of their initial training at boot camp.

Now, on the 20th of February, the common element in all these missions, from the high-end operations of our Aegis weapon system, to the low-tech, but far more demanding, riverine mission in the combat zone, was our people. It is the Navy's people who are making it all happen, executing these important missions, and achieving great success. And it is that same Navy that accomplishes all these diverse tasks; and our Navy's people, our young men and women who have volunteered to serve a cause much larger than themselves, deserve all the credit and our gratitude for the immeasurable achievements made in the defense of our Nation.

In the years that have passed since 9/11, your Navy has undertaken a truly significant reshaping in order to develop the capability to engage worldwide at every level of warfare and peace maintenance, while still maintaining our ability to dominate the blue water anywhere around the globe.

And so, as we approach our steady-state force levels of about 322,000 sailors in the active component and 68,000 sailors in the Reserve component, it is clear we have not—we will not become just a smaller Navy, we will be a different Navy. And to get the essential manpower, personnel, training, and education pieces of this different Navy right, we are putting together all the component parts of our value chain for people to ensure we have the right sailor in the right job at the right time with the right experience, a concept we call "Fit." Our efforts will ensure we are still ready to respond to any mission at any time, anywhere, from the deep ocean to well beyond the shoreline. Your Navy is a service whose routine forward presence around the world, actively supporting friends and allies, pursuing our enemies, and maintaining the global maritime stability upon which our economic well-being depends, clearly illustrated by the many missions we accomplish on a typical day, is a fact now, and will certainly remain so for the indefinite future.

On behalf of all our sailors, Active and Reserve, I wish to thank this committee for their steadfast support of all our Navy people who are doing so much for so many every day. I am standing ready to respond to your questions, sir.

Thank you. [The prepared statement of Admiral Harvey follows:]
Senator Ben Nelson: Thank you.
General Coleman?

**STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL ROLAND S. COLEMAN,
USMC, DEPUTY COMMANDANT FOR MANPOWER AND RE-
SERVE AFFAIRS, UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS**

General Coleman: Thank you, sir.

Chairman Nelson, Representative Graham, distinguished members of the subcommittee, it is my privilege to appear before you today to discuss Marine Corps recruiting, retention, and other personnel issues. Today, I would like to make just a few key points.

First, in regard to our end-strength growth, the Marine Corps achieved unprecedented success in fiscal year '07. We exceeded our goal of growing to 184,000 marines, ending the fiscal year with an Active Duty end strength of 186,492, and we fully expect to exceed our next milestone of 189,000 during fiscal year '08 as we set our sights towards 202K without lowering our standards. We owe our success, in large part, to our recruiters, who met all accession goals in fiscal year '07, while maintaining our high-quality standards. We expect to make this challenge again this fiscal year. Thank you for your support of our enlistment incentives which made these achievements possible.

Retention should also be viewed as a success. We re-enlisted 3,700 more marines in '07 than in the prior fiscal year—again, without lowering standards. Nevertheless, retention will continue to pose a significant challenge as our goals become more and more aggressive. We thank you for your support of our selective re-enlistment bonus program. It is the foundation of our retention efforts. The funds provided to us have increasingly significantly in recent years and is money extremely well spent. These funds have enabled us to increase retention in targeted and specialized military occupational specialties so that we maintain the leadership and experience necessary for combat and other operational requirements, as well as for the new units stood up in our support of our 202K growth.

I also want to emphasize today our efforts toward Marine families. Thanks to your support, we are putting our family readiness programs on a wartime footing, increasing steady-state funding, and making a host of improvements. We are establishing school liaison officer capability at every Marine Corps installation to advocate for our Marine children. We're also expanding our exceptional family member programs to improve support and provide respite care to these special families. These and other initiatives will help ensure that we fulfill our obligation to our Marine spouses, children, and other family members.

Lastly, but certainly not least, I want to tout our Wounded Warrior Regiment. It is quickly becoming what you envisioned, a comprehensive and integrated approach to caring for our wounded, ill, and injured marines and sailors through all phases of their recovery. We have recently implemented a 24-by-7 Wounded Warrior Call Center to reach out to our wounded warriors, including those who have already left the service, and a job transition cell to help them find satisfactory—satisfying work. We're very proud of how

the regiment has progressed in such a short time, and are thankful for the high priority you have given it.

Overall, the commitment of Congress to supporting our 202K end-strength growth and to improve the quality of life for marines and their families is central to the strength that your Marine Corps enjoys today.

Thanks to you, your Marine Corps remains the Nation's force in readiness, and will continue to fulfill its mission of being the most ready when the Nation is least ready.

I look forward to answering your questions. [The prepared statement of General Coleman follows:]

Senator Ben Nelson: Thank you.

General Newton?

**STATEMENT LIEUTENANT GENERAL RICHARD Y. NEWTON III,
USAF, DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF, MANPOWER, AND PERSONNEL,
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE**

General Newton: Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Graham, it's noted that this is my first opportunity to testify before this committee. I can tell you that I'm honored to be here today. I'm honored to be here today, certainly with Dr. Chu and my teammates here on this joint team, the other services, MILPER teammates. And so, I want to thank you also for this opportunity to discuss the airmen who serve the world's most respected airspace and cyberspace force.

Our airmen have been continuously deployed and globally engaged in combat missions for over 17 straight years since that first day that an F-15 touched down over in Saudi Arabia, in August of 1990, in the beginning Desert Shield. Today, airmen are fully engaged in the interdependent joint fight, and stand prepared for rapid response in conflict across the globe, to provide capabilities for our joint combatant commanders.

Our priorities are clear: winning today's fight, developing and caring for our airmen and their families, and preparing for tomorrow's challenges.

Today's airmen are doing amazing things to execute the Air Force mission and certainly to meet Air Force commitments and keep the Air Force on a vector for success against potential future threats in a very uncertain world. Our aim is to improve capability while maintaining the greatest combat-ready air force in the world.

I look forward to accomplish through the lens of five key focus areas that I'm taking on as your Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff for Manpower and Personnel: managing end strength efficiently to maximize capability; recruit and train the highest-quality airmen, maximizing the continuum of learning throughout the airmen life cycle; continue on focusing on quality-of-life programs for airmen and their families; and to maximize the efficiencies through evolving smart business solutions.

Due to increased operations, maintenance, and personnel costs, we've been forced to self-finance a centerpiece of future dominance, the massive and critical recapitalization and modernization effort for our aging air and space force.

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. In order to dominate in the domains of air and space and cyberspace throughout the 21st century, we must recruit and develop and organize America's diverse and brightest talent for complex multinational and joint interagency operations of the future.

Our recruiting force has met their enlisted recruiting mission through persistence and dedication. And since 2000, the Air Force has enlisted over 258,000 airmen, against a goal of approximately 255,000 airmen, for nearly 101-percent mission accomplishment.

For fiscal year 2008, the active Duty requirement is 27,800, and just over 9,000 airmen have been assessed, up to this point, with an additional 9,500 awaiting basic military training, down at Laughlin Air Force Base, outside of San Antonio, Texas. So, we're on track to meet our goals this year.

For fiscal year '07, Active Duty Air Force officer retention finished 11 percent above the goal, while enlisted retention fell short, about 8 percent below the goal. The Air Force Reserve fell short of its enlisted retention goal by 3 percent, and was—but was less than one-half-percent shy of the officer retention goal. The Air National Guard met their overall officer enlisted retention goals for fiscal year '07.

Even with these successes, some enlisted specialties in the active Air Force did not achieve their overall retention goal, including air traffic control and Mid-East crypto-linguists, structural civilian engineering, pavement and construction equipment, vehicle operations, and contracting. As part of our ongoing Air Force transformation, we are reviewing and synchronizing our development efforts to realize efficiencies in how well we put into play developmental tools—education, training, and experiential—to produce our stellar airmen, our military and civilian, our officer enlisted, our Active and Reserve components.

We're dedicating resources to ensure our most important weapon system, our airmen, are prepared to deliver airspace and cyberspace power wherever and whenever it's needed.

I'm excited that my new duties as your Air Force A-1 enables me to also be the quality-of-life champion for the Air Force. Quality of life is not necessarily a system of—or a list of programs and services; it's the way we take care of our airmen through these programs, and how they know that we're supporting them and their families, who, every day, make the sacrifices for America. We know airmen focus more on their mission when they have a positive way to rejuvenate from stress, when they have the knowledge that their families are in good hands, and when they are comfortable, and also confident, in being part of the larger Air Force team.

To achieve the Secretary of Defense's objective to shift resources from bureaucracy to battlefield, we are overhauling Air Force personnel services. Our total force personnel services delivery initiative modernizes the processes, the organizations, takes advantage of new technologies through which we are able to support our airmen and their commanders. Our goal is to deliver higher-quality personnel services with greater access, speed, accuracy, reliability, and efficiency.

The Air Force plans to program the resulting manpower savings to other compelling needs over the next 6 years. This initiative en-

hances our ability to acquire, train, educate, deliver, employ, and empower airmen with the needed skills and knowledge and experience to accomplish the diverse set of Air Force missions.

In conclusion, your Air Force is often the first to leave—the first to the fight, rather, and the 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 it, or hold it at risk; supply, rescue, support, or destroy it; assess the effects and exercise global command and control over all of these activities.

Rising to the 21st-century challenge is not a choice, it's our responsibility to bequeath a dominant Air Force to America's joint team that will allow us in service—that will follow us in service to the Nation.

And, again, we appreciate your unfailing support to the United States Air Force. And, again, I'm honored to be here this afternoon, and I look forward to your questions and discussion. [The prepared statement of General Newton follows:]

Senator Ben Nelson: Thank you.

Secretary Chu, we've spent time showing concern, and looking for solutions, to the sexual assault issues in the armed services today, because preventing those assaults in the military remains—maintains—remains a high priority in the Congress, and I'm sure it is with the military, as well, and Congress is going to continue to monitor the Department of Defense actions on this issue.

In that regard, in the Ronald Reagan National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2005, Congress required the Secretary of Defense to expand the mission of the Task Force on Sexual Harassment and Violence at the military service academies to examine sexual-assault matters throughout the entire Armed Forces, and to report findings and recommendations to the Secretary of Defense within 12 months of its initial meeting. The Secretary of Defense is then required to report to Congress.

In the statement of managers accompanying this legislative requirement, the conferees stated, "Given the urgency of the need for effective action to prevent and resolve sexual-assault offenses against military members, the conferees expect the task force will provide an independent assessment of the effectiveness of policies and programs developed by the Department, as well as the success of the military services at all levels, in achieving their implementation."

What's the status of the task force, at this point?

Dr. Chu: Sir, thank you for that question. It is a very important issue. And we agree with your presumption, that the first priority is prevention, not simply reaction after a terrible event has occurred.

The task force has been appointed. We are in the process of putting in place a more senior executive director to give it greater heft within the Department. It's held its first—it's held its administrative meeting, which I believe, advised by lawyers, doesn't count as the "clock starting" that you mentioned.

I do think coming into force at this time is helpful, because we've had time for the policies to be implemented across the force, as a whole, time to begin to assess their effects to see, Are we in the

right place? Are we doing the right things? What further steps should we pursue?

We have, of course, conducted the surveys that are required by statute. We have transmitted to you the academy surveys, specifically. I have spent some time perusing the focus-group report, which is part of the package we have sent you, at the military academies, in which the interviewers have sat down with the young men and women at those institutions.

I am encouraged—substantially encouraged by what those cadets/midshipmen have told us. It's a very different picture from what was true 3 or 4 years ago, when I think there was considerable fear in some quarters, and distrust. They may not use all the fancy bureaucratic terms that we employ, but they know we've put counselors in place, they know the procedures for reporting incidents, they feel—I'm particularly struck by the comments of the women at these academies; at least in my judgment, they feel that we have created a safe environment for them with our various policies. They're not all the same—there are some amusing differences across the services, about how they've addressed this issue, but I do believe substantial progress has been made.

Senator Ben Nelson: Do you have any idea of when we might expect a report from the group?

Dr. Chu: From the task force?

Senator Ben Nelson: Yes.

Dr. Chu: Since it's just getting started, I do think it's going to be toward the end of this year before we'll see substantive material.

Senator Ben Nelson: And will that report include more than the service academies?

Dr. Chu: Yes, sir, absolutely. As directed, it is to be across-the-board look at all our policies. And we have put, as I know you appreciate, a great deal of training emphasis on this issue, starting with basic training for both officers and enlisted personnel.

Senator Ben Nelson: Thank you.

In terms of suicide prevention, I know the Army has recently experienced an increase in the number of suicides, and some are holding up the Air Force suicide program as a successful model for the Army and other services to emulate. General Newton, can you briefly describe the Air Force's suicide prevention policy and your assessment of its success to date? I realize you're new into it, but you may have some thoughts about it, at this point.

General Newton: Yes, sir. Thank you for that question. And I'll be brief. But, from a standpoint of where it starts in the Air Force, it starts down at the base level, down at the unit level, and that's—and other programs, much like the suicide programs that we've had in the past, or other programs similar, that's where we find a lot of success, down at the unit level, not only from—it—therefore, rather than being a top-down, it's a bottom-up, point one.

The second point is how we communicate. How do we convey to, not only our airmen—and, by the way, it's Active Duty, Guard, and Reserve, but also to our civilians, as well—communication showing that, not only at the unit commander level, but, again, now top-down, that we, as a service, put a lot of great value. And, again, I think the fact that we are able to communicate to people, to have them actually understand that we can discuss things that perhaps

have been held back in years gone by, particularly in a very high operations-tempo environment, and with the expeditionary nature of Air Force today.

My last point on this is that we have discovered that, not only does it work in garrison or at our—generally, on base, in a traditional sense, but it also fits an expeditionary model. And so—and then, let me draw one more last point of—the fact is that it isn't a—just a Office of the Surgeon General program, it's one that—really is a commanders' program. And so, we approach it with some—obviously, some medical expertise involved with this, particularly with our mental health professionals. But, truly it is a commanders program, from the unit level up.

Senator Ben Nelson: General Rochelle and General Coleman and Admiral Harvey, can you give us some idea of what your experience is with the programs you have in your—each of your services, and how effective you think that they are at the present time?

General Rochelle: Happy to do that, Chairman Nelson.

First of all, I should mention that it's clear that the increase in suicide, as well as other measures that we track very, very closely, are a reflection of the amount of stress that's on the force. There has been a task force—Suicide Prevention Task Force—in existence for quite some time. But, what the Secretary and the Chief have directed is greater Surgeon General, chaplain, Army G-1, provo marshal, and other specialist oversight and steerage of that effort, focused on four things:

First is removal of the stigma that is associated with seeking mental health counseling and support. And our most recent military MHAT, Military Health Assessment Team—Awareness Team, excuse me—Military—Mental Health Awareness Team—trip into theater has borne out some very good results of the elimination of that stigma—the reduction of that stigma.

The second is exactly what General Newton spoke to, at sensitizing our junior-most leaders, not only of how to identify and respond to soldiers who are in danger, but, more importantly, re-emphasizing that this is a part of our Army values, it's one of our—the tenets of our Army values, never leaving a fallen or falling comrade behind.

Third is increasing the mental health professionals in direct support of our soldiers.

And then, finally, providing commanders, at every level, actionable intelligence when prevention measures fail—with intelligence that they can use to then prevent—and ideally prevent the next one.

Senator Ben Nelson: Do you have any data that would establish the tracking of high ops tempo with the increase? In other words, are there any statistics, Dr. Chu, that would establish that there is some correlation between the high ops tempo and the increased suicide rate?

General Rochelle: Was that to me, sir?

Senator Ben Nelson: Well, I was going to see if Dr. Chu had it for the entire—

Dr. Chu: I do—

Senator Ben Nelson:—all the forces, together.

Dr. Chu: We have looked at suicide rates for all four, sir. We have tracked them for years, actually. And the chairman has testified to the quality of DOD suicide prevention programs, which I think have been recognized in the civil sector, recently with some awards.

I do think it is still speculative to ascribe causality to “Why has the Army rate started to rise?” because the Marine Corps rate has not risen. So, it’s not quite the same in each service.

Also, the majority of the suicides really are here at home. And, of those today, the majority are people are on their first deployment. So, it’s, I think, a more complex picture. I would be very hesitant to ascribe to any one cause. We do know a fair amount about precipitating factors. So, failed relationships are a key factor across the board. Financial difficulty is a key factor across the board. But, I think I would be careful about drawing any immediate conclusions about, “Why has the Army rate gone up?” and, “Why at this particular time?”

Senator Ben Nelson: My time is up, but, maybe, Admiral and General Coleman, you might briefly—General Coleman, I’ll give you a chance to go first, because your numbers apparently are with—are not increasing, at some level, even with a high ops tempo.

General Coleman: Yes, sir. That is correct, sir. And, again, thanks for allowing me to answer the question.

Over the last—since about 2001, our numbers are—when we look at ’em, our numbers have remained relatively low; meaning, they have—they did not increase. We do not see a correlation between ops tempo and suicide rate. Obviously, one suicide is one too many. Our ethos is a small unit—at the small unit level, and emphasizing that it’s not weak to seek help or to seek assistance. But, our main focus is on that small unit, small unit leader, the buddy system. And we see no correlation between deployments. Whether a marine that committed suicide had been to the fight or had not been, there’s no increase in the numbers since 2001, sir.

Thank you, sir.

Senator Ben Nelson: Thank you.

Admiral?

Admiral Harvey: Yes, sir. Our suicide rate is—for details, since 2004, is about 10.3 or so per 100,000, down to about 9.5 per 100,000 now. So, fairly steady, with a robust operations tempo throughout that period of time. Our focus has been on unit training. Interestingly enough, if you look at the demographics of, sadly, who are the most likely to take their own life, it is a relatively senior individual, not the young kid, not the one who’s been around for a while. It’s that mid-grade petty officer, that chief petty officer, who’s in positions of authority, which makes this a little more unique, because the traditional “looking after your people”—who’s looking after those who’s looking after the people? And so, it’s a matter of unit training on awareness, unit training on the ability to intervene, the concept of a shipmate as someone who will step forward at the right time in order to prevent something from happening, and not just react to something that’s happening. So, it’s intense training on this part, understanding the demographics, and

making sure we're ready to put forward with the mental health professionals available to us to help guide those efforts.

Senator Ben Nelson: Thank you.

Dr. Chu: Mr. Chairman, could I add just one comment, again on the empirics, it is, I think, useful to underscore that, although each one of these is a tragedy, that our rate in the military is, and has been, at or below the gender- and age-adjusted rate for American society, as a whole. And we've also seen in civil society that's been reported in news media, where older—in some ways, this parallels with Admiral Harvey must be—older suicide rates have been rising in civil society. So, again, I do not think we fully understand the causality of all these troubles. We are concerned by the fact that the Army's rate has been rising. Let me underscore that point.

Senator Ben Nelson: Thank you.

Senator Graham?

Senator Graham: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. Chu, I think you're pretty well aware of the fact that, last year, the—this committee and the Congress as a whole passed a provision that would promote the Judge Advocate Generals to three-star rank, Lieutenant General or Vice Admiral, and I think that was effective January 28th. Do you know the status of attempts to comply with that legislation? Are there any problems that I need to be made aware of?

Dr. Chu: No, sir, I don't believe there are any problems. We are very much aware of the provision. It has the Secretary's personal interest, and he is asking the Department to act in a unified way, since it affects all three services—all three—

Senator Graham: Thank you very much.

Dr. Chu:—all three—

Senator Graham: If you have any problems, please let me know.

Now, pharmacy costs. We've been trying to deal with ways to lower our pharmacy costs without hurting quality, and actually improving access. Can you tell me where we stand now with trying to come up with a new pharmaceutical system?

Dr. Chu: We will, of course, implement the statutory provisions that you have enacted. We are looking at, again, the question, and we very much hope for partnership with the Congress of, How do we address the overall TRICARE structure, as you signaled in your opening comments.

We do believe that the report of the task force that Congress required that we constitute does provide a roadmap for the way ahead. We can change the specifics, obviously, and that needs to be a constant process, and we're very glad that you have agreed to receive that briefing, because I do think it provides us with a guide—set of guidelines as to how to think about other issues.

Senator Graham: Thank you very much.

Admiral Harvey, one of the issues facing, I think, all services is healthcare professionals. You're competing in a very tough market out there. Maybe just very briefly, each of you, starting with the Navy, could you tell me what your biggest challenge is, in terms of your healthcare costs and obligations in your healthcare professionals, of recruiting and retaining those professionals? And is there anything we can do?

Admiral Harvey: Sir, I'm very pleased to tell you that this committee and this Congress have done an awful lot in 2007 and 2008 authorization bills that have enabled us to, I believe, turn the corner, for the first time in 5 years, and put ourselves on a path to success in recruiting in every area for our medical professionals. Let me just give you a quick hit on what's come out of those bills that give us the tools that we needed to have in what is a very, very tough market.

Our 4-year active nurse corps accession bonus, gone from 15,000 in '05 to 25,000 in '07. I'm going to make nurse corps accession goals this year.

Critical wartime specialty accession bonuses for medical corps, dental corps officers, up to \$400,000; general surgeons, 300,000; psychiatrists, 175,000; emergency medicine, 175,000. I am 40 percent ahead of where I was last year on medical corps accessions. We have 80 accepted and 92 in process, against a goal of 358.

The dental officer accession bonus has increased to \$75,000. I expect to make goal for dental corps accessions this year, against a goal of 141.

The Health Profession Scholarship Program increased to a maximum amount of 30,000 per year, and the Health Professions Loan Repayment Program, critical action that you all put into the bills, increased to 60,000 a year.

So, I see tremendous movement on the part—that these tools are being received very well. We have made medical recruiting the number-one priority in our recruiting command, and it's my number-one priority in my job, as Chief of Naval Personnel. We've got the Surgeon General and his team onboard. Doctors are helping us recruit doctors. Nurses are helping us recruit nurses. And our medical service corps are helping us recruit those healthcare professionals.

So, I'm not declaring victory, sir, but I am saying, after 4 to 5 years of missing every goal in every year, we—I believe we have turned the corner on this one, and I'm really looking forward to when we get the results of medical school decisions here, in the next 2 months, that we'll be able to come back and tell you, yes, we are definitely on the path to success.

Senator Graham: Well, that's great. And one of the unsung heroes of this war, that our men and women in uniform and, I guess, some contractors, but primarily men and women in uniform, who are handling combat casualties, it's just an amazing story.

General Rochelle?

General Rochelle: Senator Graham, I thank you for that question. And I would like to echo Admiral Harvey's comments about the increases in incentives. But, I would take a slightly different tack with respect to where the Congress has been most helpful, in terms of our medical recruiting, and that is, echoing Dr. Chu's comments about authorities, giving us the flexibility—the Army, in particular, in 2005—to pilot inventive and innovative programs that would allow us to be able to stretch out and do things in quite a different way.

We—two examples—we are about to launch, in the Army, a program to grow our own nurses, in partnership—registered nurses—bachelor of science in nursing graduates—in partnership with uni-

versity. The second is, we will soon launch, as part of our pilot authorities granted by this committee, by the Congress, a waiver of the military service obligation that accrues to every commissioned officer in the Army—as a pilot. We think this will be a huge increase—will give us a huge increase, in terms of the challenges in the marketplace.

So, I would echo everything that Admiral Harvey has said; most especially, the Health Professional Scholarship Program and the increase in those incentives; but, the authorities, by far, have been the most effective.

Senator Graham: I'll be very brief, here. I know Senator Webb has questions.

General Coleman, we're growing the Marine Corps; it seems to be we're on track to grow the numbers we need.

General Coleman: Yes, sir.

Senator Graham: The quality is being maintained. Is there any major deviation in quality, here, as we try to grow our numbers?

General Coleman: Thank you, sir. Sir, we have not lowered our standards one bit. Our goal, last year, was 184 end strength. I believe we came in at 186-plus, and we have not lowered our standards in any way, shape, or form, or fashion.

Senator Graham: Is the Marine Corps generally in good shape, here?

General Coleman: Marine Corps is in great shape, sir.

Senator Graham: Personnelwise?

General Coleman: Yes, sir. Yes, sir, great shape.

Senator Graham: All right. Anything we can do for you, let us know.

General Newton, the Air Forces sort of have a dilemma, here. We're, I think, 5 percent short of where we need to be, in terms of—

General Newton: Yes, sir.

Senator Graham:—personnel and—tell me your dilemma and what we can do to help you, here.

General Newton: Yes, sir. We made a conscious decision, as we look at striving to recapitalize our force and modernize our force, the average aircraft age—I'm sure you're heard reported, is over 24 and a half years old. And so, we've made the conscious decision, as we look at our program force, of decreasing end strength by reducing 40,000. And so, we're on a glide slope, by the end of fiscal year-09, to get down to about 316,600, I believe is the number, for Active Duty end strength.

Senator Graham: Is that wise, given the operational tempo?

General Newton: Sir, it's a balance between—obviously, between cost and risk. I'll tell you that we submitted a report to Congress, just several weeks ago, with regard to what—as I just indicated, what the program force is, versus the required force. The required force, in order to meet our global commitments, with new emerging missions, with the growth of end strength, the United States Army and the United States Marine Corps, appears to be about 330,000, if you look at the POM, starting around fiscal year '10 and through '15. If you're asking me the question, "Are we incurring more risk by staying on glide path to a reduced end strength for program force down to 316,000?" I would say, yes, sir, we are. But, again,

though, it comes down to the challenge between the costs of—so forth and—as well as the need—the overarching need, at this juncture, to recapitalize and modernize.

Senator Graham: So, you're having, really, to cut your personnel cost to pay for your capital needs, is that the deal, here?

General Newton: Sir, we—if you think of it in terms of the number of banks we went to, in this case we made the decision in PBD 720, back in, I believe, around November of '05, to make that very tough recapitalization call, and went into the personnel account.

Again, the backdrop of that is, with new emerging missions—I didn't mention, but, you know, we've got a new combatant command standing up, in U.S. Africa Command. Not only are we striving to dominate in air and space, by cyberspace, as well, with our plans to stand up a new cyberspace command. But, if you look at the QDR report that came out around that same time period, which reports that the Air Force is to maintain 86 modern combat wings, and so forth—and so, yes, the—it's the difference between, obviously the cost and the risk, but also the difference between where we are, programmatically, but also in terms of required—requirements.

Senator Graham: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator Ben Nelson: Senator Webb?

Senator Webb: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Gentlemen, first, I would like to just start by saying—listening to the reactions on the question about suicide prevention and your programs and the information that you have, I—I've been watching this for 6 years now, through three different family relationships, from the enlisted infantry, you know, company level, looking up, and I don't have the—you know, the servicewide data that you have, but I do have a serious concern about this. And the things that I have seen are admittedly anecdotal, but they, kind of, contravene all of the things you're just saying, in terms of age and ops tempo and these—these sorts of things. And, because they are personal in nature, and because they're anecdotal, I don't think it's appropriate for me to go into it in a hearing, but I would like the opportunity to have you come and sit in my office for about 10 minutes and explain some of the concerns that I have. I don't believe I'd be doing my job if I didn't say this. You know, we really have, obviously, a responsibility to make sure we examine the potential, as it exists. And sometimes, as data filters up to the top—you know, having spent 5 years in the Pentagon, 4 of them with Dr. Chu, I know how that can go. So, I'd—at some point, I would enjoy being able to sit down and talk to you all about that.

Dr. Chu: Delighted, Senator.

Senator Webb: One statistic that, kind of, jumps out at me, David, from all the years that I've been involved in this, is this notion that fewer than three out of ten of America's youth are deemed fully qualified to serve in the military. That just, kind of, astounds me, because when you look back, for instance, at the Vietnam era, one out of every three males in the age group actually served, and there were many more, as we know, who would have been physically qualified. To what do you attribute this number?

Dr. Chu: I think there are two principal factors, in my judgment. One is, we have set, in the military, far higher standards, particularly for educational achievement, than was true before, and far higher standards than we set in the force in the early days of the Volunteer Force, when Congress rebuked us, as you recall, in the '70s, for the low fraction of high school diploma graduates and the weak performance on the Armed Forces Qualification Test. And so, we really have set ourselves to be Lake Woebegone. We have set a standard that 90 percent, as you know, should be high school diploma graduates. The estimates—and they are only estimates—of the high school diploma graduation in the country hover between 70 and 80 percent. Everybody in the military, as I know you appreciate, is a high school graduate, either through diploma or GED. That didn't used to be true. Similarly, in the AFQT, we aim to have 60 percent or more—and three of the four services are really in the 70-percent range—of scores above average. And we limit mental category-4 to 4 percent of accessions. Whereas, Project 100,000, for example, in the '60s, deliberately took mental category-4 individuals, in the hopes that—in high school dropouts—in the hopes we could rehabilitate them and put them on a more productive track.

So, one major element is—

Senator Webb: Right, but just to recall the history of that, you know, 30 years ago, during the Carter administration, we redefined what category 4 was. We created category 3A and then category 3B, and a whole lot of the 3B's were category 4's previously.

Dr. Chu: I think—well, let me double check, but I think the category limits were kept more or less the same.

The other big factor, I do think—and this is something that is a national challenge—is the issue of physical fitness, and particularly obesity. And a large fraction of the loss of the cohort, that is described in this study that has been done, is because they're not medically qualified. This is not the draft-era failing-the-physical issue, this is reset standards for physical fitness and obesity that are sufficiently tight that large numbers of young Americans can't comply.

It doesn't necessarily mean—I mean, and this is one of the internal issues that we are examining in—the Army is examining in pilot, that we're necessarily in the right place on some of those standards. And the Army does have a so-called ARMS experiment, where we're—instead of looking at the indicators as—we ask the person to actually perform for us—do a step test, I think, is one of the key ingredients. And if they can do that well, even if they might be a larger girth than the rules would otherwise argue should be the case—

Senator Webb: Well, it would seem to me, you know—I have a very limited amount of time here, and I know where you're going on this—you know, it would seem to me that if you take, for instance, truly disqualifying conditions, such as disease or systemic disorders and those sorts of things, you've still got a pretty large group of people that you're potentially missing out on, here. You know, the Marine Corps used to have what we called "Fat Boy Platoons," where they would take people who were overweight, and run them through a pre-boot-camp conditioning program, and put them in. And, in terms of high school graduates, I've always been

of a mind that if you take someone, with a higher mental category on their testing, who happens to be a non-high-school grad, you can make very fine military people out of them, and help 'em redirect their life.

Walter Anderson, who's the CEO of Parade Magazine Enterprises, was a high school dropout who enlisted in the Marine Corps and became valedictorian of his college class after he got out.

So, I would like—I want to ask another question, here, so I don't want to lose all my time on this, but I would hope that you could find ways to expand the potential recruitment base and take advantage of that.

Dr. Chu: And we agree, sir. And, just very quickly to say, the Army is running another pilot—so-called TTAS—two tier—Tier Two Attrition Screen—where we are looking at other indicators—and, specifically, some combination of test scores and other attributes, to say, Could they substitute for the diploma as a predictor of success in the military? So, we agree, we want to enlarge that pool.

Senator Webb: General Rochelle, I'm interested in this notion that—and, actually, for Dr. Chu, as well, potentially—this notion of transferability with the educational benefits. First of all, has that been costed? Has anybody put a cost on this?

Dr. Chu: The—if I may answer that part, sir—the specifics of the program are still being debated within the administration, issues of, you know, “Should you have served a certain number of years before you can do this?” and so on, so forth. And so, the cost estimates depend on that set of answers.

Senator Webb: So, we have a program that the President mentioned in his State of the Union Address, and Secretary Gates mentioned when he testified, that we really don't have a cost for. Is that—

Dr. Chu: No, we do have—

Senator Webb:—is that correct?

Dr. Chu:—cost for it, sir.

Senator Webb: You do have? What's the projected cost.

Dr. Chu: It depends on the parameters of the program.

Senator Webb: Well, what's the low and the high?

Dr. Chu: The low ranges from on the order of half a billion dollars a year to above a billion dollars a year, depending, again, on the parameter choices that you're making

Senator Webb: Just for the transferability prediction.

Dr. Chu: Transferability, yes, sir.

Senator Webb: Okay. Let me make two suggestions to you, here. Number one, having served on the House Veterans Committee for 4 years, there was a lot of wisdom over there when this idea came up, 30 years ago, that you have to be very careful, because you're taking a benefit away from a veteran. You know, there's one point in your life you may want to transfer this off to a family member, and 9 years later you're divorced and you're out on the economy, and you want to get an education, and your benefit's gone, then what do you do? That's point number one.

Point number two is, I've been working really hard, here, to try to get the right kind of a GI Bill, instead of this Montgomery GI Bill, that would actually allow you to expand your potential recruit-

ment base in an area where you're not really able to recruit, that individual who's—who has a propensity to come into the military, for family tradition, because they love their country, but not necessarily because they want to become a part of a career force, when they know they're going to get a full boat out of it, the same way that people in World War II got, if they get on the other end of it. And that total cost is about—we're trying to get a firm estimate, but it's about 2 billion, to dramatically change the GI Bill and really help recruitment, here.

Dr. Chu: Sir, you raise two very important issues. Let me respond very briefly.

First, on your concern with the irrevocable nature of it and perhaps having deep regret at some later point, yes, that is one of the issues that we are, likewise, concerned with. We want to structure this so that we protect that—protect the serviceperson from what might not always be a decision that he or she would sustain over time.

Senator Webb: How do you do that?

Dr. Chu: I'd rather not comment yet, sir, if I may. [Laughter.]

Dr. Chu: But, we do have some ideas on that point.

Second, on the cost estimates, VA did testify, last year, when your bill was first introduced, that, at least as then structured, it was more like 7 and a half billion dollars, here—\$75 billion over a 10-year period, 2008 to—

Senator Webb: What, my bill? S. 22?

Dr. Chu: Your bill, yes, sir. That was—

Senator Webb: You know, they—

Dr. Chu:—the testimony—

Senator Webb:—they also testified that it would be technically complex to carry out, when people did it in 1944—

Dr. Chu: Yes, sir. I don't think that—

Senator Webb:—on the back of a—

Dr. Chu: I don't—

Senator Webb:—memo pad. And the best—

Dr. Chu:—that's necessarily—

Senator Webb:—the best estimate we have now from CBO is 2 billion.

Dr. Chu: Then, I believe you've revised the parameters, but I—I defer to CBO.

Senator Webb: Okay. Well, we haven't an official estimate out anywhere. I don't know where the DVA got 7 and a half billion, other than the fact that the administration opposes the program because they're saying that DOD believes it will affect retention, which—

Dr. Chu: No, sir. I have looked—

Senator Webb:—I believe is—

Dr. Chu:—I have looked at the VA's estimates for the bill, as then drafted. I understand you've made some proposed changes to it. I do think the 75-billion number over 10 years is in the ballpark, so to speak. Now, one could structure a less-expensive proposal, that's absolutely true.

Senator Graham: Senator Webb, I don't mean to interrupt, but could you tell me what your bill does? I apologize, but I don't know.

Senator Webb: The bill basically gives a mirror benefit to the people who have been serving since 9/11 as those people who came back from World War II received. It pays tuition, buys their books, and gives them a monthly stipend. The bill, as originally introduced—and, Dr. Chu, you're correct on this—had a room-and-board provision in it, and also had a provision where all private schools would give a full tuition. And we've modified it on that—or that's—but that, I don't think, would in any way bring the bill to the cost that people say that it has.

And I—you know, I would just strongly urge you to—you know, to take a look at what that might do, in terms of your potential recruitment pool.

And my time's way up, but—thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator Ben Nelson: Thank you, Senator Webb.

I have a question for Senator McCaskill—from Senator McCaskill, who had planned to attend, but she is presiding over the Senate from 3:00 to 5:00 today, and so, she's asked that I ask the question on her behalf, which I'm happy to do.

And this is her question, "I want to next address the issue of administrative personality disorder discharges in the Department of Defense. My colleague Senators McCaskill and Lieberman have taken particular leadership on these issues. As you know, they have raised concerns with the propriety of use of these discharges, which lead to a discharge of a servicemember for what is deemed a, quote, 'pre-existing,' unquote, personality disorder. The discharge, unlike a medical discharge, is not accompanied by a medical or a monetary compensation, and, in some ways, may be viewed as a black mark on the servicemember's permanent military discharge file. In the case of combat veterans, it seems that a post-combat finding that a servicemember's mental health problems are not combat related, but rather pre-existed service, may be suspect.

"In July 2007, Dr. Sally Satel, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Instituted noted, in her testimony at the House Veterans Affairs Committee, that, quote, "The controversy surrounding Chapter 5 to 13 discharges would suggest the need for a reevaluation of screening protocols currently used by DOD. Misappropriate—misapplication of the Chapter 5/13 discharge sets up the kind of Catch 22 for the DOD. First, the military deems a recruit sufficiently mentally fit to be sent into training and then into a war zone, but then, when psychiatric problems arise, it turns around and claims that those problems were there all along, problems that should have shown up earlier in their tour of duty,' end of the quote. "Further, the summer 2007 report of the Mental Health Task Force found that servicemembers may be being pressured to accept personality disorder discharges instead of awaiting more thorough medical diagnoses and gaining compensation through the MEB and PEB process.

"Finally, it's my understanding that the DOD instruction on personality disorder charges has not been updated since 1982. "Secretary Chu, are you concerned that the administrative personality disorder discharges are being misused in the DOD?"

Dr. Chu: The shorter answer, sir, is no. But, let me first underscore two points that I know you're familiar with. One, these are only reached upon the advice of fairly senior clinicians; this is not

something cavalierly adopted. Second, it's basically a no-fault discharge for the individual. In a number of these cases, discharge could be on another basis, but it might not—but, it's an honorable discharge, basically.

Senator Ben Nelson: Well, it is, but doesn't it carry a stigma?

Dr. Chu: Well, I'm not so sure. It depends on the—whether people can read the codes and so on, so forth. I don't think it's a big—I don't think that's the big issue.

That all said, we are looking at whether it would be wise to require yet more significant review before such a discharge is employed, and whether, in particular, some of that review should be triggered if the person has served in a combat theater.

So, we agree it's an area we ought to relook at. We are engaged in that with our colleagues in the military departments. I would urge we be careful not to rule out the use of this discharge, you know, because in some cases for the individual it is actually a better basis for discharge than some of the alternatives.

Senator Ben Nelson: I don't think that there would be any expectation to rule it out altogether, just perhaps updating the 1982—

Dr. Chu: We are in the process—

Senator Ben Nelson:—approach.

Dr. Chu:—doing that, yes, sir. And that's appropriate to ask.

Senator Ben Nelson: Thank you.

There was a recent series, in the Denver Post, relating to deploying medically unfit soldiers. And this would be to you, General Rochelle. That—those reports—those articles reported that 79 soldiers, who were determined to be medical no-goes, were knowingly deployed to Iraq. The most recent article described the soldier being pulled out of a hospital, where he was being treated for bipolar disorder and alcohol abuse, so that he could be deployed to Kuwait. Thirty-one days later, he was returned to Fort Carson because healthcare professionals in Kuwait determined that he shouldn't have been sent there in the first place. These articles quote an e-mail from Fort Carson's 3rd Brigade Combat Team as saying, quote, "We've been having issues reaching deployable strength, and thus, have been taking along some borderline soldiers who we would otherwise have left behind for continued treatment." That's the end of that quote.

I suspect that catches all of us a little bit flatfooted, that that kind of a situation could be occurring. Have you been able to look into that? Because I'm sure it's been brought to your attention, since it was reported so widely in the papers.

General Rochelle: It has, Mr. Chairman. I am familiar with the incident. And let me say that that particular incident is under review—the Fort Carson case.

Senator Ben Nelson: Yes.

General Rochelle: Therefore, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on it.

Senator Ben Nelson: Yes.

General Rochelle: But, from a policy perspective, I will say two things that are significant.

First, every soldier who has a questionable deployability status, medical or otherwise, is reviewed not only by—certainly, medical is reviewed by a clinician and then that review, subject to the review

also of the chain of command. We would not knowingly deploy a soldier into combat who should not be deployed. And I have absolute confidence in the judgment of commanders on the ground who not only are—

Senator Ben Nelson: Excuse me. What about borderline? I mean, that was the from the combat team who had—along some borderline soldiers.

General Rochelle: Well, “borderline” may very well, in this case, mean an area of judgment within a range. But, I say again, sir, with absolute affirmation, that I have confidence that commanders would not knowingly deploy a soldier who would be dangerous to himself, to the unit, or the mission.

Senator Ben Nelson: As you finish—complete the investigation and review of this current situation, could you get in touch with us to let us know—

General Rochelle: Yes, sir.

Senator Ben Nelson:—what you found out?

General Rochelle: Yes, sir.

Senator Ben Nelson: And I would imagine that the question would apply to all the other services, as well. It’s not—this might have been an example, citing the Army, but we’d want to make sure that there wouldn’t be any situation for any of the services. So, if we can sure of that, I—that would be helpful.

General Coleman, during Secretary Gates’ recent trip abroad, he made comments regarding NATO forces not being able to combat a guerrilla insurgency. The Marine Corps is now preparing to send an additional 3200 marines to Afghanistan. Is the Marine Corps’ end strength sufficient to send an additional 3200 marines to Afghanistan with—asking you the question without expecting to get crosswise with the SECDEF, but you are here to give us your opinion, as you know. [Laughter.]

General Coleman: Thank you, sir.

Yes, sir, we are well prepared. Certainly, the plan has been done. Last week, I was in both Iraq and Afghanistan. We looked at some of the areas where our forces may go. There was a number of areas that we could not visit because of weather, but our 3200, plus or minus, marines are ready—prepared and ready to go. They will be combat ready and 100-percent-up round when it is time to—when it is time to deploy.

Senator Ben Nelson: And that “combat ready” would mean that they would have the equipment, including body armor or whatever is required, to qualify them as combat ready. Is that correct?

General Coleman: That’s correct, sir. We would say they were a full-up round, which means they were 100-percent prepared, sir.

Senator Ben Nelson: Do you have any thought on what the impact could be, of this deployment, on recruiting and retaining—the recruitment in the Marine Corps?

General Coleman: Sir, we’re doing better than expected in our recruiting. We’re not having—our goal is 189 at the end of September 30th for this year. We have every reason to believe that we will be—we will exceed 189 end strength, and that we’ll be—without lowering our standards. So, yes, sir, we are—we’re—there are no concerns about how this will affect—

Now, I would venture to say that there is a—there was a—there was an end date to this—a planned end date to this deployment. If that end date were extended, and other things weren't adjusted, then that may cause some concerns. But, as it stands right now, this mission, we're fully capable and fully ready to take on, sir.

Senator Ben Nelson: Yesterday, General Casey, in testifying before the Senate Armed Services full committee, stated that one of the top five areas that the Army families expressed concern about was access to quality healthcare. He said that soldiers and their families are dealing with an inundated healthcare system, and those stationed in more remote areas may not have access to as many providers as they would consider adequate.

Maybe, Dr. Chu and General Rochelle, can you tell us a bit more about the problems that the Army families are having with healthcare coverage? Senator Graham made some reference to, maybe, splitting off the programs into different programs for retirees versus Active members and their families, but perhaps you could just tell us a little bit more, because this is obviously something very important, and General Casey, in expressing, and now has raised it to attention, where maybe there's something we can do about it.

Dr. Chu: Yes, sir. Thank you for raising that issue.

We do poll our people repeatedly about their satisfaction with the healthcare that they receive. Generally, the system gets quite good grades.

It is the case, interestingly, that the active Duty members, the younger members in the patient population, tend to be more critical. The retired population tends to be much more satisfied, even though it doesn't have quite the same access rights as the active Duty population. There's an interesting relationship here to how you perceive the world.

There is an issue, in some areas, with the ease of access to specialty care. I think, in general, access to primary care is quite good. The services set high standards, in terms of primary care rehabilitee, and generally meet those standards. We will be looking at those posts where General Casey, Army, have identified issues as to whether we have enough uniformed providers in that area. Do we have enough—a strong enough network for the TRICARE program, where we go to the civil sector—and that's particularly true for the specialty care—to support that?

Certainly, there have been issues in the past about reimbursement rates from the government under TRICARE. We're prepared to address those.

I have heard, more recently from Secretary Geren, that some providers in some areas of the country are distrustful of the government. And so, whatever the rates may be, that's not the issue; it's that—so, it's alleged some providers simply don't want too many government patients in their practice, for fear that a future set of decisionmakers will be less generous, I presume. I don't know what it might be. If that's true, we need to, together, advocate to the Nation's clinicians that, "This is a national responsibility. You shouldn't be here." And several of your colleagues have been very gracious in doing that in their home States. We're prepared to work

with the Governors through the National Governors Association, if that proves to be an important issue.

Senator Ben Nelson: General?

General Rochelle: Yes, sir. Please allow me to add just three fine points to that.

First of all, I'm pleased to report that the Secretary of the Army and General Casey have added—added, in fiscal '07, \$1.4 billion, double what we submitted in the past, to our Army Family Action Plan, recognizing that the resiliency of our families is not without limits. And in the '09 budget which is before the Congress this—at present—\$1.2 billion to address family well-being needs.

Social-work services is the number-one area in which General Casey and Mrs. Casey, as they traveled about, and Secretary Geren, as he travels now, as well, here, with respect to the pressures of deployment on children. And so, social-work services, we are aggressively, with the resources the Congress has given us, increasing that coverage in and around our military installations, most especially with the schools that are attended by military youth.

The third and final point, the network, especially in specialty-care services, is sorely in need of some beefing up, and that's what our—that's what our families tell us, sir.

Senator Ben Nelson: Admiral, do you have any particular points you'd like to make on family healthcare?

Admiral Harvey: Yes, sir. The interesting issue for us—well, it's all interesting, but, I mean, the particular issue for us, in terms of this point, is the medical support to the Marine Corps bases that we routinely provide. And so, part of what I talked about in the medical recruiting, we've really gone after the psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, et cetera. I'm pleased to see we're getting the same results there.

The issue for us has been keeping them, once we get them. We saw, over the last 3 years, a lot higher loss rate than we'd like, and particularly in the areas that then impact, you know, at Pendleton and Lejeune, with the tempo and the fight that they're sustaining in CENTCOM. So, I think we see the movement. We're getting in the right direction and getting them in there. We know where we've got to get them to. We have some end-strength issues that we're working through right now, in terms of the shape of the medical corps, the talent that we have in there, and the talent we need to keep. I think we've got some road ahead on that. And so, I'm confident that we're going to improve in this area, but clearly we have improvements to make.

Senator Ben Nelson: Well, General Coleman, here's your chance. The Navy doing a good for you, or not?

General Coleman: The Navy truly is doing an outstanding job. But, a lot of that becomes—is because of the help—the budgetary help that they're receiving. So, yes, sir, they're doing a fantastic job.

Senator Ben Nelson: Thank you.

General Coleman: Did I answer that well? [Laughter.]

Admiral Harvey: You've always been a great shipmate, I'll tell you. [Laughter.]

General Coleman: It's all right.

Senator Ben Nelson: General Newton?

General Newton: Mr. Chairman, in terms of medical recruiting and so forth, as well as retention, we've got some challenges. I know the Navy mentioned that they're going to be—I think, to take your point—pretty much on track, in terms of recruitment. Recruitment, overall in the United States Air Force, is in good shape. So is retention. But, if you look into our—the health professionals and so forth, we've got some challenges with regard to both recruiting, as well as retention, the same issues that were just raised in the Navy about retention and so forth. So, that is a—that's a prime focus for us.

I would also add the fact that we are, again, a very high operations tempo Air Force, we're also an expeditionary force. And, to go back to the mental health discussion we had, perhaps what would have been thought of in the past, in terms of the health environment or the health professionals, now needs to be added, certainly with our psychiatrists and psychologists, as well as our social workers and so forth. So, it's become a much more broad aspect of the health community, that we see needs, in terms of that.

What affects our airmen—Active Duty, Guard, and Reserve—to a degree, our civilians, but also—principally, those in uniform—affects our family members, as well. And so, the stresses that our airmen have, you know, can obviously have a dramatic impact, perhaps that we've not seen before.

And I'll close on this point—is that what we are also discovering, as well as—quite frankly, we still have to continue to strive for—and that is to create an environment, to create—either at our bases at home or deployed—whereby mental health becomes something that is no longer the stigma, but it's something that is certainly—that we can all understand and relate to, and it becomes strictly—on only within the health professionals, but the commanders' challenge, as well.

Senator Ben Nelson: Well, I guess I'd ask this of all of you. If we are able to even out the time at home and the deployment, in terms of the number of months, so that there's less time deployed, more time at home, will that help some of the mental stress that we're seeing on the families, as well as on the servicemembers? Obviously, it's going to help some, but will we see anything appreciable coming from that?

Let's—Dr. Chu?

Dr. Chu: First, I should emphasize that the—again, we survey the military person about his or her perception of a family's support for that military career choice. We also do survey the spouses about their outlook. And those indicators have held up remarkably well across this period of time. Now, that's not to say there isn't stress there. I don't want to suggest that. But, when you take into account the kind of energy that, for example, General Rochelle described the Army is putting in some of these support programs, net—net—the military family is reasonably satisfied with where it stands.

Certainly, they would like to see the military person spend more time at home. That is a constant complaint.

I would not, however, overemphasize that attitude to the exclusion of what I think is an equally important factor, and that's pre-

dictability. I think the whole issue of expectations is a central element here. What do we promise—or what do we lead people to believe will be the compact between us and them? And what do we deliver? And I would hope that we'd pay equal attention to that issue. We ask our military persons, properly, to do a lot of tough, demanding things, spend a lot of time away from home. The military is there to be deployed, in the end. I don't think we want to shrink from that reality. We want to be honest with our families about it. But, we want to be constant, so much as world events permit us, in honoring whatever expectation we set. And I think that's really the issue out there. Can we set a reasonable set of expectations? Can we honor those expectations? Can we avoid breaking our word to our people? That, I think, above all, is the most important thing.

Senator Ben Nelson: Well, as you know, I think—I'm trying to remember whether it was April, where the extension was put in place, and that many of the servicemembers in the war zones—war zone found out about it, because it came through the news back here at home, and they found out about it from their families.

Dr. Chu: Yes, and that—if you're going to have bad news, you're obviously right, sir, you want to communicate it to the affected parties first. That—we have tightened up those procedures. It is tough, given the time-zone differences, given notification requirements here on the Hill, and so on and so forth, to tell everybody first. I mean, that is a challenging assignment, I would acknowledge.

General Rochelle: If I may, Mr. Chairman, we were particularly displeased with the way that announcement went, the way it occurred. And we're striving very, very aggressively to make sure that never happens again, in terms of notifying families. That's leader responsibility, and that's exactly how we view it.

To your question, predictability is key. Predictability for the soldier, predictability for the family. And I would not want us to perceive the lack of predictability as anything other than a stressor, in and of itself. So, the answer to your question is yes.

Senator Ben Nelson: Thank you.

In terms of the wounded warrior issues, Secretary Chu, the committee recently received a letter signed by your principal deputy, Secretary Dominguez, and Secretary Cooper, from the Veterans Administration, saying that they couldn't meet the February 1 statutory requirement for an interim report on the policy, as required by the Wounded Warrior Act, and stating that the interim report would be submitted by February 15th. I'm not going to quarrel over a few days, but can you tell us—since the 15th has passed, whether there's another extension that you're going to talk about, or you could tell us that there might be a date that we might expect it?

Dr. Chu: Let me go back and check why we're late against the late date. That's not excusable. [INFORMATION]

Senator Ben Nelson: Yeah. Now, I wasn't trying to catch you—

Dr. Chu: No, no. I don't have a good answer for you, sir. I don't know.

Senator Ben Nelson: Okay.

The President, in his—and this is, again, for Dr. Chu—in the State of the Union speech, the President referred to the importance of implementing the recommendations of the Dole-Shalala Commis-

sion to Improve the Care and Treatment of our Wounded Warriors. And I believe that the Wounded Warrior Act included in the National Defense Authorization Act that the President signed into law on the 28th of this year—of January—addresses all but one of the recommendations of that Commission. The recommendation that the Wounded Warrior Act does not address is the recommendation to restructure the VA disability payments into three payments: transition payments, earnings lost payments, and quality of life payments. The VA Committees of the House and the Senate are holding hearings to address this recommendation.

Well, first let me ask you, Do you agree that the Wounded Warrior Act addresses all but one of the recommendations of the Commission? I—we have to establish some groundwork, first of all. Is there only remaining that hasn't been—

Dr. Chu: I think the way I would see it, sir, is that the central proposition of Dole-Shalala was not addressed. That is this big issue, What should the annuity and disability system look like? And as you have summarized, there would be several changes for VA. And VA has launched the studies, even though Congress did not adopt the recommendation. Likewise, the other provision is that we would vastly simplify the medical retirement decision in Defense. If you're not fit for duty and you're medically retired, you get a much smaller annuity, but it would not be subject to concurrent receipts; you would actually receive it, and we would end a lot of the quarreling that goes on about what your status is. I do think the Department's view of this is, this is the central provision, this is the heart of other Dole-Shalala proposition. We hope the Congress would enact it. We also recognize that one of its benefits is, it sets up a sharper division of labor between DOD and VA. Our job then becomes focused on, Is this medical condition unfitting for military service? If the answer is yes, "Thank you for your service," you move over to the VA, and they deal with the remaining issues.

So, I do hope that Congress will act on this important issue.

Senator Ben Nelson: And, of course, we're all going to call that "seamless," because it's going to happen automatically, as—

Dr. Chu: I do think part of the advantage of what Dole-Shalala have recommended is that it's a much simpler sort of decision, as far as DOD is concerned. And it basically—and there is some controversy about this, I would acknowledge—but, basically removes DOD from the rehabilitation business. And I think that's part of where some of the current issues arise.

Senator Ben Nelson: Well, the—your determination by DOD, versus VA, was, in many instances, for different reasons. And we understand.

Dr. Chu: Yes, sir.

Senator Ben Nelson: This will—

Dr. Chu: And that's statutory in—

Senator Ben Nelson: Yes.

Dr. Chu: —its foundation. And, therefore, we need your action to clarify the roles.

Senator Ben Nelson: Now, as that legislation gets introduced, should I assume that the funding for it is already included in the DOD budget?

Dr. Chu: Since it's not yet enacted—well—

Senator Ben Nelson: In anticipation—

Dr. Chu: The way it would affect the DOD budget is through the normal cost percentage for the retirement account, which would change. And that requires, under the laws that affect that account, the actuaries to pronounce—and I believe the situation is, until it's enacted, they won't actually make that change.

Senator Ben Nelson: Well, the—but, would they have some idea of what—

Dr. Chu: Yes, we do have—yes, sir, we do have estimates of what the net cost would be.

Senator Ben Nelson: Okay.

Dr. Chu: Not necessarily sanctioned by the actuaries, I emphasize. This is what we have done—

Senator Ben Nelson: Actuarial, yeah.

Dr. Chu: —we have done.

Senator Ben Nelson: I understand the difference between estimates and actuarial science. One's by an estimator, the other is by an actuary, or something like that. [Laughter.]

Senator Ben Nelson: That's what they would tell you. [Laughter.]

Dr. Chu: We love our actuaries, sir.

Senator Ben Nelson: Well, there's nothing better than trying to figure out the algorithms, I do know that from my own prior experience.

Question about the fiscal year budget 2009 of the Departments that includes 2,036 military-to-civilian conversions for medical military billets. It appears inconsistent with Section 721 of the conference report for the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2008, which expressly prohibits the Department from converting any additional military medical and dental positions to civilian positions in—until September 30, 2012. Is—are we misreading this, or is this actually happening?

Dr. Chu: Sir, we, of course, will obey the law, as it's written. The budget was prepared before the enactment of the authorization bill, which didn't come til January, as you well—

Senator Ben Nelson: Right.

Dr. Chu: —are aware. We are also—we will also be submitting a legislative proposal to change back to the prior regime. Obviously, that would be, ultimately, your decision. So, we recognize that, unless the law changes, we can't actually make the conversions, but we would like to be able to pursue some of those conversions in the future.

Senator Ben Nelson: So, we won't have the conversions in the future unless we have the actual authorization, and have it handled by legislation.

Dr. Chu: We will be sending you a—we will be sending you a legislative proposal to reverse the action just taken. If it should receive favorable action by the Congress, then we would be able to make some of these conversions.

Admiral Harvey: Dr. Chu, may I add something on that?

Senator Ben Nelson: Oh, sure.

Admiral Harvey: Sir, we—

Senator Ben Nelson: Anybody—feel free to—

Admiral Harvey: Yes, sir. We certainly got the message. It's been received and acknowledged for, and we will carry out the law.

One thing I would just put on the table for you, sir, is that the appropriations to support the end strength that we're going to have to carry are not there. And so, it will require, in a long term—in the short term, we're going to do what we have to do to provide medical care across the board to where we have to do it, but, in the long term, we do have an issue here, in that the appropriations that we have do not match what is now going to be the end strength we need to carry with the current force structure. So, something either changes in our operational force structure, in terms of end strength to support the increased military end strength we'll carry, or, you know, we have to find some other means here. But, it is a significant issue for us, as we carry out the law.

General Rochelle: If I may, Mr. Chairman.

Senator Ben Nelson: Sure.

General Rochelle: Another nuance, not at all insignificant, to piggyback on my colleagues' comments, we may also require, in addition to the appropriations to accompany the reversal back military spaces, standard-of-grade relief, just to highlight something, because, as we bring the military structure back in, we're going to bump—inside the same end-strength structure—we're going to bump against standard-of-grade ceilings. So, I mention that, if you please, for the record.

Senator Ben Nelson: Sure. Okay, thank you.

Well, I was hoping that we didn't have the situation where the—developed, where we now had a fourth branch of government. When I was Governor, I always knew we had three branches of government—executive, legislative, and judiciary—and then the fourth branch, the Department of Roads. [Laughter.]

Senator Ben Nelson: They did whatever they felt they wanted to do. So, I didn't think we had that developing here. We'll find a way to smooth that out, to the best extent possible.

In terms of respite care, General Coleman, in your written statement, you said that the Marine Corps offers Active Duty families enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program up to 40 hours of free respite care per month to enable caregivers to get breaks while still nurturing the needs of family members with special needs. This sounds like a very important program for these families with special needs. Can you give us a little bit more about it and how it—who it covers and—

General Coleman: Yes, sir.

Senator Ben Nelson: —and how you are able to fund it?

General Coleman: Yes, sir. This is a great success and news story. The Commandant was able to procure some funds for this, and some given from OSD, some from the—from within the Marine Corps, that allows these special needs—and I think we're all special needs when it comes to that—but, to give the caregivers—to give the homemaker some time away. One of my dearest friends, his son has autism, and his wife is there all the time. A thing like this allows her some downtime, some alone time, some "Let me get myself together" time. And this is—I believe it's in the 36- to 40-hours-a-month time, where she can get away and get some well-needed—she or he—some well-needed rest. And it's a great program.

We stole it from the Army, because we weren't as involved in it as the Army was. And Mrs. Conway, the Commandant's wife, read an article, where the Army was all over this, and she said, "Hey, Marine Corps, we need some of this, too." So, it's a great, great news story, sir.

Senator Ben Nelson: It certainly is family-friendly and—and in recognition of reality for people with—families with those special needs. So—maybe the other two services—well, you stole it from the Army, so—[Laughter.]

Senator Ben Nelson: —maybe you can give it to the Navy and give it to the Air Force. [Laughter.]

General Rochelle: I'd like to thank the—my colleague for the acknowledgment. [Laughter.]

Senator Ben Nelson: Well, there is nothing better than to find good programs on what you would call the exceptional programs that are there, that's certainly available for others to look at. And I—one of those, I commented about yesterday with Secretary Geren, and that is maternity leave—maternity time, after delivering the baby, for the mother not to be deployed sooner than 12 months, I think is the Navy's—

Admiral Harvey: Yes, sir.

Senator Ben Nelson: —standard; 6 months, the Marine; and, I think, 4 months for the Army and the Air Force, at the moment, and suggested that that be reviewed because of —well, a variety of different reasons, all of which makes some sense, that if we want to be a family-friendly force, the last thing we need to do is create a—let a situation develop, or continue to be there, that might cause a choice between having a family and not having a family, if you can—if you can keep the spouse that's a member, both as a mother and as a servicemember. I mean, that's the objective. We don't want to train people and then have, as you know, those kinds of roadblocks or those kinds of hindrances that would cause people to say, "Well, at some point, I guess I'll just have to hang it up, because I want to have a family, and 4 months is not enough in between deployments," not knowing what future deployments may be.

Dr. Chu, would you have some thoughts—

Dr. Chu: Let me comment on that—

Senator Ben Nelson: —on that?

Dr. Chu: —sir. I do think—I'd like to make several points. First of all, 4 months is a minimum. Services are free to adopt more. You've noted some have. Second, the services—and I've spoken to both the Army and Air Force assistant Secretaries for Manpower on this matter—will use waivers to deal with individual situations. I do think we need to be a little careful that we don't damage the standing of women as a key element of the force, in saying that they should not share their part of the overall force burdens, in terms of how we utilize them, and that's the reason that Department has looked at it in the past, and, I think, end judgments, they would be—should look at it again, the notion of a sabbatic period for—which I think may be a superior alternative for those who would like room within which to develop a family. Maybe—and the Navy has expressed interest in this before. The Department has never really come to a good conclusion about this. It would require statutory assistance, in my judgment, in order to have a successful

program, so people could step out of their military role, maintain some degree of benefit support during that period of time—perhaps most importantly, healthcare—but not be part of the active Force for a period of 1 or 2 years. And that may really be the solution, for those who need more time off, whether it's to care for a relative or to start a family or for other purposes.

Senator Ben Nelson: That was going to be my next question. If you—if you're going to have maternity leave, is it possible, without absolutely adversely affecting the possibility of a deployment of a person, other conditions where you might grant a waiver to keep them in the military; otherwise—they have a choice. They could leave—

Dr. Chu: Right.

Senator Ben Nelson: —and we lose the—

Dr. Chu: Right

Senator Ben Nelson: —training and—

Dr. Chu: Right. And we don't want to lose the trained personnel. On the other hand—

Senator Ben Nelson: Right

Dr. Chu: —I do think we have to remember, the military is there as a deployable force. That is its primary mission.

I should add, also into the record, that mothers all receive 6 weeks maternity leave.

Senator Ben Nelson: Yes.

Dr. Chu: It's a separate matter.

Senator Ben Nelson: We worked on that, so that now, I believe, we've got something for adoptive mother—adoptive parents, as well, recognizing that it's not just the biological situation that we're recognizing, but also the family relationship that's developing and bonding that's required, as well. And, otherwise, we run into other issues. And I was glad to find that particular situation that we could cite as a reason to change the policy?

General?

General Rochelle: Mr. Chairman, may I simply state, for the record, that, at the direction of the Secretary—Secretary Geren and General Casey—our policy is actively under review.

Admiral Harvey: Sir, this is a not a small issue. You know, we have—17 percent of the Navy right now is made up of women, and our incoming classes in ROTC and the Naval Academy is about 22–23 percent. And I expect that the percentage of women in the Navy will grow steadily over the next few years. So, they'll be picking up a larger and larger contribution of our overall effort.

So, we have to be able to come up with the means and the manner in which we will also get the retention of this group that is equivalent to the male sailors that we now enjoy. The sad fact is that female retention in our surface warfare and aviation communities is about one-third of their male counterparts. So, we run up against this issue every day, and we have to keep pushing forward on this aspect of our service, and the nature of our service, to ensure that we reach all the talent we have to have to deliver the capabilities we must, and find a way to keep that talent with us, regardless of gender.

So, this is a very big issue, and I think it's going to get bigger for us over time.

Senator Ben Nelson: Well, if we don't get it right, we lose our investment in personnel, the cost of training, and then we're faced with replacement—replacing those trained personnel. We don't have to perform miracles, we just have to figure out what works and what will keep us in the mix as they make decisions about family. And if we've got those things that are roadblocks or inhibitors, we're obviously going to—we're going to pay the price of the loss of—in retention.

Admiral Harvey: And I think we can do this in a way to express the concern, that Dr. Chu so rightly expressed, that we can never forget, we are an expeditionary force. We are routinely forward-deployed. We are expected to go forward and do hard things in hard places. That's never going to change. That's the core element of who we are and what we do. But, I do believe that we can find a way to bring these two issues together that will result in the kind of outcomes we need to sustain this force in the future with the demographics that simply are before us.

Senator Ben Nelson: And, General Newton, I think you might have been at—or, out at STRATCOM at the time that we found out about the Air Force couple that were—served as the example for why we were able to get this—

General Newton: Yes, sir.

Senator Ben Nelson: —policy changed.

General Newton: Yes, sir. I think—just to echo some of the comments made here—is that we, too, are expeditionary Air Force with unique challenges that we have in the 21st century. We constantly survey, from commander surveys and so forth, throughout our force, both Active Duty, Guard, and Reserve, to make sure that we are certainly in touch with the realities that our airmen and their families face. In this case, that—and we also stand tall and not take for granted the fact that we—it's an All-Volunteer Force, and that it's just unique circumstances we have. So, constantly, it's under review and assessment to make sure that we're on the mark.

Senator Ben Nelson: Well, thank you.

Those are generally the questions that I have. Would there be any comments that anybody would like to make before we adjourn the hearing?

Now, I would say thank you for what you do, day in and day out. Thank you for the members of your service, for what they do.

Thank you, Dr. Chu, for what you, at the Pentagon, do to keep our country safe, to keep our military functioning as an expeditionary force and ready to go and deploy as the need requires.

I appreciate the fact that we don't ignore reality just to try to stay ready to go. And there are other considerations about how we can go about doing it that will not get in the way. And moving toward programs of transferability of education, of other opportunities, just simply enhance the ability of the military to stay an All-Volunteer Force. Competition is such that they're—you're up against the corporate world, against the government of—local governments and others to—for the same young people, and to retain the ones you have. So, it just behooves us all to continue to work together to try to find ways to just make it that much more friendly.

And it's easy to say that in a hostile world, but that's what we have to do. We have to have this military- friendly for the people so we can protect ourselves from a hostile world.

Dr. Chu: Mr. Chairman, thank you—

Senator Ben Nelson: General?

Dr. Chu: —for the actions you and your subcommittee members have taken in support of the military forces, the partnership that has allowed us, I think, to sustain this fine force over the course of the last 7 years.

Senator Ben Nelson: Well, thank you. And—

General?

General Coleman: Sir, I would like to jump onto your kind nature there, and also Senator Graham, when you asked if there's anything you can do. My mother used to say, "If you want something fixed, you go to the people that can fix it." So, if I may, back in—

Senator Ben Nelson: Yes, go right ahead.

General Coleman: —back in December, the Commandant, General Conway, discussed with me, in a one-way discussion where I was listening, that the Army—and I've already vetted this with my good friend and colleague, Lieutenant General Rochelle, so there's no hard feelings here—but the Army is having a little bit of concern with their company-grade officers staying on Active Duty. And there's a couple of programs where they give upwards of \$30,000, depending on the specialty, so that they—so that they stay. Well, we, in the Marine Corps, aren't having that problem—knock on wood—and—but, the Commandant, in December, said, "Ron, I'd like to reward our company-grade officers. Is there some way that I can say to those officers, to all the company-grade officers that are staying, 'Hey, I'd like to—here's 2,000—here's \$3,000, you know, go do something. Thank you for staying. No commitment.'"

Senator Ben Nelson: A reward, as opposed to, perhaps, an incentive?

General Coleman: Yes, sir. Or, sir, what—it reminds me of, when I returned from Vietnam in 1970, the great State of Pennsylvania gave me a whopping \$300 and said, "Thanks for your service." So, we vetted that, and we've come up against quite a few roadblocks. We were told that we could do that if we made them sign on for another 1, 2, or 3 years. And that's not the—that's not what we want to do. We don't—they're already staying for the 1 or 2 or 3 years that we want. All the Commandant would like to do is say, "Thank you for your service." So, if you could—if you could give us a hand there, sir, in either pointing me in the right direction or at least acknowledging to the Commandant that I said that, so I don't have any more one-way—[Laughter.]

General Coleman: —one-way conversations, I certainly would appreciate it, sir.

Senator Ben Nelson: I suspect he's going to know, by the end of the day. [Laughter.]

Senator Ben Nelson: Well, that is a worthy consideration, because we talk about incentives, but we ought to also think about it in terms of "thank you" recognition, as well. A pat on the back is helpful, but very often there are other things that you could do

to make it even better. So, we will take that under consideration, under advisement, clearly

And, once again, thank you, everybody, for being here. I appreciate, so much, your input. As you know, and as my colleague and I—clearly indicate that this is a bipartisan effort here. There's nothing partisan about making sure that our men and women in uniform are receiving the best and having the best opportunity to do their job, and to be able to do it well, and also for us to be able to say "thank you" in a number of different ways, all of which, I hope, are helpful and express our appreciation for what they do and what you do.

So, with that, unless there's anything else, I'll call it adjourned, ahead of time.

[Whereupon, at 4:57 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]