

Advance Questions for Michael Dominguez
Nominee for the Position of Assistant Secretary of the Air Force
(Manpower and Reserve Affairs)

Defense Reforms

More than a decade has passed since the enactment of the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 and the Special Operations reforms.

Do you support full implementation of these defense reforms?

What is your view of the extent to which these defense reforms have been implemented?

What do you consider to be the most important aspects of these defense reforms?

Yes, I support full implementation of Goldwater-Nichols. Considerable effort has been made to implement these reforms over the past 15 years, and the right mechanisms are in place and working. In my opinion, Goldwater-Nichols is probably one of the most significant pieces of legislation enacted in the second half of the 20th century -- greatly improving the organization of the Department of Defense and focusing our joint warfighting capabilities.

The goals of the Congress in enacting these defense reforms, as reflected in section 3 of the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act, can be summarized as strengthening civilian control; improving military advice; placing clear responsibilities on the combatant commanders for the accomplishment of their missions; ensuring the authority of the combatant commanders is commensurate with their responsibility; increasing attention to the formulation of strategy and to contingency planning; providing for more efficient use of defense resources; and enhancing the effectiveness of military operations and improving the management and administration of the Department of Defense.

Do you agree with these goals?

Yes.

Recently, there have been articles which indicate an interest within the Department of Defense in modifying Goldwater-Nichols in light of the changing environment and possible revisions of the national strategy.

Do you anticipate that legislative proposals to amend Goldwater-Nichols may be appropriate? If so, what areas do you believe it might be appropriate to address in these proposals?

Goldwater-Nichols has served the Department of Defense well since 1986; however, there are dynamics today different from 15 years ago that may warrant review of some provisions, such as the personnel assignment rules and how we select joint specialty officers. If

confirmed, I would like to explore those issues, in cooperation with Congress, to ensure we have sufficient flexibility in the management of our personnel resources in a joint environment.

Duties

What is your understanding of the duties and functions of the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force (Manpower and Reserve Affairs)?

The principle duties of the Assistant Secretary are to support the tasks assigned by the Secretary of the Air Force. Based on my understanding, the duties will include providing guidance, direction, and oversight for Air Force manpower/personnel programs; medical readiness and health care; plus Reserve Component affairs. I've been briefed that the Assistant Secretary also is responsible for programs to prohibit discrimination and oversight of the operation of the Secretary of the Air Force Personnel Council and its component boards -- the Air Force Civilian Appellate Review Office and the Air Force Board for the Correction of Military Records.

What background and experience do you possess that you believe qualifies you to perform these duties?

I am humbled that the President would nominate me for this Assistant Secretary position, and, if confirmed, pledge my sincere efforts to uphold the duties with honor and integrity. There are several components of my background that I believe make me well suited for this position. First, I am a veteran who, as a graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point, proudly served our nation at home and abroad. Those experiences shaped my appreciation for the sacrifices made by our men and women who serve in uniform—both active and the Reserve Component. Second, I bring over 15 years experience as a civil servant -- serving at various levels of responsibilities within the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Department of the Navy. That has provided me an invaluable insight into the day-to-day workings of the Department, its civilian/military structure, and its relationship with the Congress and other Federal agencies. Last, I bring a strong background in program analysis, the Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System, and business acumen that will provide me the basis to review and assess our various manpower and personnel issues.

Do you believe that there are actions you need to take to enhance your ability to perform the duties of the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force (Manpower and Reserve Affairs)?

If confirmed, I look forward to learning more about the Air Force, its mission and its people, in order that I can best work the recruiting, retention, health, and quality of life issues impacting our Total Force

Assuming you are confirmed, what duties and functions do you expect that the Secretary of the Air Force would prescribe for you?

If confirmed, I look forward to being a part of Secretary Roche's management team, and I would expect him to assign me duties consistent with the position -- providing guidance and oversight for the various Air Force manpower and Reserve Component programs.

In carrying out your duties, how will you work with the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Management Policy, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, and the Chief of Air Force Reserve?

If confirmed, I plan to foster a close working relationship with my civilian counterparts in the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the other Services, plus with the Air Force Chief of Staff and the Chief's of the Reserve Components, in order to effectively oversee our "people" programs.

Priorities

What broad priorities will you establish in terms of issues which must be addressed by the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force (Manpower and Reserve Affairs)?

From my perspective, the challenges of recruiting and retaining an all-volunteer force in a tight, competitive job market cannot be overstated. If confirmed, I will focus my attention on those two principle areas to ensure we maintain the right level of emphasis and resources. The Air Force must have competitive, flexible personnel programs to attract and retain the best and the brightest in service to their country. Also, I will continue the focus on the Air Force's quality of life programs, such as health care; workplace environment; and affordable housing.

Major Challenges and Problems

In your view, what are the major challenges that will confront the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force (Manpower and Reserve Affairs)?

Air Force people -- active military, reserve, guard and civilian employees -- are the key ingredient to our mission success. As such, I would consider the top challenges to be recruitment, retention, civilian force management, and preservation of quality military health care.

Assuming you are confirmed, what plans do you have for addressing these challenges?

If confirmed, I would plan to consult with the Secretary of the Air Force and other key leaders to immediately address these four priorities, establishing timelines and working towards comprehensive solutions. Also, I look forward to working with this committee and other members of Congress to ensure we have a supportable gameplan.

What do you consider to be the most serious problems in the performance of the functions of the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force (Manpower and Reserve Affairs)?

Not having served in that position, I am not able to identify any shortcomings at this time.

If confirmed, what management actions and time lines would you establish to address these problems?

Not having served in that position, I am not prepared to identify those at this time.

Officer Management Issues

We consider promotions to general and flag officer ranks as identifying military officers for very senior positions that should be filled only by officers with the very highest moral and ethical values.

Do you believe the officer corps has confidence in the integrity of the officer promotion system in the Air Force?

I wholeheartedly agree that integrity, character, moral and ethical values are critical qualities for those serving in the Air Force's senior leadership positions. Although I have not been involved personally in the Air Force officer promotion process, my initial impression is that the system appears to be working well.

If confirmed, what role do you, as Assistant Secretary of the Air Force (Manpower and Reserve Affairs), expect to play in the officer promotion system?

From my viewpoint, the integrity of the officer promotion system is a critical responsibility of the Assistance Secretary. If confirmed, I will have the opportunity to work with the Secretary of the Air Force to provide oversight of every aspect of the promotion process. My goal will be to continue the fair and equitable consideration of all officers, to ensure confidence and integrity in the system, and to ensure boards are conducted in accordance with applicable laws and Department of Defense directives.

If confirmed, what role do you, as Assistant Secretary of the Air Force (Manpower and Reserve Affairs) expect to play in the general officer management and nomination process?

I will have no active role in the general officer nomination process, but will support the Secretary of the Air Force, as needed, on any general officer issue.

If confirmed, what steps will you take to ensure that only the most highly qualified officers are nominated for promotion to general and flag officer rank?

I understand that there are ongoing activities in the Air Force to institute a comprehensive leadership development system focused on core competencies needed for future aerospace leaders. If confirmed, I will ensure that leadership development continues to be high priority for the Air Force.

Protected Communications

Section 1034, Title 10, United States Code, prohibits taking retaliatory personnel action against a member of the armed forces as reprisal for making a protected communication. By definition, protected communications include communications to certain individuals and organizations outside of the chain of command. We continue to see a lack of understanding in the senior military leadership of the policy that it is appropriate and necessary to protect service members who report misconduct to appropriate authorities outside of the chain of command.

Do you support prohibiting retaliatory personnel actions for making protected communications?

Yes, most definitely.

If confirmed, what actions will you take to ensure that senior military leaders understand the need to protect service members who report misconduct to appropriate authorities within or outside the chain of command?

If confirmed, I will work with the Secretary of the Air Force to ensure we continue to educate and communicate to the senior military leadership the provisions of this important section of the law.

Operating Tempo

The services have been very concerned in recent years about the impact of the pace of operations or “optempo” on the quality of life of our people in uniform and specifically on their willingness to reenlist.

If confirmed, what steps do you plan to take to address the Air Force optempo concerns?

Sustained TEMPO takes a toll on the personnel of any organization, and, if confirmed, I pledge my efforts to explore ideas that will help alleviate the burden on Air Force people. Having read about the new Aerospace Expeditionary Force (AEF), I am encouraged that the Air Force’s senior leadership shares that same concern, as the AEF appears to provide greater predictability and stability for Air Force members.

Recruiting and Retention

For its active duty forces, the Air Force achieved its recruiting goal for 2000 and projects that it will meet its FY2001 objective. However, it does not appear that the Air Force will meet its 2nd and 3rd term retention goals and will miss its required end strength by 4,100. When this shortage is combined with the Air Force request for an end strength increase of 1800 for FY 2002, the Air Force may have a significant recruiting challenge next year.

What steps will you take, if confirmed, to assist the Air Force in meeting its recruiting and retention goals?

If confirmed, I look forward to focusing attention on this difficult challenge. Specifically, I believe that improving retention goes a long way to resolving recruiting challenges. Since retention decisions are generally family decisions in today's military, I'd like to address issues that impact both the member and his or her family.

What steps will you take, if confirmed, to assist the reserve components in achieving their recruiting and retention goals?

If confirmed, I will support the Reserve Components recruiting and retention initiatives, including seeking sufficient funding for various quality of life and advertising programs and working to ensure a reasonable parity of benefits.

Homosexual Conduct Policy

Do you support the current Department of Defense Homosexual Conduct Policy?

Yes.

If confirmed, do you plan to make any changes to the basic policy or its implementation? If so, what changes will you propose?

I am unaware of any need for change, however, if confirmed, I will work with DoD to ensure fair and equitable personnel policies for all members.

Anthrax Vaccine Immunization Program

DoD considers the biological agent anthrax to be the greatest biological weapon threat to our military force because it is highly lethal, easy to produce in large quantities, and remains viable over long periods of time. The anthrax vaccination program has been curtailed because of limited quantities of FDA approved vaccine.

If confirmed, will you support and enforce the Anthrax Vaccine Immunization Program if DoD reinstates it?

Biological warfare is a very real threat and I believe we need to provide the best protection available to the men and women serving our nation. If confirmed, I will pursue all avenues of medical readiness for our troops.

How do you believe the Air Force should respond to service members who refuse to take the vaccine when ordered to do so?

If confirmed, I will work with the Secretary of the Air Force to ensure our policies are consistent and that each case is handled fairly and on its merits.

Montgomery GI Bill

Almost all new service members enroll in and contribute to the Montgomery GI Bill. Only about half use their benefits, and many do not use all of their entitlement. Many sailors and Marines say they would like to stay in the Service, but feel they have to leave so that they can provide for the education of their spouses and children. Some of these service members might stay in the service if they could transfer all or a part of their unused entitlement to GI Bill benefits to family members in return for a service commitment. Service Secretaries could use this retention tool selectively, just as they use reenlistment bonuses.

If confirmed, will you give serious consideration to how the Air Force could use the transfer of unused GI Bill benefits to family members as a retention tool and provide your thoughts on how we best do this?

From my viewpoint, the significant contribution of the Montgomery GI Bill to the military, and to the nation as a whole, cannot be overstated. I would be glad to consider the use of transferability and provide thoughts on the proposal to the committee, if confirmed.

If you confirmed, will you give serious consideration to how the Air Force could use the award of U.S. Savings Bonds as a flexible means to enable Sailors and Marines to save money for the education of themselves and their dependents?

If confirmed, I will be happy to consider how U.S. Savings Bonds may be used as a reenlistment incentive.

Gender Integrated Training

Basic training, which may be the single most important phase of an individual's life in the military, is structured and defined differently by each Service.

Do you believe the current DoD policy of allowing each of the Services to establish its own policy for gender integration in Basic Training is effective?

From my understanding, gender integrated training has worked well for the Air Force and has been in effect for the last 20 years. I believe that Service Secretaries must have the flexibility to determine the most effective training methods for their individual environment as they are held accountable for training, organizing and equipping their forces.

If confirmed, will you propose changes to Air Force policies? If so, what changes will you propose?

I am unaware of the need for any changes.

Concurrent Receipt

Military retirees with disabilities incurred during their military service are eligible to receive military retired pay from the Department of Defense and veterans' disability compensation from the Department of Veterans' Affairs. However, current law requires that military retired pay be reduced by the amount of the veterans' benefits.

If confirmed, would you support a change in the law to permit disabled military retirees to receive their full retired pay as well as their disability compensation?

Any such change in the law would obviously carry a significant monetary impact and I have not had the opportunity to examine this in detail. I appreciate the importance of this issue to our disabled military retirees, and, if confirmed, will look into the merits of this proposed change.

Management of the Congressional Fellowship Program

For the past several years, the Committee has expressed concern about the management of legislative fellows by the military departments and the Department of Defense.

If confirmed, will you review the Department's policies pertaining to the management of legislative fellows and provide the Committee your assessment of which management reforms have been implemented and which require additional action?

If confirmed, I will review the Department's policies and provide the Committee an assessment.

What are your personal views on the value and current management of the legislative fellowship program within the Air Force?

I have not had the opportunity to evaluate the management of the program within the Air Force. However, I do believe that legislative fellowship programs are valuable to the individual from a career broadening perspective, and that they enhance the important relationship between the military and the Congress.

After completing their fellowships, are legislative fellows assigned to positions in which the experience and knowledge they gained during their fellowship are used effectively?

I have no knowledge of individual assignment actions that may have taken place in the past. However, I would expect the experience gained by these individuals from a legislative fellowship should enhance their professional development and pay dividends for years to come, wherever they are assigned.

In your opinion, is it appropriate to bring a reserve component member on active duty solely to participate in a legislative fellowship program?

Yes. The Reserve components are a critical part of the Total Force and they would benefit from the same exposure and experience.

Management of Deployment of Members

Increasing operational demands on military personnel resulted in enactment of section 991 of Title 10, United States Code, and section 435 of Title 37, United States Code. Those provisions require the Services to manage the deployments of members and, if operational necessity so dictates, to pay per diem compensation to members whose deployed periods exceed prescribed limits. Additionally, each Service Secretary is required to establish a system for tracking and recording the number of days that each member of the armed forces under the jurisdiction of the Secretary is deployed.

Do you support the statutory framework set forth in the sections cited above? If so, do you believe any modifications to the law are necessary?

I am not sufficiently familiar with the law to determine if modifications are necessary, but will look into the issue if confirmed.

What is your understanding of the ability of the Air Force to comply with these statutes and implement the prescribed tracking and recording system?

It is my understanding that the Air Force is implementing a tracking and recording system that will comply with the full intent of the law.

Armed Forces Retirement Home

The Soldiers' and Airmen's Home in Washington, D.C. and the Navel Home in Gulfport, Mississippi, provide unique services to eligible military retirees but have experienced problems in funding and management.

Do you support an increase in the amount of money automatically deducted from the pay of active-duty enlisted personnel as a means of better funding the retirement homes?

I support the unique services provided by the Armed Forces Retirement Homes to retired military personnel. However, I have no current knowledge of the funding requirements and cannot advise on the appropriateness of budget adjustments.

If confirmed, what actions would you take to ensure the successful operation of the retirement homes?

The retirement homes are an important commitment to our retirees, and, if confirmed, I will actively work to ensure their successful operation.

Congressional Oversight

In order to exercise its legislative and oversight responsibilities, it is important that this Committee and other appropriate committees of the Congress are able to receive testimony, briefings, and other communications of information.

Do you agree, if confirmed for this high position, to appear before this Committee and other appropriate committees of the Congress?

Yes.

Do you agree, if confirmed, to appear before this Committee, or designated members of this Committee, and provide information, subject to appropriate and necessary security protection, with respect to your responsibilities as Assistant Secretary of the Air Force (Manpower and Reserve Affairs)?

Yes.