

**Opening Statement of the Secretary of Air Force  
Senate Armed Services Committee  
US Air Force Academy Sexual Assault Review  
30 September 2003**

Submitted for the Record

Mr. Chairman, Senator Levin, members of the Committee. Let me begin today by thanking the committee for inviting General Jumper, Ms. Walker and myself to update you on our actions regarding the Air Force Academy, as well as to provide you with some context for evaluating our approach to these problems and the decisions we have made.

Mr. Chairman, you and members of this committee have been actively involved in highlighting the scope and nature of the sexual assault problem at our Academy. You've offered us your thoughtful suggestions since this issue was first brought to our attention, and you were responsible for the appointment of an independent panel of American citizens to review this matter.

We commend the work of Congresswoman Fowler and her distinguished team of experts. Throughout their review, we required that our staff cooperate fully with the panel because our goal is the same as yours -- to provide for the safety and security of our cadets, and to ensure that we produce officers worthy of the special trust and confidence of our nation. We are grateful for Ms. Fowler's diligence, as well as her valuable recommendations. The commission has done a great service to the institution and to our Air Force. We have learned a lot and we wholeheartedly agree with her recommendations. However, I would want you to know that, in the report of the Working Group, there were no shields or any attempts to do anything other than to portray the facts so they might speak for themselves. We look forward to working with the Secretary of Defense and you as we move forward to study and act on the panel's findings.

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Mr. Chairman, from the very beginning of my tenure as Secretary, I have been intensely focused on sustaining our position as the world's finest air and space force. We do this, not merely by investing in platforms and systems, but principally by investing in people. Nowhere is this more important than one of our premier sources of training future leaders, the Air Force Academy. This is America's Academy. And because of the unique position of responsibility these officers will assume upon graduation, we owe it to you -- and the citizens you represent -- to get it right.

At the Academy, a singular purpose drives us: producing officers of character who are prepared to lead airmen in the profession of arms, potentially into harm's way.

Thus, we have been shocked and appalled to learn of the character failures of some of our cadets, and possibly, even some of our graduates. We do not condone these criminal acts, nor do we tolerate a culture that discourages the reporting of those who would perpetrate such acts. We must create an environment of trust and allegiance, not to misplaced notions of loyalty, but to

standards of officership that will not tolerate criminal behavior or the attitudes that allow sexual harassment and assault to occur.

Shortly after I assumed my post on June 1<sup>st</sup> of 2001, General Mike Ryan -- our Chief of Staff at the time -- and I talked about the Air Force Academy and about the fundamental obligation we have as custodians of this great institution. From the beginning of my tenure, one of my principal goals has been to strengthen this institution -- to reinforce the foundations that have produced our success, and to make changes that would advance our mission there. Working closely with Generals Ryan and Jumper, and long before the sexual assault issue was brought to our attention in January of this year, we have been actively engaged on Academy issues.

We sought to reinvigorate a sense of military professionalism. In the last months of 2001 and the first half of 2002, we had court-martialed more cadets than we had in the previous 10 years at the Academy -- eight for drugs alone. We had cadets involved in credit card theft, embezzlement, pornography, sodomizing a minor, and a stolen textbook ring. And we took firm action against each of them. This level of misconduct convinced me that we needed to invest yet more of our personal time and effort to make positive changes at the Academy. And that we have.

During my term to date, I've visited the Air Force Academy more than any other Air Force installation or operating location outside of Washington -- nine times. General Jumper has been there repeatedly as well. I believe that no previous Secretary of the Air Force or Chief of Staff has devoted more time and effort to the Air Force Academy than General Jumper and myself. In all these endeavors, our first concern was the welfare of the cadets at the Academy. I would like to review some highlights:

- In October of 2001, we went to Colorado to consider and make changes to the Academy's Honor Code system. Working with retired General Mike Cairns, who chaired an independent report on the honor system, we made it more responsive, added due process steps, and reaffirmed our commitment to the values that underlie the code.
- Immediately following this review, we took on the issue of recruited athletes. We were accepting an increasing percentage of recruited athletes. In March 2002, we issued our guidance, limiting the number of recruited athletes to no more than 25 percent of the incoming class. Again, we took this step to get the institution refocused on training, education, and character development of future Air Force officers.
- In May of 2002, I went to the Academy to focus on cadet military professionalism. During this meeting, I directed the establishment of a Senior Officer lecture series, wherein superb Air Force leaders -- officers like General Buzz Moseley and Chuck Wald -- would take a greater hand in the training and development of our future officers. General Jumper also encouraged every 4-star officer to visit the Academy annually. And I concluded this visit by doing what I want all of our leaders doing there -- teaching cadets personally. I chose to teach a case on acquisition ethics. General Jumper also taught a class.

- Over the summer of 2002, we took on the curriculum issue. We conducted a complete review of the curriculum and made significant changes to enhance the science and technology requirements for cadets. We established a new Systems Engineering major, expanded language requirements for liberal arts majors, and reinstated basic airmanship training for the cadets.
- And while we were working on these items, we cracked down on those who fell below standards: we clamped down on those involved with illicit drugs. We imprisoned the Cadet who assaulted the young lady at Summer Camp and implemented new screening rules for camp volunteers. Further, in this case, we took charge of the relation between the Academy and the young lady's family due to the poor performance of some of the Academy personnel involved. And, we removed a permanent professor -- a Department head -- who was responsible for an inappropriate and sexually explicit skit performed by some cadets.

We have tackled all these issues -- the Honor Code, recruited athletes, the curriculum, issues of character and leadership development, enforcement of standards, additional training for staff, and much more -- in my first 19 months on the job and General Jumper's first 16 months at the helm. At no point during this entire period were we informed about a major problem with gender relations or sexual assault. We spent time with alumni, alumnae, cadets, parents -- many of whom are active duty officers -- with daughters as well as sons attending the academy, faculty and ex-faculty. Two members of our staff were women with extensive experience at the Academy. I even maintained a dialogue with the Superintendent of the Naval Academy in an attempt to gain insight into potential problems. Yet, there were no suggestions of a widespread gender problem. This subject was not addressed openly by either officers or cadets. Had we received such information, I assure you our actions would have been as firm and swift and decisive as our approach to the other issues we faced.

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When we received a single e-mail from a cadet in January of this year, we were disturbed by its content, and the pain that was in the message. We contacted the author of the e-mail and we asked her if she would be willing to come in to talk to our representatives. She did so, and brought a former cadet as well. What they had to tell raised serious concerns.

Based on these reports -- as well as reports to members of Congress, especially Senator Allard -- we took immediate action. We chartered a Working Group in January, under the leadership of the Air Force General Counsel, the Honorable Mary Walker. In our charter to the team, we specifically and intentionally focused on determining the scope of the problem at the Academy, and what did we need to do to begin to fix it. What went wrong? How could it happen? How long has it been going on? We asked them to undertake a comprehensive review of the Academy programs and practices that were designed to deter and respond to sexual assault incidents, and to report their findings with respect to the responsiveness, effectiveness, and fairness of our current programs. We wanted facts. We needed to change the Academy and earn again the confidence of the parents of our cadets -- especially those cadets considering entering the class of 2007. Our charter was very specific:

- Review the current programs, policies and practices at the Academy as compared to the rest of the Air Force;
- Review the cadet complaints and provide an opportunity for cadets, former cadets, and other members of the Academy community to make constructive comments;
- Evaluate how well the Academy's process to assist victims and punish offenders has worked in the last ten years;
- And to offer recommendations to us as a basis for us to make changes at the Academy.

Time was of the essence. We did not ask them to investigate, report on, or draw conclusions on the activities of the headquarters. We wanted facts and factual history, not speculation. Our immediate and compelling focus was to provide an environment for our cadets free from sexual assault and sexual harassment while ensuring that if a sexual assault did occur, the crime would be reported, the victim would be supported, and justice would be done. Within a week or so, I also directed the Air Force Inspector General to undertake a parallel investigation into every case where a victim felt that justice had not been done so as to assess command accountability. Furthermore, I directed Ms. Walker to develop a factual history in the report of the last ten years at the Academy to provide General Jumper and me with the basis for evaluating how our officers dealt with what they found there.

While the Working Group and the IG team was doing their work, General Jumper and I repeatedly went to the Academy to personally engage with the cadets and the leadership. I addressed the entire student body and the assembled faculty in February during a conference on Character and Leadership Development. The following week, General Jumper did the same. We made it absolutely clear that we were going to fix this problem, and that the cadets could expect significant change, not just in matters related to sexual assault, but in the entire Academy climate.

To learn, we reviewed the work of the Working Group as they developed history and diagnosis. When we received Ms. Walker's interim report in March, *we personally* assembled a group of officers and leaders with experience at the Academy, other academies, and Air Force ROTC to help us review an agenda that would allow us to make swift and decisive changes at our Academy.

Mr. Chairman, we want to be very clear how we viewed our responsibility: first and foremost, protect our cadets, reestablish the confidence of the parents of our cadets, attack any barriers to reporting, and begin to change the culture which had developed over the past two and a half decades that tolerated sexual harassment.

First, we expeditiously pursued our review at the Academy and issued our *Agenda for Change* because of our overarching responsibility to protect the cadets who were at the Academy and the incoming class. We were compelled to immediately address these issues so we could reassure the parents of our current and future cadets that their children would be safe. I'm proud to report that the class of 2007 has the fourth largest number of women in the Academy's history.

And, beyond all other matters, we were committed to eliminating the climate at the Academy that discouraged reporting of sexual assaults and encouraged a misplaced loyalty to protecting those who committed criminal acts. Our focus was on the Academy, its current cadets, and the incoming class. Our concern was to act to make swift and decisive change.

We viewed that as our responsibility as the Air Force's senior leaders. And it is why we issued an *Agenda for Change* that was a beginning of an overall, intensive effort to fix the problems at the Academy. We needed to make leadership changes to get the process started, and attack the entire climate, from basic cadet life and staff training to the specific processes by which we deter and respond to sexual assault. The preliminary Working Group Report was very helpful in giving us diagnoses and raising issues needing to be addressed.

The new Academy leadership team -- a team General Jumper and I assembled after interviewing many candidates -- and our Executive Steering Group at the Headquarters have taken the *Agenda for Change* and the General Counsel's final report and translated them in 63 action items. We've established a headquarters oversight mechanism that is tracking implementation as well as providing support to Academy leadership. And our team just returned from two-weeks at the Academy where they reviewed our progress to date. This construct will be made permanent and will ensure that our successors maintain the needed attention on the institution.

As of today, we can report that we have made progress in implementing these changes, although we have a great deal of work yet to do, as Ms. Fowler correctly notes in her report. Generals Rosa and Weida, and Colonels Gray and Monteith are officers of action and are the right leaders at the right time for the Academy. We have opened up the Academy to public scrutiny, and have invited all concerned with resolving these problems to offer their criticism and inputs. We have invited the cadets to be part of this process. We have worked with the other services and the leadership of the US Military Academy and the Naval Academy to capture their best practices. We have been open and direct with the Fowler Panel, the DoD Inspector General, the Board of Visitors, and this committee, as well as your counterparts in the House.

We recognize that our initial blueprint for action may need modifications, as in the case of our approach to a "confidentiality track" for victims. As we have already done, we will continue to modify our actions, to incorporate best practices, to ask help from outside experts, to bring the Academy in line with the processes used throughout the Air Force, and to ensure that we continue the process of changing the culture at the Academy.

As recent surveys have shown, changing attitudes will be something we can't solve in a matter of months, and significant problems still exist. While I feel confident that we have assured the safety of our cadets, it is disturbing to read in our latest cadet climate survey that more than 20 percent of our male cadets believe that women do not belong at the Academy. This calls into question our admissions procedures. More disturbing, these attitudes seem to have spread as cadets become more senior over time. In that same survey, however -- which General Weida and Colonel Gray briefed to us just last Friday -- our Freshman cadets reported they are confident in their new leadership, less tolerant of honor code violations, and are more likely to confront their peers. Further, our women cadets overwhelmingly expressed confidence that our new leadership team is serious about addressing issues of sexual harassment and assault. We

need to nurture those attitudes, and I'm confident that our new leadership at the Academy is moving in the right direction. We need to ensure that they do not become discouraged with the slow pace of progress.

It will take strong leadership and a consistency of purpose to sustain this movement. And, even though we've been at war as we've responded to this crisis, it's received no less attention than it would have during peacetime. We remain engaged, and will continue to take decisive action on matters of leadership, training, and the enforcement of standards at the Academy, and throughout the Air Force. This is our commitment to you and all those we serve. And, it is what the American people expect of those entrusted with their sons and daughters and the security of this nation.

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Mr. Chairman, there have been failures at the Air Force Academy; of that there is no doubt. General Jumper and I have been and remain intensely focused on correcting these problems and restoring the confidence of the American people in their Air Force Academy. Our focus throughout has been on fulfilling our goals of educating, training, and inspiring Air Force leaders of the highest character and integrity, ensuring the safety and security of every cadet, and enhancing the trust and confidence of the American people in the Academy. We will stay this course. With what we have learned from our interactions, the efforts of the Working Group and the Fowler Commission, and what we will learn from the IG investigations, we are prepared to deal with issues of accountability expeditiously.

We appreciate the support you and the members of the Congress have given us, and we sincerely appreciate the suggestions you have provided throughout our response to this crisis. Again, we appreciate and applaud the work of the Fowler Commission.

Thank you, I will be happy to answer your questions.