

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE PRESENTATION

TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES SENATE

SUBJECT: PERSONNEL POSTURE HEARING FOR FY25

STATEMENT OF:

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May 8, 2024

NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL
RELEASED BY THE COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES SENATE

INTRODUCTION

Chairwoman Warren, Ranking Member Scott, distinguished members of this subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you and represent your United States Space Force. I am excited to share with you the progress of the Space Force, building and managing a force capable of securing the Nation's interest in, from and to space. Winning in space requires equipping our Guardians with the tools, talents, and experiences necessary for space superiority, and the protection of the joint force, our allies, and our partners.

THE FORCE WE NEED

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

We have engaged in a modern approach to talent management incorporating education, training, and individualized development in addition to supporting a healthy work-life balance, holistic health, and family programs. In 2023, Congress passed the Space Force Personnel Management Act. Thank you for your support with this legislation. This will enable the Space Force to build a modern personnel management system that will better allow the Space Force to develop and retain the force it needs to be competitive and successful. The permeability between full-time and part-time military service within a single component will allow Guardians the flexibility to manage their careers and better meet personal and professional goals while meeting Space Force operational needs.

To ensure our force readiness, the Space Force is making a concerted effort to increase representation on the Joint Staff and within the combatant commands. This heightened presence enables dynamic responsiveness to the growing demand for space capabilities. Talented Guardians, well-versed in space equities, will play pivotal roles in shaping the future of Space Force leadership.

The needs of the Nation require we be operationally capable of deterring conflict and defending our Nation's interests immediately and boldly. To this end, we continue developing the training, systems, and experiences necessary to be the digital force required in any potential fight.

At the same time, we are enhancing our end strength through the investment in K-12 Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM), and higher education to increase our pipeline of talent, along with maximizing civilian personnel authorities. Our Guardians, both military and civilian, are our greatest strength.

END STRENGTH

The Space Force has requested 9,800 military end strength from Congress for fiscal year 2025. This is an increase of 400 from fiscal year 2024 enacted levels. We estimate that this is achievable given our understanding of today's recruiting and retention landscape for Space professionals. Also, with the enactment of the Personnel Management Act, approximately 1600 full- and part-time Air Force Reserve billets will transfer to the Space Force over the FYDP, the exact end strength for each fiscal year will depend on execution plan time-phasing. This summer we anticipate opening Tranche 1 for Air Force Reservists in Space-focused specialties who wish to transfer to a full-time USSF position.

As a result of this first window, any transfers in FY25 will be year of execution transfer. The Space Force will continue to manage military personnel inventory in support of new and evolving mission requirements to deter and defeat our adversaries in a contested space environment.

RECRUITING

The competitive market for STEM talent creates significant competition for those unique and essential capabilities necessary for the Space Force. Despite the environment, the Space Force, with the help of the Air Force Recruiting Service, exceeded our enlisted FY23 recruiting requirements by nearly 10% and are on track to meet our FY24 recruiting goals. As a Service, we have recruited exceptional talent in support of STEM and cyber-related disciplines needed to meet our complex mission set, with 99.5% of entries scoring in the upper half of the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery and ~97% graduating from Basic Military Training and Tech School. While we have been successful to date, the recruiting landscape is dynamic; there is a high demand for talent in these technical communities, across the Department of Defense, the United States Government, and industry. This year, the Department of Defense's Joint Advertising Market Research Studies program indicated that the Space Force brand recognition among our target audience is at 4%. The general lack of awareness concerning the Space Force "brand," requires uniquely innovative outreach and incentive methods to attract and retain highly-qualified talent in a challenging marketplace. To establish the Space Force as a known, credible, and critical military entity, we are investing \$18 million in fiscal year 2024 to develop unique Space Force marketing efforts.

Our focus today is on expanding our reach to parents, coaches, friends, and prospective Guardians in order to ensure our talent pipeline remains robust. We are focusing investments to ensure that our nation understands what the Space Force contributes to our national security and how a Guardian career offers opportunity to serve, educate, contribute, and defend our national interests.

TAKING CARE OF GUARDIANS

Managing Talent

The Space Force continues to shape the Guardian experience and foster an organizational culture that empowers exercising mission command to secure American interests in space and contributing our unique space domain expertise in joint operations. In addition to the recently passed Space Force Personnel Management Act, which will provide flexible full- and part-time work roles to capitalize on the best and brightest, connect with industry and academia, and recruit the next generation, we are redesigning career paths to provide skills, knowledge, and experience to meet the high tech demands of our operations. Additionally, while we continue to develop a new performance appraisal system focused on contributions to team and mission, we are implementing a Guardian-centric bridging strategy for evaluations tying our values to mission accomplishment. The Space Force is setting the foundation so ALL Guardians will be better prepared to meet the high-tech, data-centric, network-intensive joint operations need for success in future campaigns.

Training and Development

The Space Force is redesigning our Officer Training Course. Under this program, all newly accessed officers will attend the same initial skills training course to learn the fundamentals of cyber operations, intelligence, and space operations. This combined initial skills training will ensure all

officers have a comprehensive operational background prior to pursuing more specialized duties like acquisition. The Space Force has also worked to establish clear delineation of the roles, responsibilities, duties, and career paths for our officer, enlisted, and civilian Guardians to optimize our force. In the next phase we will revise Guardian career paths consistent with our distinct roles of Officers, Enlisted, and Civilian Guardians. Within our noncommissioned officer (NCO) corps, we are creating enhanced leadership training at future professional military education courses that will take place at each NCO rank to set our Guardians up for success at all command and staff levels. In June 2023, the USSF established intermediate-level education and senior-level education programs in collaboration with Johns Hopkins University's (JHU) School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), culminating in a Master of International Public Policy degree. The programs are offered to officers and civilians in the Space Force and other services, as well as international and interagency partners and meet service and joint professional military education requirements. This approach will allow the Space Force to tailor its education for leaders for unique space related issues and establish a mechanism whereby Guardians can earn a degree from a recognized private university. Approximately fifty students are currently enrolled in their second semester of their first year at SAIS.

Promotion and Evaluation

It is crucial that the Space Force selects the best and the brightest to help shape the space domain for the Joint fight. The Space Force promotion system is regulated by law, Department of Defense and Department of the Air Force policy. Our promotion program fulfills the requirements of section 619 of Title 10, United States Code and Secretarial policy by promoting the "best qualified" officers to positions of increased responsibility and authority. The Space Force promotion system selects the best qualified commissioned and noncommissioned officers with regard to their record, their education, their contributions and demonstrated potential. Promotion boards convened to consider officers for promotion are charged with recommending the best fully qualified officers based on this 'whole-person' concept. We leverage the Air Force Personnel Center to help the Space Force execute its statutory requirements for promotion of officer, enlisted and General Officers.

Holistic Health Approach

The Space Force has implemented a Holistic Health Approach (HHA) to deliver a ready, fit, professional force supporting the wellness of each Guardian. This is an innovative, science-based approach to health, emphasizing total fitness, preventive medicine, and education. In an effort to operationalize HHA, the Space Force has established Guardian Resilience Teams (GRTs) embedded with Guardians where they work. The GRTs consist of multidisciplinary subject matter experts, health integrator and physical, mental, and spiritual health providers. Over the past year, the Space Force has stood-up nine GRTs located at every Space Force Base, the National Capital Region, Joint Base San Antonio/Basic Military Training, and a remote GRT for geographically separated units and remote Guardians.

In support of HHA, the Space Force, in partnership with the Air Force Research Lab, began a two-year study of our service's Continuous Fitness Assessment, to assess the effectiveness of continuous fitness in meeting HHA goals and physical fitness requirements. Over 7,000 of our uniformed Guardians, representing 85% of our total force, registered to participate in the study.

PAY AND COMPENSATION

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

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

There remains an extremely high demand for talent in information and cyber warfare communities across the Department of Defense, the U.S. Government, and the commercial and private sectors. To support Guardian retention, the Space Force is offering Selective Retention Bonuses, Special Duty Assignment Pays, and Assignment Incentive Pays, to attract, compensate, and retain our highly-skilled workforce. The use of these incentives in critical Space Force specialties and locations assists in the ability to counter retention challenges at a relatively low cost when compared to the cost of replacing Guardians lost to other organizations, industry, or the private sector.

UNITED STATES AIR FORCE SUPPORT

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

Quality of Life

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

The Space Force is working directly with the Air Force to maximize available, affordable, and quality child care options that allow Guardians to remain mission-focused, while also allowing spouses to pursue career opportunities. We are working to improve access to child care, increasing staffing incentives, adding family child care providers, developing education and marketing materials, increasing community-based fee assistance, and targeted construction investments. Recently, Buckley Space Force Base hosted a hiring event that resulted in a child care vacancy reduction of 25%, with fifteen new hires, and reduced the days to hire from forty-four days to fifteen days. This aims to reduce the child care waitlist significantly, with initial projections anticipating a

significant increase in direct care staffing from 49% to 73% within one month, the largest gain in three years. Patrick Space Force Base, the Child Development Center increased capacity for children ages 6-12 years old, but continues to seek qualified individuals to fill 10 staff vacancies to improve availability for younger children. Additionally, the Space Force has established a quarterly “Child Care Community Forum,” opened to every Guardian: leader, parent, and member (military, civilian, household) to educate and engage with Guardians on child care programs, services and information. The Space Force is focused on continuing to characterize the unique aspects of Guardians’ child care needs to develop future child care support strategies.

The Space Force recognizes that spouse employment is a significant factor in the family decision to continue military service. The Space Force has established the Guardian Family Career Program, which offers spouses the opportunity to support fellow Guardians while advancing their careers with pre-identified remote or portable positions from one Space Force installation to the next. Opportunities are available at all levels and meet the spouse where they are in terms of experience and professional interest. As a part of this program, we recently released a new policy authorizing up to five days of PCS-related administrative leave for Civilian Guardians listed as dependents on their military or civilian spouse’s PCS orders in an effort to support families as they navigate career related moves.

CONCLUSION

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