

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE PRESENTATION  
TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL  
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
UNITED STATES SENATE

SUBJECT: MILITARY PERSONNEL POSTURE HEARING FOR FY23

STATEMENT OF:

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Chairwoman Gillibrand, Ranking Member Tillis, Distinguished Members of this Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee. As the Nation's newest military Service, it is exciting to come before you today to discuss the progress our Guardians have made to build and manage a force capable of defending our Nation's vital interest in the space domain.

## **THE FORCE WE NEED**

The United States Space Force (USSF) operates in a unique and dynamic personnel environment. In September 2021, the Space Force released the Guardian Ideal which outlines our innovative approach to talent management of our military and civilians from accession through development and combines aspirations with actions and milestones. Our objective is to build and develop a highly-skilled, unified, and inclusive force capable of operating in the complex space domain. We intend to have a more holistic approach to talent management, incorporating work-life balance, family support, resiliency, training, education and individualized development into the Guardian Ideal. Part of this holistic approach includes the integration of our reserve Space Professionals.

Even as we continue building the Space Force, the needs of the Nation dictate that we are operationally capable of deterring conflict and defending our Nation's interests immediately and boldly. This demand cannot wait for us to finish building the force. To this end, we continue developing the training, systems and experiences necessary to be the digital force required in today's fight. At the same time, we are enhancing our end strength through new accessions to include inter-service transfers, exploring lateral entry opportunities, and taking advantage of civilian personnel systems and authorities to increase our civilian personnel capacity.

## **SPACE COMPONENT**

The ability to attract, recruit, and retain high caliber talent in the Space Force is essential to the success of our service. The Space Component provides us an opportunity to grow and sustain the force by creating a new component consisting of full- and part-time members, eliminating the distinctions found in the traditional regular/reserve construct, making it easier for Guardians to serve and providing greater flexibility to commanders.

We are competing for talent with the high-paying space industry. The Space Component extends the continuum of service, enabling us to recruit and retain the exquisite, highly-technical force we need, in an efficient, effective, and fiscally sound manner, while decreasing overall bureaucracy. We have one chance to get this right. The Space Force is at an early stage of development where we could implement this ground-breaking approach to military human capital management and build a component that improves warfighting readiness with a consistent, coherent means to employ the force.

We realize that Congressional authorities and authorizations are necessary to achieve these goals and we are appreciative of your continued support.

## **DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION**

Operationalizing Diversity and Inclusion is critical to Space Force talent management. Space Force continued efforts to support the General Officer Inspire, which is an initiative that the Chief of Space Operations co-signed with the Chief of Staff of the Air Force that proactively seeks and develops youth. The objective is to have USSF senior leaders engage with youth and youth influencers from underrepresented

groups in order to increase our diversity in the rated career fields as well as the broader Air and Space Force. We recently stood up a Cultural Management Working Group, a cross-functional team of Guardians. Through a collaborative effort, this team identifies forward-looking approaches and best practices to foster a culture in which Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility principles are optimized, supports continuous improvement, and promotes a safe and respectful workplace. The desired outcomes are to enhance our talent acquisition efforts to promote a workforce that reflects the diverse population of the United States, including those from underserved communities and to improve retention among both military and civilian Guardians to meet the National Security goals and objectives.

## **END STRENGTH**

The Department's FY22 Active Duty military end strength request for 337,620 included 8,400 for Space Force. This increases our end strength by 1,966 due to anticipated mission transfers from the Air Force, Army and Navy. In FY23, the military end strength requests will be separated and Space Force will have its own appropriation; with projected growth from 8,400 to 8,600. To meet this goal, the Space Force will continue to manage military personnel inventory to support mission requirements and we appreciate the Congressional support.

## **RECRUITING**

The competitive market for STEM talent creates a significant challenge to attracting and recruiting individuals with those unique capabilities into the Space Force. The Department of the Air Force, through Air Force Recruiting Service, has met Space Force recruiting goals to acquire exceptional talent for STEM and cyber-related disciplines for this complex mission set. While we have been successful to date, the recruiting landscape is dynamic; there is a high demand for talent in these technical communities, across the Department of Defense, US government, and industry.

Our recruitment initiatives are focused on expanding the pool of potential STEM applicants through partnerships with colleges, universities, and organizations that produce diverse STEM capable personnel. The Space Force University Partnership Program (UPP) offers the opportunity for a strategic partnership with the nation's top universities possessing high academic standards, nationally-ranked STEM degree programs, world-renowned space-related research and established Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) detachments. Additionally, the UPP schools' interests align with USSF's long-term science and technology priorities. The UPP's goal is to develop a diverse, highly capable workforce and advance strategic focus areas of the USSF and to pursue critical science and technology topics that are important to the USSF. This program creates opportunities for advanced academic degrees as well as workforce and leadership development for USSF Guardians. The UPP provides a broad range of scholarship, internship and mentorship opportunities for university students and ROTC cadets with the goal of recruiting and developing diverse officer, enlisted, and civilian Guardians with a particular focus on STEM.

While we focus on STEM talent as a whole, we cannot afford to overlook individuals with those attributes consistent with Guardian values. To ensure we right size our applicant pool and select future Guardians from the most diverse talent possible, we have instituted a national selection process that casts a wider talent net. Additionally, we have implemented interviews, diverse selection panels, and behavioral assessments to expand the tools used for a holistic approach to selecting future Guardians. These newly implemented Guardian selection efforts facilitate our ability to select the best fit Guardians from the broadest reach.

The Space Force is working with the Department of Defense and Department of the Air Force stakeholders to mitigate potential barriers to service from members of underrepresented groups. We are conducting a comprehensive review of accessions policy and will review all career field entry requirements and

assessments to identify opportunities to expand the pool of potential applicants from underrepresented groups.

Equally important to recruiting exceptional talent is the ability to retain the talent we have, and to engage and compensate our workforce in a manner that encourages retention. Our Guardians who transferred from another Service are still under a two-year service commitment, so we do not yet have retention data unique to the Space Force. We expect to see a normal attrition rate, but can adjust our initial accessions, prior-service accessions, and any normal workforce shaping tools as we see fluctuations in those retention patterns.

## **MANAGING TALENT**

The Space Force is taking a fresh approach to talent management in order to build an organizational culture that emboldens Guardians to produce innovative outcomes to secure American interests in space and contribute our unique expertise in joint operations. Our Talent Management Office (TMO) is leading the implementation of the Guardian Ideal, the Space Force's Human Capital Plan in a multi-pronged approach. First, through building a competency based requirement system and inventorying all competencies and levels of mastery for each Guardian, the TMO can make informed and connected development and assignment decisions, which leads to greater Guardian involvement in their careers and greater mission accomplishment. Additionally, we are developing a new performance appraisal system to focus more on contribution to the team and mission, which include multi-sourced input from all team members, and provide a continuous assessment as opposed to one time a year. We are tying this competency framework back to the Guardian Commitment, the foundation of the Space Force, built upon our values of character, connection, commitment, and courage.

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

## **DEVELOPMENT**

The Space Force will shift from managing people within prescribed career fields, to managing positions based on the competencies and experiences needed to succeed. We are completing work on a comprehensive competency framework that addresses not just occupational skills, but also those attributes necessary to succeed as a part of an inclusive and high-performing team. As part of managing talent we will include O-6s in Talent Marketplace this year bringing all Guardians, officer and enlisted, (O-6 and below as well as E-9 and below) into the same talent management tool for development and assignments. The inclusion of the Guardian's voice enables transparent choice architecture across the enterprise to meet both personal strengths and Service needs.

## **PERFORMANCE EVALUATION**

Our performance appraisal system is in development and our vision is to shift from an annual to a continuous 360 approach that will capture the inputs of subordinates, peers, and superiors. This provides a more complete and timely picture of how a Guardian is performing and growing over time to include while working outside their assigned team. The appraisal system will be an important component of an enhanced approach toward assessing promotion potential and readiness. Current approaches rely almost exclusively on the informed opinion of our senior leaders within strict timelines and percentage constraints. This is a good approach, but we now have access to improved tools that will provide more data that speaks to potential more objectively and consistently across the entire force. Various talent management boards will benefit with the inclusion of data derived from behavioral assessments and the results of situation-based testing that evaluates members based on how they perform in challenging situations they may encounter in the next higher grade or

position of increased responsibility. The scientific studies in these areas show these tools better predict who will succeed at the next level and also the individuals we need to develop further before they are ready for the next rank. This deliberate approach toward individualized development will enhance Guardians both personally and professionally.

We are actively and thoughtfully instituting policy and process changes to bring us into closer alignment to the future state described in the Guardian Ideal. For example, for non-commissioned officer promotions, we have eliminated promotion testing, stratifications, and forced distribution. Additionally, the Space Force has included personal preference into officer and enlisted development teams (DTs). This has been accomplished using MyVector, a web-based mentoring network, as a data collection tool where guardians can provide their personal preferences, as well as personal considerations, into the system to ensure the talent management board members are cognizant and make talent management decisions that include the Guardian's voice and competencies. Developmental processes follow the promotion boards to place new selects into appropriate positions commensurate with the new selected grade.

We also intend to evolve the performance appraisal collection platform to capture information on work place environment to identify work climate issues in a timely manner so we can investigate and, if necessary, intervene before potential issues become problems. This is a vital component of the physically and psychologically safe environment that we owe all of our Guardians, both civilian and military.

The USSF will continue to implement recommendations from the Secretary of Defense's Independent Review Commission. These recommendations hold leaders and Service members appropriately accountable for problematic behaviors but also sets the precedent and expectation to engage in positive behaviors that benefit the unit as a whole. Leaders at all levels are being educated on prevention strategies and delivering informed prevention messages which prepares our Guardians to positively impact the overall culture. This focus on core values and engaged leadership will enable Guardians to be successful as they are evaluated and held accountable for prevention activities.

## **PAY AND COMPENSATION**

The Space Force is dedicated to ensuring that all Guardians are appropriately compensated for their service. Military compensation must be designed to meet the financial needs of Guardians and their families and make the Space Force competitive in the market for highly qualified talent. On the whole, we believe that the current military compensation system is generous and accomplishes these goals.

Total compensation, includes basic pay, the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH), the Basic Allowance for Subsistence (BAS), health care benefits, retirement benefits, the tax advantage of pays like BAH and BAS, special and incentive pays and bonuses, and many other benefits. This network of pays, allowance, and other benefits compares favorably with private industry and civilian employment.

Increases to basic pay, the foundation of military compensation, are based upon the Employment Cost Index. We believe this is the correct measure for across-the-board increases to the basic pay table. Other indexes, like the Consumer Price Index, capture costs that are already accounted for in allowances like BAH, BAS, and COLA.

While the Space Force believes that across-the-board increases to the basic pay table should continue to take into account ECI, we also believe there is an opportunity to explore more targeted increases to the basic pay table at noncommissioned officer ranks in order to ensure retention of these highly skilled leaders.

Recent surveys have indicated food insecurity concerns at the most junior ranks. Congress acted to address

these concerns with the Basic Needs Allowance in the FY21 NDAA. The Space Force is looking forward to implementing this pay, and is working with the Department of Defense and sister Service partners to develop enduring solutions to concerns over the adequacy of military compensation. While we believe that military compensation is adequate and competitive in the aggregate, we see an opportunity for targeted change.

### **PERMANENT CHANGE OF STATION**

The Space Force assignments process supports our talent management philosophy in alignment with operational mission requirements. We value gaining competencies through development as well as contribution to the team and mission rather than moving. We have far fewer geographic locations compared to other services, and there are more career development opportunities in a single geographic location providing greater stability for the Guardian, their families and their units. In many instances, there are multiple development possibilities at the Guardian's current assignment location where Permanent Change of Assignments (PCA) (no move) are executed versus Permanent Change of Station (PCS), which allow for heightened stability for families through more stable spouse employment and military child education, amongst other issues

Since the creation of the Space Force, the average stateside tour length for Guardian officers has been approximately 36 months and for enlisted Guardians it has been approximately 40 months. There will be some cases where this timing will be shorter than expected because we have prioritized moving Guardians from their Air Force assignment to one in the Space Force. As a small force, we want to target most of our moves in the July timeframe to support retention and family considerations such as school and career transfers for military spouses and children.

### **UNITED STATES AIR FORCE SUPPORT**

As a growing Service, and one that must remain lean, agile, and mission-focused, we are grateful to have the continued support of the United States Air Force and the Department of the Air Force across a wide range of personnel and family support activities and programs. Interpersonal violence, sexual assault prevention and response, suicide prevention, resiliency, and family care are all areas in which the Air Force maintains the lead role and are vital to the wellbeing and retention of Guardians. The Department of the Air Force has also taken the lead role in diversity and inclusion initiatives. As we continue to grow, some of these functions will transfer to the Space Force, however, many of them will remain with the Air Force and the Department of the Air Force. We are truly a one-team-one fight organization, and we are grateful for the continued efforts of all members of our team.

### **CONCLUSION**

Guardians are the heart of the Space Force. In order to achieve mission success, we must create an environment that fosters their success and recognizes their value, both as individuals and as members of a team. We must develop each Guardian according to their individual capabilities and desires within the context of Space Force requirements. We must provide inclusive leadership that encourages growth. We must provide Guardians the tools, digital and otherwise, necessary to accomplish the mission. We must provide an environment in which they and their families feel safe and supported against any internal threat, an environment where they can thrive. We must ensure that we are doing right by our Guardians and their families. All of this, of course, requires your support, and funding. We thank you for your continued support for our Space Force, its uniformed and civilian Guardians, and their families.