

Written Testimony Submitted
to the
UNITED STATES SENATE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES - SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL

By
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Chairman Tillis and Ranking Member Gillibrand and members of the committee: Senators Ernst, Graham, Sasse, McCaskill, and Warren, I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear today with Senator Jim Talent and Ms. Kathy Roth-Douquet to discuss the work of the Bipartisan Policy Center's Task Force on Defense Personnel in producing its report entitled *Building a F.A.S.T. Force: A Flexible Personnel System for a Modern Military*. I was honored to work with them and many others on this very important subject.

The report produced by the Task Force presents its assessment of the nation's imperative to improve DoD's defense personnel systems to better meet ever changing future national security needs and our country's evolving service-age population. It offers a comprehensive package of 39 bipartisan proposals to improve the effectiveness of military personnel policy. As a whole, these recommendations aim to prepare the military to confront the threats of the future while also keeping promises made to today's service members.

I appear here as a private citizen and a member of this Task Force and do not represent the Secretary of Defense Reserve Forces Policy Board which I Chair, nor the Defense Business Board or National Defense Industrial Association on which I served. I believe, however, that my personal and professional experience is relevant to these matters. I have served 24 years with the Senate Armed Service Committee with 14 of those years as the Staff Director supporting the Chairman and the Committee as well as 35 years of commissioned military service in the U.S. Marine Corps. I chaired the Independent Commission on the National Guard and Reserves from 2005-2008 which Congress established to assess the future roles of the Reserve Components. As a Marine Major General, I also served on the Reserve Forces Policy Board for 5 years prior to retiring in 2003, and I have served as the Chairman of the newly structured independent RFPB under four Secretaries of Defense since 2011.

I would like to personally commend the members of this subcommittee for the work they have done to improve the lives of our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Coastguard. The Fiscal Year 2017 National Defense Authorization Act and the personnel reform initiatives contained within it are

just some of the examples of how you have led the way in tackling tough issues and making much needed reforms. I can speak from personal experience that this subcommittee and its House counterpart have stayed in front of the Pentagon for decades.

Many of the challenges the Department of Defense faces will take years to address. We can rest assured, though, that despite the strategic challenges throughout the world, the United States military, as the bedrock of national security, protects our citizens and interests, preserves regional stability, renders humanitarian assistance, and imparts stability to the world. The demands on our U.S. military personnel have never been greater, and our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines form the foundation of our national military power. An outdated personnel system, rising personnel costs, and the growing divide between our military members and the nation they serve pose significant challenges to recruiting and retaining the most talented people necessary to meet our country's ever-changing security needs.

The Personnel System – Time for a Change

The combination of statute, regulation, culture, and tradition which forms the Department of Defense's Personnel System is long overdue for reform. Defense personnel management statutes, policies and information systems have not kept pace with demographic or technological changes. While core U.S. national security interests have largely remained constant in the quarter-century since the end of the Cold War, the threats arrayed against those interests have changed dramatically. Today's global security environment is more complex and unpredictable than ever before. This environment should be the primary factor for policy makers when deciding how to reform the personnel system.

Personnel management reform should include a strategy for a modern military workforce that is diverse, technologically skilled, and provides flexible career opportunities. This new system must be viewed by potential entrants as a desirable and competitive career option; attracting high quality recruits and maintaining the best and the brightest for advancement and leadership of the Nation's military services. It must develop professionals, promote institutional values, embrace diversity, and maintain key elements of service culture. It must produce a force that both represents and is connected to the population it protects. The system must be fair with transparent policies, practices, and processes. It should be cost effective, produce ready service members, and be seamlessly integrated across components. It must be much more flexible and incorporate world-class business practices in terms of assignments, advanced schooling and training, family considerations and non-traditional opportunities. Ultimately, our Armed Forces must remain capable of deploying rapidly and sustaining military power

in response to a variety of threats at home and abroad to win the Nation's wars, support our allies, and defend our interests.

The Defense Officer Personnel Management Act of 1980 (DOPMA) and its follow-on Reserve Component counterpart, the Reserve Officer Personnel Management Act of 1994 (ROPMA), updated the original 1947 personnel policies in place for much of the Cold War. Three of the things Congress hoped to accomplish with DOPMA included providing a predictable and uniform promotion system, standardizing career lengths across the services, and ensuring proper proportionality of senior officers through the force. The first step to essential modernization of the personnel system is to provide flexibility by making bold statutory reforms to DOPMA and ROPMA. I had the opportunity to work on DOPMA with my boss, Senator Sam Nunn, as a relatively new Senate staffer in the 1970s. He chaired the Manpower and Personnel Subcommittee when DOPMA was revised over a four year period in the late 1970s. By then, the system which was developed right after World War II had been in place almost 25 years and we knew some changes had to be made as the military adjusted to the newly formed All-Volunteer Force. We also knew then that some of the policies we enacted would need to be revisited in the future. However, there have been very few significant changes in almost 40 years, and some view the current system as an inflexible Cold War-era relic. Our current personnel policy is complex and burdensome to not only the individual military member and his or her family, but also to the organization.

Unfortunately, there were some unintended consequences resulting from DOPMA/ROPMA implementation, one of which is the "up-or-out" promotion system. Officers generally have two opportunities for promotion at each grade. Those who twice fail are required to separate from the service, retire if eligible, or continue to serve until retirement in their current grade with a waiver with no chance of being promoted. Subsequent legislation, such as Goldwater-Nichols, created requirements for officers to accomplish specific items primarily related to joint service—check certain "boxes"—at certain times throughout their career to remain competitive. This time-based career management system created an officer corps with a lack of professional diversity in terms of career experiences. It also heavily discourages service members from pursuing alternative career paths and often penalizes non-conforming career choices. "Up or out" instead pushes service members out of the force when they are most experienced. A competency-based career management system, organized around the mastery of knowledge, skills, and abilities, would encourage more flexible career paths, thereby permitting longer assignments, greater opportunity for graduate education, time-outs for family responsibilities, the lateral

entry of skilled professionals, and longer overall careers. Such changes better reflect the new career patterns in the private sector and offer a more competent and seasoned force with less turnover and attrition.

From 2005 to 2008, I was fortunate to Chair the independent Commission on the National Guard and Reserves established by the Congress and we addressed these very issues. The Commission recommended that Congress implement a more flexible promotion system based on the achievement of competencies. Under this new system, the timing of and opportunities for promotion should vary by competitive category (career field), depending on service requirements.¹ The Task Force report also makes the correct point that both the up-or-out nature of the 20-year career and the limited ability for the military to quickly meet manpower needs create inefficiencies, resulting in higher costs.² As RAND economist Richard Cooper testified to Congress, the only way to truly control costs for the professional military is to change the up-or-out promotion system to selectively reduce personnel turnover and to change accession requirements.³

Merging DOPMA and ROPMA into a single system would create a personnel system best suited for today's military "Total Force." The Total Force includes all organizations, units, and individuals that provide the capabilities to support the Department of Defense in implementing the national security strategy. It encompasses the regular Active Component members, the Reserve Components, which includes the National Guard, civilians, members of the Individual Ready Reserve, and contractors. In implementing policy reforms for the Total Force, the Reserve Components must certainly be included. They have transformed from a seldom-used Cold War Strategic Reserve in the 1970s and 80s, to an indispensable operational force that is frequently and routinely employed to meet the Nation's defense needs. The Department's culture needs to change to embrace Active and Reserve members, as well as civilian employees as members of the same team – not separate competing teams. To that end, the Department should encourage and incentivize continued service in the Reserves to preserve talent from the Active Component that would be otherwise lost through reductions or routine transitions from the Active force.

¹ Commission on the National Guard and Reserves: *Transforming the National Guard and Reserve into a 21st-Century Operational Force*, January 31, 2008, 19.

² Task Force on Defense Personnel, *Building a F.A.S.T Force: A Flexible Personnel System for a Modern Military*, March, 2017, 25.

³ Bernhard Rostker. *I Want You! The Evolution of the All-Volunteer Force*. RAND Corporation. 2006. 365. Available at: <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG265.html>.

The Department should encourage and facilitate a seamless transition between the Active and Reserve Components and remove barriers impeding it. As the military strives to become more adaptable and to better respond to an unpredictable security environment, it should ensure the ability to quickly access talent in its Reserves. Reserve Component service should be an option throughout a military career as a means of preserving costly investments in training and experience.

To achieve this level of Active-Reserve permeability, federal law must be changed. Current law requires officers who desire to transition between the Active and Reserve Component to gain a separate Reserve-officer commission, through a process known as “scrolling.” This process takes up to six months and likely discourages many highly qualified personnel from continuing to serve in the Reserves. To facilitate the transition, Congress should amend current statutes to create a single type of commission, a “universal appointment,” in lieu of the current regular and Reserve commissions. Our system must provide greater opportunities to transition between the Active, Guard, and Reserve Components. Only after creating this culture of permeability and support of a continuum-of-service paradigm will we be able to recruit and retain the best talent for our military.

In addition to the key initiatives previously mentioned, the Department should implement several other reforms to create a personnel system that improves the career management, permeability, and flexibility of service options, and makes the best use of civilian and military skills found throughout the Total Force.

The Department should create an integrated Total Force pay, travel, and personnel management system that is modernized and accessed through mobile technology. This system will increase permeability by enabling streamlined transitions between components. Additionally, it will improve the ability of Reserve Component members to manage their careers by enabling seamless movement of all administrative and other records between components/services. Both the Army and the Air Force are currently working to field Integrated Pay and Personnel Systems – Army (IPPS-A) and Air Force Integrated Pay and Personnel System (AF-IPPS) – which could serve as a model for the other Services. Earlier attempts to field the same system DoD wide—DIHMRS—failed after significant costs.

Some other personnel reforms may include employing best practices from the private sector to advertise, apply for, review and select best qualified candidates for assignment to positions across the Total Force. In order to provide access to the deepest talent pool possible, it is also important to ensure all members have opportunities to compete for special assignments or educational opportunities at pivotal times throughout their careers without fear of their career being negatively affected.

The Services are experimenting, on a very small scale, with sabbatical programs to allow service members on Active Duty to “take a knee” for educational or other personal reasons. The Army’s Career Intermission Pilot Program is already seeing the first return of soldiers to the force who took time off. It is now time to broaden the program and allow those in uniform to consider it as simply another path possible on the way to a more fulfilling military career. These opportunities should be available to all service members in order to meet the changing demands in their personal lives, for fulltime educational opportunities, or family and employment obligations. Members should have the ability to pause promotion clocks during periods where they would be less available for military service. During periods where personal needs or civilian professional requirements make military service difficult, pausing promotion clocks would prevent members from being forced out due to lack of competitiveness for promotion and allow them to continue service once these demands subside.

Further, the Reserve Component has great potential to contribute in specialties that are more-immediately transferable from civilian occupations, such as health care, public affairs, and cybersecurity—yet current policy doesn’t maximize this potential. Especially after considerable resources are spent training service members, the military is missing an opportunity when only a small percentage choose to remain in the Reserves following completion of initial Active-Duty service.

Let’s take the cyber mission as an example. As the Department of Defense builds the cyber force, use of these valuable skills developed by civilian industry, at little to no cost to the government, can provide immense benefits to the Department. The Reserve Forces Policy Board formed a Cyber Task Group in 2013 to study the best use of the Reserve Component in this arena, and they made several key recommendations. One of their recommendations was that Reserve Component personnel be included in the development of Cyber Mission Force requirements which would reduce long-term costs, while leveraging civilian-acquired skills, service-invested training and experience, and enhancing continuity and longevity. The study recommended the Secretary of Defense direct a Total Force approach toward manning the Cyber Mission Force. The study also recommended USCYBERCOM and the Services review niche cyber needs outside the Cyber Mission Force construct to take advantage of the full range of civilian-acquired skills within the Reserve Component.⁴

As you know, the Fiscal Year 2017 National Defense Authorization Act authorizes the Secretaries of the military departments to conduct pilot programs to recruit and confer original

⁴ Reserve Forces Policy Board, *Improving the Total Force: Using the National Guard and Reserves*, RFPB Report FY17-01, November 1, 2016, 56-57.

appointments to qualified individuals as commissioned officers in a cyber specialty.⁵ This is certainly a step in the right direction, but it does not include members of the Reserve Component. I encourage you to expand this authorization. If the Reserve Component is utilized effectively, it can be a valuable source of uniformed talent, with the added benefit of valuable private-sector experience, oftentimes at a lower cost. This concept benefits the nation just the same if military members leave the Active Component to pursue career goals in the private sector, yet remain in service in the Reserve Component.

Rising Personnel Costs

Our domestic fiscal environment is just as challenging as our complex and unstable security environment. Budget impacts created by the 2011 Budget Control Act (BCA) and sequestration have resulted in deep cuts year after year to U.S. military readiness and capabilities. Since passage of the BCA, security conditions have changed and are dramatically less stable than they were in 2011. Military personnel systems must be financially sustainable for the department and taxpayers, and must complement—not displace—other national security needs. A high quality, professional force must be competitively compensated, but inefficient compensation costs cannot be allowed to force out other military necessities. Honoring the commitments made to current service members, military retirees, and their families is a military necessity and a moral obligation for policymakers. However, it is also imperative to ensure that future generations of service members are competitively compensated while also having the best training and equipment available.

By many accounts, the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) has been a great success. It has provided the military with high quality personnel and has proven effective in both peace and war. Military leaders, politicians and the American people themselves all prefer it to the alternative. It is here to stay. But it is expensive and the cost growth trends are unsustainable on their current path for both current and deferred compensation.

Former Secretary of Defense Thomas Gates, Chairman of the Commission in 1970 that recommended the All-Volunteer Force, warned the following three fundamental changes were needed to ensure sustainability of the AVF: First, reform the up or out promotion system; second, eliminate the cliff retirement system, which only benefits those who stay 20 years and then incentivizes them to leave right away; and third, change pay and compensation from one of tenure and longevity to a pay system that rewards skills and performance. 47 years later, we've touched only a few of those items, so it should

⁵ S.2943, Sec 509.

not surprise us that former Secretaries of Defense, such as Gates, Panetta, and Hagel, and many former senior military leaders, like General Ron Fogleman and Admiral Gary Roughead have all stated that the “all in” costs of the AVF are unsustainable.⁶

The independent Congressional Budget Office and Government Accountability Office have released a number of analytical reports documenting this fact, as have many members of the think tank community. A definitive work is the interim report by the Military Retirement and Modernization Commission. Highly overlooked, this report was published in June 2014 and consisted of over 300 pages of the full costs related to running the All-Volunteer Force both inside and outside DOD. They avoided any opinions, and stated just the facts, which are inescapable: the all-in costs are well over \$410 billion per year; well in excess of the 30 percent of the DoD budget benefits-based lobby groups are fond of quoting.⁷ This does not include the staggering \$1 trillion in unfunded liabilities for military retirees; today, we have over 2.4 million retirees compared to the 1.1 million on Active Duty. There is a consensus among defense experts from the left and right that we need to address these adverse trends.⁸

Military personnel costs have increased sharply over the past 15 years. Since 2001, pay per Active Duty service member has grown over 80 percent (in current year dollars, or about 50 percent in constant dollars). Military pay has increased 40 percent more than civilian pay since 2000 and enlisted service members are now paid more than 90 percent more than civilians with comparable education and experience make (83 percent more for officers). Non-cash benefits cost a further \$48 billion a year—mostly for health care, but also for commissaries, housing, and family programs.⁹

One way DoD has adapted to these higher costs is by relying more on the Guard and Reserves, a true bargain for the taxpayers in terms of cost. Before the Vietnam War, the Guard and Reserves comprised only 26 percent of the Total Force. With the end of the draft and the establishment of the Total Force policy in the early 1970s, the proportion began to rise. By the end of the Cold War, when the full cost of sustaining the All-Volunteer Force was becoming apparent, the Guard and Reserves comprised 36 percent of the Total Force. In FY 15, the proportion grew to 38 percent.¹⁰ In some services, such as the Army, the Reserve Component consists of roughly 50 percent of the Total Force.

⁶ National Commission on the Future of the Army, (July 16, 2015)(written testimony by Major General Arnold Punaro, USMCR (Ret.)).

⁷ Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission, *Final Report*, January 2015.

⁸ Punaro, NCFR Testimony

⁹ Punaro, NCFR Testimony

¹⁰ Reserve Forces Policy Board, *Improving the Total Force: Using the National Guard and Reserves*, RFPB Report FY17-01, November 1, 2016, 18.

As the Department faces fiscal challenges from internal cost growth and external budget pressures, the question arises whether to continue this long-term trend can be sustained. That requires an assessment of relative costs and capabilities for Active Duty, Guard and Reserve personnel.

All analyses show that Guard and Reserve forces cost much less in peacetime. At the individual level, Guardsmen or Reservists cost 15 percent (according to GAO) or 17 percent (according to the National Commission on the Structure of the Air Force) of comparable Active Duty personnel. However, the relative cost increases when full time support, equipment, and operations are added. For ground units, analyses found that Guard and Reserve forces cost the following proportion of Active Duty forces:

- Congressional Budget Office: 30%
- RAND: 23-25%
- DOD's Total Force Policy Report to Congress: 25-26%
- Commission on the National Guard and Reserves: 23%
- Reserve Forces Policy Board: 22-32% (all functions, not just ground)

These standard comparisons capture pay, unit costs, and some benefits. However, they leave out benefits that significantly increase the Active Duty costs: PCS, commissaries, family housing, day care, health care, dependent schools, and parts of retirement, as well as costs borne by the Departments of Labor, Education, Treasury and Veterans Affairs.¹¹

The Reserve Forces Policy Board has shown that these benefits add hundreds of thousands of dollars to the annual costs of one full time Active Duty soldier. Some have argued that these benefits should not be considered compensation, but are incidental to military life. I disagree. These are services that civilians and reservists also use but must pay for themselves. Further, like compensation, these benefits exist to help recruiting and retention; if they do not, then they should be eliminated. At the very least, we should agree with the RFPB's recommendation that DOD needs to assess and better understand these costs so future manpower analyses can be informed by accurate cost data.

One area of success in utilizing the Total Force and reducing overall costs while increasing efficiency is the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy's successful integration of their Reserve Component forces as associate units and blended units through shared Active Component and Reserve Component platforms. Under these concepts, a Reserve Component unit aligns and co-locates with an Active

¹¹ Punaro NCFR Testimony

Component unit in order to utilize their platforms; or, conversely, an Active Component unit aligns and co-locates with a Reserve Component unit in order to utilize their platforms. This model of Associate Units and Blended Units with shared platforms has been successfully tested and proven by the Air Force and the Navy during Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. By combining Active Component and Reserve Component capabilities into Multi-Component Units, there is potential for large cost savings and increased readiness within the Reserve Component operational force due to an increase of Active personnel in the units. Alternatively, there should be enhanced opportunities for Guard and Reserve personnel to serve on Active Duty staffs and in key positions that are traditionally held by Active personnel to help prepare them for senior assignments. This would also create a larger pool from which to select senior Reserve Component leaders.

Another concept would increase the numbers of Active Component military members serving in Reserve Component units (under the NDAA 1992 instituted Active Component / Reserve Component Title 11 program). History suggests that Title 11 programs have never been fully manned. Additionally, the Title 11 program was not highly regarded as career enhancing— particularly for O-6s competing for General Officer/Flag Officer promotion. Therefore, in order to have better integration in the Total Force, measures should be taken to make these assignments attractive. As an example, the USMC Reserve's Inspector Instructor Program could serve as a model for the other Services to utilize as a Title 11 Reserve Component Integration tool.

In this fiscally constrained environment, it is also essential that we maintain an Operational Reserve. An Operational Reserve provides ready capabilities and capacity that are accessible, routinely utilized on a predictable basis, and fully integrated for military missions that are planned, programmed, and budgeted in coordination with the Active Component.¹² This was one of the fundamental issues the Commission on the Guard and Reserve was asked to study. I was a skeptic going into this task—I knew the difficulties associated with the changes in policies, budgets, and laws that would be needed. After two and a half years of study we came down fully in support of the Operational Reserve as supported by DoD. I am even more convinced now that maintaining an Operational Reserve is essential. This does not mean the balance and mix of the Total Force should remain static and conform to the current plans, or that every unit can always be at full-combat readiness at all times. But an appropriate mix is essential.

¹² Reserve Forces Policy Board. Improving the Total Force: Using the National Guard and Reserves. RFPB Report FY17-01, November 1, 2016, 34.

The nation can ill-afford to ignore the rich capabilities of the National Guard and Reserves or the lessons learned and experience gained over the last 15 years of combat and other operations. Reserve Component members bring unique capabilities and professional expertise to the Total Force gained through years of experience in the civilian sector. The Department must learn to better exploit this expertise going forward. Rich repositories of talent reside in the Reserve Component that is cost-prohibitive to develop in the Active Component (i.e. doctors, nurses, lawyers, computer analysts, cyber experts, engineers, etc.). After enduring a period of significant force structure reductions and budget cuts, continued investment in a strong National Guard and Reserve Force provides numerous benefits to the Total Force and is essential in achieving U.S. national security objectives going forward. It is equally vital that senior leaders understand the importance of, and define specific roles for Reserve forces in future strategic and operational plans.

Bridging the Growing Civilian-Military Divide

The growing civilian-military divide cannot be ignored. A key component in looking at this issue is the Abrams Doctrine, first articulated by the legendary Army leader General Creighton Abrams. That doctrine is just as relevant today as it was coming out of the divisive Vietnam War: the Army should not go to war unless the nation goes to war, and the nation goes to war only if the Guard and Reserve are mobilized to join the fight.¹³

As a relatively new Senate staffer in 1973 with a tour as a Marine infantry platoon commander in Vietnam in 1969-1970, I had a chance to meet General Abrams when he came to see my boss, Senator Sam Nunn. General Abrams outlined to Senator Nunn how to maintain a powerful Army as the size of the Active Army was decreasing since the U.S. combat role in Vietnam was drawing down. 1973 also marked the first year the All-Volunteer Force came into effect. Abrams embedded a relationship between the Active and Reserve Components within his new force structure so close that it would be impossible to employ the Active Army in major conflicts without relying on the Guard and Reserves. And he ensured, as the Active force was drawn down, that the Army's combat power was increased. He made the Guard the combat Reserve of the Army and placed significant combat support and combat service support capabilities in the Army Reserve. Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird used this philosophy to create the Total Force policy implemented by Secretary of Defense Jim Schlesinger. It has proven incredibly successful.

¹³ Punaro NCFR Testimony.

Before I met General Abrams, I had no intention of going into the Marine Corps Reserve—the Reserves were not viewed with the same prestige in the 1970s as they are today. But his vision of their importance convinced me to join. However, the capabilities and the cultural barriers did not change overnight, and only took place after the call-up of the Guard and Reserve in Desert Shield and Desert Storm, the increased use of the Guard and Reserve during the 1990s, and the over 945,000¹⁴ service members that have been mobilized since 9-11. General Abrams’ vision has now been proven correct many times over. The country requires a powerful ground force, and the Total Force Army is embedded in the fabric of our nation from its revolutionary roots, and this same doctrine applies to all of our Reserve Components.

Many of you may have seen the change of responsibility between Chief of the National Guard Bureau General Lengyel and General Grass in August. I was present for that really inspiring event. I was struck by the comments of then Secretary of Defense Ash Carter. The Secretary said, “Today’s Guard is battle tested- an agile, flexible, deployable force with combat experience and a broad range of skills gained both on the battlefield and in civilian life. The National Guard is a critical component of our total force, bringing to bear the experience and skills of our citizens warriors wherever and whenever needed to confront the challenges of a complex world.”

This is a powerful statement from the then civilian leader of the world’s largest and most complex organization, with over 3 million employees, including 1.3 million Active Duty personnel and 818,000 Guard and Reserve, over 5,000 facilities on over 30 million acres of land worldwide, and an annual budget of over 580 billion dollars.

Carter went on to say: “the more deeply integrated the Guard becomes in all facets of planning and execution, the better prepared the nation becomes. The presence, skill and readiness of citizen warriors across the country give us the agility and flexibility to handle unexpected demands, both at home and abroad. It is an essential component of the total force and a lynchpin of our readiness.” Let me repeat that- the lynchpin of our readiness...and they live in communities throughout this great country.

In addition to members of the Guard and Reserve being an ever-present fixture in our communities, there are other opportunities to integrate military members back into society after their Active service is complete. To partially address the issue, Syracuse University, in partnership with DoD, the Schultz Family Foundation and the private sector, is participating in a job placement and training

¹⁴ OASD (Force Readiness) monthly report, April 20, 2017.

pilot program at Joint Base Lewis-McChord and Camp Pendleton. They will launch similar initiatives at 16 additional military installations over the course of the next two years. The pilot program initiative is a step forward. However, a more comprehensive program needs to be developed that will provide a “one stop shop” for transition, ease military members and their families into civilian life, and help to retain hard-won combat experience and skills in the Total Force.

Military members are recruited and enter service from the communities in which they grew up and went to school. Members often return to these locations upon completing Active service and many remain affiliated with the military by serving in a Guard or Reserve unit or by joining the Individual Ready Reserve. Others leave the military entirely and enter our Veteran ranks.

The current transition process begins and ends at their last Active Duty location, which is very rarely in the community from where they came or where they intend to live and work. While transition programs have been improved, they don’t really cover transitions beyond discharge and are primarily focused on pre-discharge preparations. As a result, separating service members end their service in one location and must abruptly begin new lives with little or no coordination between their separation points and their ultimate home communities.

In order to provide a more holistic, coordinated transition and promote the well-being of our members, families, and communities, DoD should integrate and facilitate collaboration of all of the government resources that are geared toward the transition process. This recommendation was outlined in the April 2012 Report of the Reserve Forces Policy Board (RFPB) on Avoiding Past Drawdown Mistakes to Enhance Future Total Force Capabilities. In this report, the RFPB recommended the development of long-term “one stop shop” Reserve community transition centers, utilizing existing, and well-established programs in community facilities throughout the country.¹⁵

This recommendation could be executed as Military Entrance Processing Stations (MEPS) “in reverse” that would serve as transition facilities where service members would complete the separation process while experiencing a positive hand-off from the military to their civilian communities. When service personnel first leave their communities to begin their military service, they enter service at a MEPS.

When they leave the military, they should transition at a community-based location where all government agencies and community-based organizations are present. These stations would optimally be established in or collocated with existing Guard armories and Reserve centers throughout the United

¹⁵ RFPB Report, 63.

States, of which there are 4,542. In addition, the Guard and Reserve have more than 160,000 full-time people already supporting these centers. This whole of government, whole of society approach would provide direct links to employers, educational and technical training institutions, local medical resources, Veterans Service Organizations, local Chambers of Commerce, Departments of Labor and Education representatives, and the full range of community support agencies available to transitioning service members and their families. Embedding these facilities in Guard armories and Reserve centers would also offer immediate access to those service members who want to continue to wear the uniform by facilitating instant entry into one of the Reserve Components or at least having them leave acquainted with the range of options for continued service.

Recruiting for talent retention will become increasingly important as Reserve Component mobilizations and deployments continue to decrease and sequestration budgets degrade readiness. In 2015, 165,686 non-retirement service members separated from the Active Component and only 56,583 joined the Guard and Reserves.¹⁶ The Reserve Component can capture even more valuable talent, save training dollars, and achieve a higher experience level across their forces if the Department would proceed with this proposal.

Take for example, an Air Force enlisted aerospace propulsion mechanic who completes his/her service at Joint Base Langley-Eustis, VA and returns home to Atlanta, GA to be officially discharged. After completing initial base out-processing functions at Langley, he/she would report to Dobbins Air Reserve Base in Marietta, Georgia to receive his/her discharge after linking into the “total force and total community” resources already established there. At Dobbins today, a Developmental Training Flight (DTF) unit prepares delayed enlistment airmen for basic training and enhances their understanding of the Air Force mission and military culture. Their mission could be expanded to serve those airmen transitioning back to civilian life. Dobbins ARB is near the VA Atlanta Regional Benefit Office, Atlanta VA Medical Center, Decatur Clinic, and multiple community based outpatient clinics, Atlanta MEPS, and a significant number of large civilian employers. Private sector partnerships could be struck with companies like Delta Airlines, based out of Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport in Atlanta, to secure civilian employment for separating service members. With points of contact established by these community based entities in the Dobbins Center, transitioning service personnel would be able to access all of them. The service member separating at Dobbins would become acquainted with Air Force Reserve, Air National Guard, and other Reserve Component opportunities in the local area and the

¹⁶ RFPB Report, 65.

benefits of Reserve Component service – things like TRICARE Reserve Select, Tuition Assistance, and others. Whether the individual leaves at four years, one year, twelve years, or twenty years, this community-based transition program, vice an Active Duty-based transition program underscores the commitment we make to the force.

Conclusion

As I close, I want to commend this subcommittee for taking a hard look at these problems and identifying and implementing several key reforms. Oftentimes, you have been on the cutting edge and well in front of the Pentagon. The pilot program providing direct commissions to cyber positions, shortening the length of joint Duty assignments, leave for primary caregivers after the birth or adoption of a child, the Blended Retirement System, and granting equal survivor benefits to Reserve Component members are just a few examples from the last National Defense Authorization Act. As a nation, we need to keep moving in a direction that recruits and retains the very best members for our military in order to meet the ever-changing national security challenges we face.

Thank you very much for offering me the opportunity to share my views with you.