

**PRESENTATION TO THE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS AND MANAGEMENT,
UNITED STATES SENATE**

SUBJECT: INSTALLATION READINESS

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Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, good morning. I am Chief Master Sergeant Walter Poliansky, Superintendent of the 89th Support Group, at Andrews Air Force Base, Maryland. As the Superintendent, I am responsible for advising the commander on all issues affecting health, morale, welfare, and quality of life for our group's 715 enlisted members. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to share my views on the impact of reduced facility maintenance funding has on the enlisted members in our Air Force.

Overview

The Air Force of today is significantly different than when I entered in late 1978. Then, our workplace environments, housing units, and dormitories were in very poor shape. This had a serious impact on morale and retention in our early years of an all-volunteer force. Senior leadership recognized this problem and took action to provide our people with safe, efficient, and modern places to work and live. These quality of life initiatives positively impacted readiness, morale, and ultimately retention. Their efforts proved fruitful in the mid-eighties, and early nineties. Military construction and real property maintenance accounts were robust, and we made great strides in providing quality facilities for our people. Since then, a decline in the defense budget, and competing requirements, have hindered our abilities to move forward in these areas. We now see growth in the backlog of required work necessary to maintain the readiness edge we established in past years. Meanwhile, expectations of our commanders, our people, and our families remain

high. We are challenged to balance mission readiness, modernization, and quality-of-life efforts in the face of aging infrastructure, and declining military construction, and real property maintenance budgets.

We need a larger real property maintenance budget to fully fund our preventative maintenance program. We need additional funding to repair and overhaul our rapidly aging facilities and infrastructure. Finally, we need the funds to purchase much needed replacements for outdated furnishings for our single airmen living in the dormitories.

Deteriorating infrastructure and facilities, along with reduced funding in facility maintenance programs, adversely impact the quality of life of our enlisted force, their families, and ultimately retention rates. Although we have made strides, more needs to be done. Frequently, because of funding constraints, the first things cut from construction projects are the replacements and overhaul of the mechanical, electrical, and utility systems of our facilities. Consequently, our facilities are looking better, but the real problem lies beneath the facade.

Our present funding only allows us to do the bare essentials, keep our heads above water, and sustain facility operations. We have become reactive instead of proactive. We do not have the dollars necessary to perform essential maintenance or equipment replacement. Facilities and infrastructure at Andrews Air Force Base are, on the average, 30 to 40-years old. Most mechanical, electrical, and utility systems are well beyond their life expectancy. We do not have the money to upgrade these outdated systems. Additionally, off-the-shelf replacement parts are no longer available or manufactured.

Because the budget is so tight, our military work force is frequently

responding to after-hour emergencies. Airmen are called out all hours of the day and night, in all kinds of weather, to fix problems well beyond repair with little to no resources. Compounding the problem, 86 percent of the engineers stationed at Andrews are also assigned to deployable Air Expeditionary Forces. Our family's expectations are reasonable, despite our personnel shortages, due to deployments. They are understanding, yet count on the same level of quality service. These requirements and valued customer service put an added burden on those left behind to maintain the base. Increased funding will allow us to replace old equipment and systems now in order to head off catastrophic failures later. This will also reduce our operations tempo for our civil engineer work force, who are already over tasked.

Let me give you a few examples: In November 1999, our civil engineers responded to a major power outage over Thanksgiving weekend that knocked out power to our airfield lighting system. The source of the problem, 30-year old cable that should have been replaced 10 years ago. IMPACT: Air Force electricians worked 12 to 14 hours a day, in deplorable weather conditions, for 18 days straight. An emergency contract had to be executed to augment our work force. Together they replaced over 63 thousand feet of deteriorated cable. Additionally, our power production shop had to work around the clock to provide generator support until the commercial power could be restored. Because of their dedication, there was no impact to our Presidential support mission. However, our people were fatigued. The long hours had a negative effect on their morale and quality of life. Power outages have become more routine throughout the base, including the housing

area, because existing equipment has not had sufficient upgrades to keep up with our increasing demands.

Most of the pavement on our airfield is 40 years old and has reached the point where routine maintenance is no longer effective. We have identified over \$30 million in backlogged, critical repairs needed for our runways and taxiways at Andrews. They are necessary to maintain our full mission capable status. Additionally, this will prevent costly foreign object damage to aircraft from loose pavements being ingested into their engines.

Another problem is our mechanical systems throughout the base. Many of them are beyond their life expectancy. Last summer, the air conditioning system failed at our education center, housing the Office of Special Investigation Academy, Airman Leadership School, and off duty education programs. This system was 25 years old. It had operated almost 5 years over its 20-year life expectancy. For the last 3 to 4 years, our craftsmen had been nursing the system along because there was no money to replace the unit. They responded routinely to make "band-aid" fixes that kept the system operational. They regularly made recommendations to have the unit replaced. IMPACT: The quality of life of both the craftsmen performing the maintenance, and the students and staff the facility supports were severely impacted. The price of the new system was \$80 thousand. An additional \$14 thousand was spent on renting a portable chiller unit for 30 days, until the new unit could be installed. Because of the system's catastrophic failure, funds had to be diverted from other priorities, impacting yet other Andrews' members and their quality of life. This is only one of many problems. We have

people working in facilities that have been identified for demolition, because it is no longer economical to renovate. Workers are becoming frustrated and less efficient. On occasion, they are sent home early because of environmental conditions. In my opinion, our readiness posture is being jeopardized.

It does not stop at the workplace. The centralized heating and air conditioning units at the dormitories are also deteriorating. Many of our young men and women come home after a long day at work to no heat, air conditioning, or hot water. This lowers their morale and ability to perform effectively.

Dormitory furnishing is yet another problem. These items have a 5-year life cycle because of the high turn over rate and usage. Presently, because of funding limitations, we are replacing items on the 10-year cycle. Our young airmen deserve better than this. These examples are common throughout the Air Force.

Our enlisted force is the most dedicated and trained I have seen in my 22-year career. They deserve to have the best resources available to do the job for which they are trained, and a standard of living equal to their civilian counterparts. Many of our first and second term airmen are getting out. Not because they do not enjoy their job, but because of the environment and conditions they have to work and live in. One Staff Sergeant, who recently separated from our Air Force after 7 years, told me, " I can no longer work for an organization that wants me to do a job without the right tools or materials." If we provide our people with a quality work environment, the right facilities, tools, and equipment; they will do the rest.

It is our job to protect our men and women. Daily, we put them in harms way – yet we do not put our best efforts forward to take care of them and their families. Now is the time to invest in our most important and valuable asset – our people. We need your help.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee, I want to thank you for your continued strong support of Air Force programs and the benefits you have provided our airmen in terms of quality of life both in the workplace and at home. I will be happy to address any questions.