

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE

HEARING ON THE FISCAL YEAR 2003

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION BUDGET REQUEST

PRESENTATION TO THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES SENATE

SUBJECT: FY 2003 AIR FORCE PERSONNEL PROGRAMS

STATEMENT OF: CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT OF THE AIR FORCE
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BY THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
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INTRODUCTION

Good morning Mister Chairman and Committee members. It is an honor to be here today to discuss issues affecting the well-being of Air Force members and their families.

This has been a year of tragedies and triumphs. The attacks on September 11th had a dramatic impact on the lives of all Americans—especially those in uniform. Today, members of our armed services are deployed to distant lands fighting the war on terrorism. Additionally, those left at home have seen a significant increase in their pace of operations due to both heightened security requirements at military installations and additional tasks in support of the homeland security mission.

These current operations have highlighted the ability of our armed forces to work together to accomplish the mission. While the accuracy of the weapons systems might get media attention, it is the combined efforts of the people involved that have made these operations a success. Therefore, I am proud to represent a portion of that group -- the more than 400,000 enlisted members of the united states air force on active duty, in the air force reserve and in the air national guard.

I have been the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force for almost three years. I've traveled around the world visiting bases and speaking with people about various issues important to them. Regardless of the mission or location I've encountered, troop morale has been very positive. People are working hard and are extremely proud of their contributions to the mission at hand. Also, they truly appreciate the visible signs of patriotism and support from Americans back home.

Our people don't ask for much. They want the appropriate tools and enough trained people to effectively get the job done. They want some peace of mind to know their families are being taken care of. And, they want their concerns heard by those who are in a position to take action – not just talk about it.

RETENTION

The continued strength of America's air force will depend on our ability to recruit and retain high quality people.

The Air Force is a retention-based force. With such a highly technological mission, it costs less for us to retain our people, than to recruit and retrain new individuals. Our annual retention goals identify the percentage of individuals we'd like to retain in the various year groups to effectively accomplish the mission. Currently, our first term retention rates have stabilized, but we continue to fall short on our second term and career airmen retention goals. These people represent our experience base -- the skilled technicians, trainers and deployers who are vital to meeting mission requirements.

It is essential we continue to improve the standard of living for our airmen and their families if we want to continue to make advances on the retention front. Within the next five years, approximately 234,000 active duty airmen -- 84 percent of the enlisted force -- will make a re-enlistment decision. The potential exists that many of these people will migrate to the civilian sector for a more stable work and family environment.

A valuable tool in helping stabilize our retention numbers, especially, in critical skills is the selective re-enlistment bonus program. We increased the number of specialties eligible for an SRB to 161—which accounts for approximately 82 percent of the enlisted skills. The SRB cost has also increased from \$74 million in FY99 to \$258 million for

FY02.

RECRUITING

This was an outstanding year for Air Force recruiting and first quarter figures for FY02 paint an optimistic picture for the near future. The Air Force finished FY01 having recruited 35,381 people -- 102 percent of our 34,600 goal. We finished the first quarter of FY02 at 107 percent -- having recruited 8,076 against a goal of 7,578.

To reach these positive numbers, we funded over \$71 million in FY01 for national TV advertising, increased the number of recruiter authorizations in the field from 1,209 in FY00 to 1,650 in FY01, and provided an enlistment bonus to 85 skills.

While our recruiters continue to face a challenging market, we have not lowered our standards to meet our goals. Approximately 99 percent of our recruits have high school diplomas, and 75 percent scored in the top half of test scores on the Armed Forces Qualification Test.

QUALITY OF LIFE

The welfare of our people is critical to overall readiness and is vital in our efforts for recruiting and retention. Air Force members and their families continue to work hard and dedicate themselves in service to America. Therefore, we believe those serving on active duty, in the Air National Guard, or in the Air Force Reserve Command deserve a standard of living at least equal to the Americans they support and defend.

Thus the Air Force continues to pursue improvements in all of our core quality of life priorities: necessary manpower; improved workplace environments; fair and competitive compensation and benefits; balanced tempo; quality healthcare; safe,

affordable housing; enriched community and family programs; and enhanced educational opportunities.

Necessary manpower is a quality of life factor that we added to our list in recent years. The demands to support both current contingencies and homeland defense have required us to take a hard look at our force structure. Even with improved recruiting and retention we are still short of our actual requirement as outlined by the mission demands. The bottom line is that we don't have the people or the resources to perform all the missions our nation asks of us.

The Air Force is committed to ensuring our people are appropriately compensated for their efforts in securing our nation. It is encouraging to see the level of support from members of Congress through the pay and benefit initiatives included in the 2002 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) have made a tangible impact.

Through your efforts and support, our airmen received the largest pay-raise in two decades. Targeting of additional dollars toward all mid-level and senior noncommissioned officers has also been a welcome change.

While I'm pleased we have made some headway in retention, we must continue to focus on areas where we struggle, and avoid a "pay table inversion"—a situation where junior members receive greater compensation than those who supervise them.

The continued measures outlined in the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) program have reduced out-of-pocket costs for maintaining an off-base residence to approximately 11 percent based on national median housing costs. While this is a vast improvement from the 15 to 19 percent our members paid just a couple of years ago, we must continue to make incremental increases in BAH funding until we eliminate out-of-

pocket housing expenses.

Another area of extreme importance regarding pay and benefits are commissaries and exchanges. They provide vital non-pay compensation benefits upon which active duty, retirees, and reserve component personnel depend. Our commissaries and exchanges provide: value, service, and support; significant savings on high quality goods and services; and a sense of community for airmen and their families wherever they serve.

A retention initiative authorized in the FY01 NDAA is the Uniformed Services Thrift Savings Plan. This long-term, savings plan to supplement retirement is a way to help our service members prepare for the future. Our first open season began in October 2001, and we currently have about 10 percent of active duty air force members enrolled in the program. However as we continue to educate our people on the value of this program, I believe the number of enrollees will increase.

Make no mistake, the Air Force is committed to ensuring our members and families have a high-quality working and living environment.

The Air Force Family Housing Master Plan guides our efforts to ensure we provide quality on-base living facilities, and we are on track to meet the AF goal to revitalize inadequate units by 2010.

The Air Force Dormitory Master Plan outlines how we will meet the Air Force goal of providing single airmen (E-1 to E-4) a private room on-base and replace our worst dorms by 2009. With current levels of funding, we are on target to meet this goal.

The quality of the facilities supporting our members and families in temporary duty and permanent change of station status are also in need of improvement. Not only will better quarters improve our members and their families quality of life, but also provides

significant savings in travel costs, out of pocket expenses, and ensures force protection. Our new visiting quarters, or “VQ”, standard will provide a “one size fits all” room for all grades of transient personnel, while our temporary lodging facilities have significantly increased the living space for our families.

The importance of fitness is directly tied to readiness, and we must provide our people with functional facilities. The Fitness Center Master Plan prioritizes the requirement for replacing or modernizing Air Force fitness centers. The Air Force committed \$183 million in FY00-05 quality of life funding and has steadily increased annual MILCON funding, including \$55 million this year. However, we still need \$382 million to complete the plan.

CONCLUSION

The Air Force leadership strongly believes that quality of life directly impacts recruiting and retention. I thank this committee for its support in our efforts to provide a quality standard of living for our people.

Before I conclude, I’d like to share a personal observation. During my tenure as the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, I’ve entered into countless conversations with airmen assigned around the world. From these conversations I have concluded that many in the field simply don’t distinguish well between the various leaders or groups within our federal government. To them, members of Congress, senior military leaders and civilians within the DoD hierarchy are viewed as one and the same. Therefore, it is imperative we work together to collectively ensure that serving in America’s military is a rewarding experience.

We ask a lot from the members of our armed services. We ask them to serve long

hours in places that are often unsafe and far from home. We ask them to commit their heart and soul to their service and country, and some pay the ultimate sacrifice. I am happy to say the support from this committee and members of Congress has been outstanding this past year. We truly appreciate your continued help as we strive to improve the quality of life for our airmen.

On behalf of the men and women who serve in America's Air Force, thank you for your leadership and for allowing us the opportunity to discuss issues and concerns in this open forum.