

RECORD VERSION

STATEMENT BY

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BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, VETERANS AFFAIRS AND
RELATED AGENCIES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

FIRST SESSION, 114TH CONGRESS

QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE MILITARY

FEBRUARY 25, 2015

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS**

Introduction

Chairman Dent, Ranking Member Bishop, distinguished members of this committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you on behalf of the more than two million members of our Army team: Soldiers, their Family members, and our civilian employees. I am hopeful that we can build a strong, positive, and meaningful dialogue with this committee over the next four years to better the quality of life for our Soldiers and their families. They deserve it.

I would also like to welcome the new committee members. I appreciate you taking on the tremendous responsibility; I look forward to working with each of you to support the Total Army Family.

Over the last decade, the Army team has given its all to meet every mission. Soldiers and Army Civilians have deployed. Families have taken on greater responsibilities to allow their Soldiers to focus on the mission. And Congress has ensured the Total Army team was resourced to succeed. This mutually supporting relationship is foundational to how we operate in an increasingly complex world. I want to personally thank this committee, its members and staff, for the enduring support. You recognize how important it is for us to take care of our Soldiers and their families while they give so much to take care of us.

Status of Quality of Life

We have to remember, the two most solemn obligations this country has to its military: to provide our troops with the best training and equipment imaginable and to ensure our troops and their Families are appropriately compensated and cared for during and after their time in uniform. When America calls, our Soldiers will answer. We must ensure they are prepared to accomplish the mission. With those obligations in mind, I'll share our progress on several key focus areas and identify areas where this committee can make a difference.

We are especially grateful for the \$975 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 funding provided by Congress for military construction that will improve the quality of life of Active, Reserve and National Guard Soldiers and families. These authorizations and appropriations resulted in tangible Quality of Life (QOL) improvements including the \$52 million Trainee Barracks Complex, Phase 1, at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. The Fort Jackson complex will support Basic Combat Training at Fort Jackson by replacing existing mobile barracks which are inefficiently dispersed and reaching the end of their useful service life.

I would also like to thank Congress for increasing the Operations and Maintenance minor construction authority from \$750,000 thousand to \$1 million and for increasing the Unspecified Minor Military Construction authority from \$2 million to \$3 million. These increased authorities will provide Army garrisons with additional flexibility to meet emerging facility requirements in support of Army Soldiers and Families.

QOL in the Army can be defined as the sum of the impacts of programs, services, facilities, and opportunities that result from policy and law. The quality of life for our Soldiers and their Families is stressed in this current fiscal environment. Across the board, Soldiers and their Families are feeling the cumulative effects of reduced training, facilities degradation, diminished access to services, and fewer opportunities for advancement that result from a smaller Army with a smaller budget. Army leaders are first and foremost committed to the Soldiers, Families and Civilians who make up our Total Army and will continue to keep their interests at heart when making the tough decisions required of us under constrained resources. Everything we do in the Army revolves around the people who have raised their right hands to protect and defend our Nation's freedoms; the Family members who shoulder the sacrifices of serving right alongside their loved ones; and our Army Civilians who provide support in the defense of our Nation. Because of that, every decision we make affects every aspect of the Soldier lifecycle from recruiting to retention, transition, or retirement. Our Total Army, ready and resilient, tackles every problem and challenge placed in front of it. However, the grand sum of these challenges has begun to take a toll on the Force. Left untended

and on a course for the return of sequestration, these issues could have devastating effects on our ability to meet the needs of the Nation and to sustain the All-Volunteer Army.

Background

For more than 239 years, the U.S. Army has answered the call of our Nation and continues to answer the call in an ever-changing, complex and uncertain security environment. We are able to do this because we are a team of the finest leaders ever assembled, molding and shaping the finest Soldiers and organizations capable of operating in the most decentralized and chaotic of environments.

Over the past year, we've been called upon to meet the needs of the Nation in new ways; from fighting a possible pandemic to defeating the emerging threats of rogue non-state actors like the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. These new missions require us to be agile and adaptive. They also require us to be trained and ready. But, the past year has also saddled the Force with issues that could distract from our focus. We've faced the third- and fourth-order effects of budget reductions, the drawdown, and the threat of a return to sequestration. Despite these challenges, our Soldiers have continuously demonstrated to the American people that U.S. Army Soldiers are consummate professionals.

As a spokesperson for the U.S. Soldier, mission uncertainty tends to be acceptable. But, uncertainty in possible changes to compensation and benefits, family services and other programs contribute to morale concerns. Together, this committee, the Army and the American people can maintain the balance that allows us to preserve the premiere, trained, and ready All-Volunteer Army.

Secretary McHugh, General Odierno, and I, are amazed at all that our Soldiers, Family members, and Civilians have accomplished. However, our Army is not focused on our past achievement, but rather our future.

The Army stands at a pivotal moment due to daunting fiscal challenges and strategic ambiguity. There is a significant amount of uncertainty that the Army and Soldiers must be prepared to face. It is our responsibility as leaders to make every effort to prepare the Force to operate in a constantly evolving global security environment. The Army Operating Concept (AOC) is our way of rethinking how the Army operates to “Win in a Complex World.” The AOC sets five strategic priorities that help shape how we prepare for an unknowable and constantly changing environment:

1. Develop adaptive Army leaders for a complex world
2. Build a globally responsive and regionally engaged Army
3. Provide a ready and modern Army
4. Strengthen our commitment to our Army profession
5. Sustain the premier All-Volunteer Army.

Through these efforts, our All-Volunteer Army will remain the best-trained, best-led and best-equipped force in the world. It will have the capability and capacity to provide expeditionary, decisive land power to the Joint Force and be ready to perform across the range of military operations in support of Combatant Commanders to defend the Nation and her interests at home and abroad, both today and against emerging threats.

As we drawdown the force to historically low numbers, we must ensure our adversaries know that we are a learning and adaptive “Army of Preparation” trained and ready to prevent, shape, and win in a complex world.

Professional Development

The world is a dangerous and unpredictable place, and a new mindset is required to prepare our Nation’s sons and daughters, America’s finest, to fight and win in this complex and ambiguous environment.

That’s why leader development remains our number one priority. We are investing in leader development through an overhaul of our professional military education system

by looking at who we train, when and how we train them, and what we are training them for. Collectively, these efforts are known as Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) 2020, which looks at training from the operational, institutional and self-development perspectives.

In the operational domain, we must continue to harness a decade-plus of proficiency in combat. The insights our squad leaders and platoon sergeants have reaped from over 13 years of combat need to be shared, retained and cultivated so the next generation can benefit from their hard-learned lessons. A renewed focus on individual and collective level training at home station will enhance unit readiness, while also increasing the effectiveness of our multi-echelon, multi-component training at our combat training centers.

Some of the most exciting improvements will occur in the institutional domain within the NCO Education System (NCOES). We're in the process of developing new courses for senior NCOs as well as restructuring courses for junior leaders. All of the changes in institutional education are structured to boost the critical thinking skills of our young leaders with the end result being a noncommissioned officer who has enhanced capabilities as an advisor and can offer creative solutions to commanders in a Joint operating environment. We are also revamping our entire Soldier education framework by maximizing resources through educational partnerships and better integrating and synchronizing all of our educational institutions. We are working to maximize credentialing opportunities and partner with civilian academia to ensure Soldiers receive full credit for the work they are doing in order to prepare them to ultimately transition and remain as Soldiers for Life.

Finally, in the self-development domain, Soldiers at all levels must embrace the expectation that developing their individual leadership skills, traits, and attributes is a personal responsibility. NCO 2020 builds Structured Self Development into each level of NCOES. The self-development domain also encourages Soldiers to use Tuition Assistance and other earned incentives to enhance personal educational and career

goals. These programs are critical to our Soldiers' personal and professional development. Without them, we cannot achieve our goal of properly preparing them to be Soldiers for Life.

The need for a professional NCO Corps that can meet the requirements of training the Nation's best and brightest to fight and win in this landscape has never been more critical. Ultimately, a strengthened NCO Corps will help us achieve our national security objectives.

Soldier 2020

Complementing NCO 2020 is Soldier 2020, which is the Army's campaign to develop the Force of the Future based exclusively on standards. Soldier 2020 is a Total Army effort to scientifically evaluate every job in the Army to determine its requirements – physical, mental, emotional – regardless of gender to ensure the best-qualified Soldier has the opportunity to serve in any position where they are capable of performing to standard.

A major component of this effort is the plan to open all units, positions and occupations - across the Total Force - to all Soldiers by January 2016. The Army has made tremendous progress executing Soldier 2020, putting the best-qualified Soldiers in each career field within our Army. Over the past 27 months, we've opened more than 55,000 positions to women across all Army components. This represents six previously closed military occupational specialties.

Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) has been working with the U.S. Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine to develop valid, accurate, scientifically defensible physical performance tests to predict an applicant's ability to perform the critical, physically demanding tasks of currently closed Military Occupational Specialties (MOSs).

Right now, the only occupations closed to women in the Army are: –Infantry (11B, C, Z); enlisted Engineer (12B); enlisted Field Artillery (13B, D, F); and Armor (19A, B, C, D, K, Z).

Subject matter experts from the Engineer, Field Artillery, Infantry, and Armor Career Management Fields identified 31 tasks - across the closed MOSs - critical to MOS performance. Army TRADOC verified that these tasks are critical to performance in the occupation and that 90% or more of Soldiers currently assigned to each MOS are capable of completing the tasks to standard. The performance tests will allow the Army to select Soldiers, regardless of gender, who are capable of safely performing the physically demanding tasks of the MOS, which will result in fewer training injuries and re-assignments of Soldiers.

The Army is still in the process of determining where and when to apply occupational specific performance testing at this time. Once developed, testing will be conducted for everyone who wants to enter one of these occupations. Additionally, individuals will be required to complete MOS specific occupational training to be awarded the MOS.

The Army will introduce women into male-only units in an integrated, incremental, and deliberate manner. In May of 2012, the Army opened positions to women in the Headquarters and Headquarters Companies of the maneuver battalions within nine Army Brigade Combat Teams. Positions opened beginning with senior NCOs and officers and subsequently opened to junior enlisted Soldiers in the summer of 2013. Opening positions in this manner ensures that leadership is in place prior to opening additional positions in lower levels of the organization. We expect to repeat this process as future MOS decisions are made.

Once complete, this deliberate process will allow for success in our military based solely on ability, qualifications, and performance and will enhance unit cohesion and increase overall readiness.

Ranger School Assessment

TRADOC's Maneuver Center of Excellence is conducting a one-time, gender-integrated assessment of the Ranger Course. The assessment is set to take place in April 2015.

This is a truly exciting time in our history as a Nation and Army as we continue to make sure we create an environment in which all Soldiers believe they can increase their personal capabilities and best-contribute to the Army team.

Readiness & Training

In this current fiscally-constrained environment, training and readiness are inextricably linked to our drawdown. We are posturing the Army to be a land force capable of integrating and synchronizing across multiple domains within a Joint Interagency, Intergovernmental and Multinational environment all in support of the National Defense Strategy and to provide our National leaders with multiple, scalable options. Without jeopardizing ongoing operations, the Army will reduce personnel in a responsible, measured way to achieve congressionally mandated end-strength and shape the Force for the future. We continue the drawdown while still meeting every mission we're called to do - just as we always have, but the long-term cost to our people, our facilities and our equipment is as unpredictable as the complex world in which we are poised to fight.

The budget caps set years ago could not have accounted for the velocity of instability around the world. To be successful in today's uncertain security environment requires us to size and equip the Force based on what we need to meet the challenges of a diverse enemy and ever-changing operational environment; while a return to sequestration-level funding forces us to make these shifts based almost solely on what we can afford. This increases the risk that when called to respond to the next world crisis, we will either not have enough Soldiers to send, or we will send Soldiers who have not been sufficiently trained and adequately equipped. Putting Soldiers - America's sons and daughters - at this kind of risk is not responsible and has to be our foremost thought when deciding on funding. Every dollar spent on readiness and training increases our Soldiers' capacity and capability to fight and win.

Last month, The Army Chief of Staff testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee and told them the abrupt nature of sequestration in FY13 had significantly impacted every aspect of the Army, from training to readiness to family programs. He further explained that although the Bipartisan Budget Act gave us some relief from sequestration, the reduced spending levels in FY14-15 have forced us to reduce our training, defer needed maintenance upgrades and delay or cancel important procurement programs. The negative effects this has on readiness and modernization are not easy to remedy.

Transition & Soldier for Life

As we continue implementing this drawdown, we will continue to honor the service and sacrifice of Soldiers and Families by providing important support programs to assist them both while serving and after they transition. During this process, it is an unfortunate fact that natural attrition alone will not achieve the Army's reduced end strength requirements. While we are doing everything we can to ensure this drawdown is executed in a controlled and responsible manner for both the Army Families affected and the Nation's security needs, we have had to involuntarily separate quality Soldiers. We expect to need additional involuntary separation boards again this year. Our Soldiers and Families are exemplary – that's what makes us the best fighting Force in the world. Still, we have to send good Soldiers home. This is one of the toughest things we've had to do as an Army.

Using a standards-based approach, we are retaining only the most qualified – the most capable, the best of the best. That doesn't mean the ones we send back into the civilian world are less than stellar. In fact, if we could keep them all, we would. They certainly contributed to our successes over the last 13-years. After just a single term of service with the U.S. Army, they have skills and attributes that far exceed those of the average 20-year-old. We're giving back highly motivated and skilled workers.

From the moment citizens become Soldiers – they enter into an alliance that never ends. They become Soldiers for Life. A Soldier for Life, Starts, Serves, Re-integrates

and Remains strong. This four-phase model emphasizes continuous personal and professional development and connection to the larger Army family of all three components—Active, Army Reserve, and Army National Guard--retirees, veterans, as well as community, civic and industry partners.

Successful navigation of the four-phase model throughout a Soldier's career contributes to sustaining not only a trained and ready Force, but also a skilled and certified pipeline for career-ready citizens.

Successful systems are already in place to support our goal of preparing Soldiers for the challenges and rigors of both military life and life after they transition. The Tuition Assistance (TA) program and the Post 9-11 GI Bill are crucial Soldier for Life enablers. Some Soldiers choose to begin working on their educational goals while serving and others choose to focus on their education after their service is complete. These programs offer options and are immensely popular with our troops. It is essential that we maintain Soldier support programs such as TA and the GI Bill. Without them, our ability to achieve a successful Soldier for Life program will be significantly hindered.

We're also creating new opportunities under the Soldier for Life banner. As part of Soldier for Life, the Army is developing credentialing programs associated with many of our career fields. These credentials go beyond preparing Soldiers for transition; they lead to a more professional work force that is aligned with civilian practices. Our various Centers of Excellence currently have 96 credentialing programs affecting 47 skill sets.

As of December 2014, the Army has seen over 18,000 enrollments in credentialing programs with more than 20,000 credentials earned. Our credentialing efforts enhance Army readiness, Soldier life-long learning and increase overall post-service employability.

This effort is also fiscally responsible. We estimate it costs less than \$300 per Soldier for credentialing and licensing, which aids in Soldier employment. The cost avoidance is the estimated \$8,000 average per Veteran the Army pays in unemployment compensation.

As a result of our synchronous efforts with government agencies and interaction with communities, the Army has seen a significant decrease in unemployment compensation for ex service member spending and Veteran unemployment. Overall Veteran unemployment has dropped to 5.8%, below the national average of 6.4% for FY14, and veteran unemployment rates have continued to drop during the first quarter of FY15. Through our connection efforts, we continue to make progress in reducing unemployment among 18-24 year-old Veterans.

Military Compensation

For the past 18-months, the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission reviewed all aspects of military pay and compensation and recently published their report. The Army continues to look at potential impacts of the commission's recommendations. As we assess the recommendations, any Army proposal will be postured to recruit and retain a high quality force, offering competitive and sustainable benefits that compare favorably with private sector compensation. We strive to keep faith with those already serving while maintaining our ability to sustain the All-Volunteer Army.

Currently serving Soldiers and their families are concerned about their pay and benefits. There is a lot of speculation since the final decisions have not been made. It is important for us to make sure Soldiers and their Families understand the commission's goals; that nothing will change immediately; that we are still analyzing the effects of the recommendations, and determining how best to take the lessons-learned from the commission and use them to increase readiness. Finally, it is imperative we make sure we communicate any pending changes to Soldier pay and benefits well-before they are

enacted. We stand behind our promise that no Soldier serving today will see their basic pay decrease.

It's important for Soldiers and Families to know that the Army's proposals are part of a broader Department of Defense (DoD) recommendation. The Army supports a holistic and comprehensive approach that reforms military compensation in a fair, responsible, and sustainable way.

Through this review process, some facts guide our analysis of the commission's recommendations. First, Army military and civilian manpower costs are at historic highs and consume nearly 60% of the Army budget. Second, without compensation reform, under our current budget the Army will be forced to make further reductions to not only personnel, but also modernization and readiness. Because of these facts, the Army has to make tough decisions to rebalance the Force by prioritizing resource allocations across readiness, modernization, and force structure accounts. We see this as the best way to ensure we are able to properly train, equip, and prepare our Soldiers to fight and win in a complex world.

As the Army's senior enlisted leader, my biggest concern is our sustained ability to recruit and maintain a high quality All-Volunteer Army. In order to achieve that end-state, we must take time to understand how pay and compensation changes could affect our accessions and retention programs. Keeping faith with those already serving is the first step to achieving a balance between what we must do to quell the budget strains and what we must do because it's right for our people. It is absolutely paramount that we maintain the promises we've made to those currently serving by not drastically altering their pay and benefits mid-stride. The consequences of breaking this pact would filter from beyond our posts, camps and stations directly to mothers and fathers of potential recruits across the nation. What we do today and in the near term as a result of this study will affect the Army of tomorrow. This is the thought I carry with me as we look at how to reform this system.

Family Readiness

Family readiness means being prepared to effectively navigate the challenges of daily living in the unique context of military service. To meet readiness needs, the Army has invested in a wide array of Family Programs. Examples include: child care and youth programs that provide peace of mind to Soldiers that children are in safe environments, allowing them to focus on the mission; Family Advocacy for the prevention and treatment of domestic violence and child abuse; and the Exceptional Family Member Program, which matches Families with special needs with relevant services at their duty locations.

We have statutory requirements, operational imperatives, and a moral obligation to provide a balanced array of programs and services to Soldiers, Army civilians, and their Families that meet the unique demands of military life, foster life skill competencies, strengthen and sustain physical and mental fitness and resiliency, and promote a strong and ready Army.

Soldier and Family Programs are an investment in the Army's most valuable asset – our people. The Army remains committed to providing Soldiers and Families a quality of life commensurate with their service, while being good stewards of taxpayer dollars. The FY16 budget request includes \$1.1 billion to ensure Soldiers and Families are prepared to face the everyday challenges of military life, and to provide for a ready and resilient total force.

We remain committed to protect Soldier and Family programs to the greatest extent possible. We continue to review Family programs to ensure the most efficient delivery of service, where and when it is needed most. The programs that support Soldiers and Families remain a top priority because it is critical they live resilient, stay ready and be Army Strong.

We have done our best to ensure Army Families are well cared for during these times of fiscal constraint. However, further cuts will have an immediate impact on Soldier and Family readiness.

The Army Profession

We are in the second year of codifying what it means to be part of the Profession of Arms. It means we are trained to a high, self –governing standard, we provide for professional development and we live by the Army Values and abide by the Army Ethic. Understanding the Profession of Arms helps Soldiers see their place in meeting the needs of the Nation and provides a basis for establishing the trust that keeps us dedicated to each-other through combat and beyond.

This year we are exploring the Army Ethic in-depth by way of panels, discussions, case studies and proliferation of positive examples of stewards of the profession.

But we still have our moral and ethical challenges –sexual assault and harassment. I know how important these issues are to this Committee and to the American people. As a leader, I feel a responsibility to the mothers and fathers who have left their sons and daughters in my care. Our leaders feel the same responsibility. These young Soldiers deserve our best efforts to solve these problems.

Some of our biggest challenges can, and I believe will, be solved with a combination of great leadership and commitment to the Army Profession. For the most part, I think we are moving in the right direction.

Above all else, the Army is an organization built on and bound by values. Sexual harassment and assault in all its forms goes against every one of those values. The overwhelming majority of Soldiers and Civilians serve honorably, but we must recognize that the ill-disciplined few jeopardize the safety of all our people as well as the trust and confidence the American people have in their Army.

The Army's prevention-focused, advocacy-centered program known as Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP) will become the Nation's standard for addressing this national issue. The Army's goal is to strengthen the Army's culture and provide positive command climates in which behaviors and attitudes that lead to sexual offenses are rare and survivors feel free to report without fear of reprisal. The program seeks to reduce and ultimately eliminate this crime from our ranks, and to quickly and compassionately care for survivors through a comprehensive plan centered on enhancing prosecution, investigation, survivor advocacy, assessment and accountability. And we are making strides.

According to the report sent to the President this past December, sexual assaults are down, reports are up, and satisfaction with the chain of command's support for the program is up. This is exactly what we want to see.

It may seem counterintuitive that we want to see statistics that show more reports – but this crime is one of the most underreported crimes in our Nation. If we are seeing a statistically significant increase in reporting in our ranks, it suggests that perhaps our culture is changing, our climate is improving and confidence in commanders is stronger than ever before. Increased reporting also means victim advocates can arrange access to medical, legal, and emotional support for these brave survivors.

We've learned so much over the last few years because Army leadership has been committed to stamping-out this insider threat. The commitment is evidenced in the tangible changes to policy and practice. The changes include revised policies that focus on constant assessments of command climates, changes to leader evaluations to ensure they can demonstrate support of SHARP goals, improvements to SHARP training content in every level of a Soldier's Professional Military Education, the addition of special legal counsel to support victims, and the establishment of more stringent screening criteria and background checks for those serving in positions of trust,

including Sexual Assault Response Counselors, Victim Advocates, recruiters and drill sergeants.

Just a few weeks ago, over 200 4-, 3-, and 2-star general officers, commanders and command sergeants major from across the Army met for two days to share ideas, hear from survivors, by-standers, academia, and subject matter experts at the Army's annual SHARP Summit. Events like these allow for free expression of ideas with the ultimate goal of identifying gaps as well as successes so we can implement substantive changes that move us closer to eliminating sexual offenses from the Army.

I had the privilege of sharing my thoughts with the summit audience. I told these professionals that our young leaders are hearing and understand the policy. They know what's right. I told them, however; that there are still too many survivors who fear retaliation from their peers for coming forward. This retaliation ranges from being "un-friended" on social media to being avoided by former battle-buddies. We're still trying to understand this development. My fear is that if this trend goes unchecked, it will reverse the strides we've made in building confidence among survivors, and reports will begin to decline. When reports decline, trust erodes further and survivors face this crisis alone. I challenged these leaders to recognize excellence and bravery within their units as a way to make it popular to support the SHARP program. Too often we focus on the negative things a few wayward Soldiers do. Instead, I encouraged leaders to make by-stander intervention a positive experience.

In March, I'll be visiting Joint Base Lewis McChord (JBLM) to view the progress of an Army pilot program launched there last July that brings all SHARP resources under one roof. The JBLM center is the model we're using to analyze the effectiveness and assess costs needed to provide SHARP services in centralized locations. We hope to establish 12 SHARP Resource Centers across the Army that will better support survivors and encourage an atmosphere of trust that results in prevention.

We also strive to inspire change in our country's other large organizations. The idea is that, over time, if we can share our dedication and lessons-learned outside of the Army, then we'll have help preventing the problem from ever entering the Army.

While I understand the concern that exists from our government leaders and from the American people, we are resolutely working on the problem. It is my sincere opinion that Army commanders must retain their authority over the disposition of sexual assault cases. Removal of that authority would actually make it harder to respond to the needs of Soldiers within the command. Making commanders more accountable, not less, solved many of the Army's most difficult problems – most notably integration.

Wounded Warrior Care and Disability Evaluations

Since the inception of Warrior Transition Units in June 2007, nearly 66,000 wounded, ill, or injured Soldiers and their Families have either progressed through or are being cared for by these dedicated caregivers and support personnel. Additionally, more than 29,400 (approximately 45%) of the Soldiers have returned to the Force.

The Army is committed to ensuring our wounded, ill, and injured Soldiers have the best health care possible and successfully remain on active duty or successfully transition out of military service and receive necessary health care from the Veterans Administration (VA). The past six years have been a time of significant investment in the development of the Warrior Care and Transition Program (WCTP). The WCTP's top priority is the welfare of our Soldiers and their Families: commitment to the best care and treatment of wounded, ill, and injured Soldiers and commitment to education, training and careers.

We also continue to improve the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) process, phased in from 2007 to 2011 to replace the Legacy Disability Evaluation System. IDES is a joint DoD and VA process designed to provide a seamless transition from military service to civilian life for wounded, ill, or injured Soldiers. IDES helps ensure a fit and ready force, as well as timely and accurate disability evaluation and

benefits for wounded, ill, and injured Soldiers. The key goals of IDES are to reduce overall processing time, reduce duplicative exams from DoD and VA, ensure Soldiers receive benefits shortly after medical separation or retirement to mitigate financial hardships, and increase transparency for Service Members and their Families.

As of the end of FY14, the Army has eliminated IDES backlog at the Medical Evaluation Boards and the Physical Evaluation Boards. We are now meeting timeliness goals for all stages the Army controls.

The Army is continuing to work with our VA partners to operate the IDES process efficiently while ensuring Soldiers receive the benefits they have earned and deserve.

Closing

The topics I've highlighted here carry one thread – people. Everything we do is about the people who wear this uniform now and in the future. As decisions are being made about programs to keep, facilities to maintain, services to provide and people to stay – I'm cognizant that these decisions impact people. And, individually, a change to one program or service can and will be weathered. But, slashing a bit from many areas - as will be required if our path continues toward sequestration-level funding - carries a cumulative impact that we have not yet calculated.

Despite an air of uncertainty, throughout this past year, while continuing the fight, drawing down our force, and working within fiscal constraints, our Soldiers have always demonstrated their professionalism. Moreover, they have demonstrated their trust in us to take care of them. The Soldiers who make up today's All-Volunteer Force stand ever-ready and willing to answer the Nation's call. They believe in each other. They believe in their leaders. And, they believe in their ability to protect the Nation. We must ensure that our actions and decisions never weaken such a solemn bond.

In closing, I want to recognize the amazing work our Army Team does every day. As the Sergeant Major of the Army, the best part of my job is being around the greatest

team the world has ever known. The professionalism, dedication, and sacrifice they exhibit is astonishing --for each other, for the mission, and for the people of this Nation. It is the reason our Army is envied worldwide. Today, our Soldiers are the best-trained, best-manned, best-equipped, and best-led force in our history. It is essential that we maintain the right level of resourcing to remain that way.

Tomorrow we will be smaller and we may be leaner, but we remain the best. And, in 2020, 2025, or 2050 -we will be the best. I feel confident in making that prediction because I know our Soldiers. I am equally confident that we will continue to have your support and the support of the American people to take care of our Soldiers. As our Nation has done throughout its history, the American people and their elected representatives will ensure we have the necessary resources to preserve liberty and protect our way of life!

I appreciate the opportunity to speak before you today and I look forward to continuing our dialogue. Thank you again.

This We'll Defend.