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Future Recruiting Challenges in the Fiscally Constrained Environment

Witness Statement of
Brigadier General Gina M. Grosso,
Director, Force Management
Policy, Deputy Chief of Staff,
Manpower, Personnel and Services

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Chairman Wilson, Representative Davis, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you to discuss recruiting.

Air Force Recruiting Service (AFRS) has successfully met the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) requirements for the past 14-years. In recent years the weak economy has served as the catalyst for high-quality enlistments and led to historically high percentages of recruits as high school diploma graduates (HSDG) and in the Armed Forces Qualifying Test (AFQT) categories of I-III A (score of 50-99). Although Department of Defense benchmarks are 90% and 60% respectively, the Air Force recently exceeded these targets by recruiting 99% HSDGs and 98% in AFQT categories I-III A in Fiscal Year (FY) 2013. As a result, AFRS has recruited the right Airmen into the right jobs at the right time to fill the Initial Skills Training pipeline with the number of Airmen to meet career field requirements across the Air Force.

Independent research from Joint Advertising Market Research and Studies (JAMRS) indicates the high-quality enlistment market will be the first to drop off as the economy improves and youth are afforded more opportunities. Recent JAMRS studies also highlight a low-level of interest in serving in our Nations' Military with only 8% of high-academic quality youth indicating an interest in serving in the Military. As these factors limit our high-quality applicant pool and Air Force requirements increasingly demand high-quality, technically-savvy recruits, we must posture ourselves to be responsive to the dynamic environment in which we recruit. The Air Force depends on three critical resources to ensure we continue to meet our recruiting needs. These are, in order of importance, a right-sized and properly-trained recruiting force, a robust advertising and marketing campaign and a fully-funded Initial Enlistment Bonus Program.

Recruiting Force

Our recruiting force is sized to meet current accession requirements and is programmed to be proportionate to overall accession requirements across the Future Years Defense Program. This creates a favorable economy-of-force minimally affected by fluctuations in end strength. However, due to a long selection, assignment and training process, it doesn't afford us the ability to swiftly react to any sudden increases in accession requirements. On average it takes 12 to 18 months to identify, select, train, and assign recruiters. It takes even longer for them to become productive recruiters and for civilians they recruit to get to basic training. If unforeseen events or external factors drive an immediate need for more recruiting effort, we won't have the ability to respond swiftly.

Fluctuations in the size of our recruiting force are not a new concept. Following FY99, when we missed our enlisted accessions goal for the first time in 20 years, we increased recruiter manning to ensure there wouldn't be a repeat in FY00. This increase in manning, although authorized immediately, took 12 – 18 months to fully translate into increased recruiters in the field. The buildup of the recruiter force continued through FY03 but since then has decreased proportionately with reductions to end-strength and accessions. However, historically we have been unable to fill all of our recruiting positions. For every recruiter vacancy, a portion of that workload is distributed to other recruiters to meet recruiting goals and maintain continued Air Force visibility in the vacated geographical recruiting area. This additional workload distributed to a one-deep position extends the recruiter's workday and further reduces his or her effective span of control. To eliminate this manning gap, the Air Force recently instituted a nominative versus a voluntary process to man special duties such as recruiting. This process ensures that all special duty positions are filled with our strongest Airmen and by design will eliminate the manning gaps.

The Air Force's increased demand for Battlefield Airmen (BA), such as Combat Controllers and Tactical Air Control Party members, requires recruiters to divert more effort in pursuit of these uniquely qualified recruits. The effort to find and qualify a BA is disproportionate to most accessions and can account for recruiters devoting approximately 50% of their duty time to ensure these critical recruits are sought out and physically prepared to meet the stringent requirements necessary to qualify as a BA. This further necessitates a properly sized recruiting force and resources tailored to meet this unique demand.

Although our accession requirements are less now than they have been in recent years, it is vitally important to note that as our recruiting force shrinks so does our footprint in communities nationwide. After years of downsizing and base realignments and closures, Air Force presence in many communities has eroded. These are the same communities we rely on to entrust their sons and daughters to meet our All-Volunteer Force requirements. While we strive for budget and manning efficiencies, we must still maintain our presence in these communities to highlight awareness of opportunities to serve in the Air Force.

A recent curriculum review at the recruiting school validates proper resourcing to meet current and scheduled recruiter vacancies, but as mentioned above, any sudden increased demand for recruiting effort (i.e., recruiter manning) would strain the system and threaten our ability to provide trained recruiters to the field at the right time. During our curriculum review, we addressed the importance of maintaining a professional recruiting force by incorporating the best sales techniques and placing greater emphasis on topics such as preventing sexual assault and avoiding unprofessional relationships. This builds on our recruiter hiring practices that ensure we maintain our professional edge by selecting the right Airmen for this special duty.

Robust Advertising and Marketing Campaign

An adequately-funded and sustained advertising campaign is essential to recruiting success as we compensate for fewer recruiters in the field and reduced Air Force visibility in America's communities. Each Air Force recruiter on average covers an area of responsibility comprised of 1,700 square miles. Effective advertising virtually shrinks this area by delivering the Air Force message more frequently to points on the compass that realistically have no recruiter representation. Research by JAMRS cites television as one of the best vehicles to reach youth. Unfortunately, advertising dollars have been in constant flux which has created inefficiencies and a constrained television advertising campaign. Additionally, budget constraints slowed or completely shut down key advertising and marketing events, to include the Air Force Thunderbird Aerial Demonstration Team, and delayed our National Television campaign for FY14, leading to missed "key spots" and diminished purchasing power. This not only resulted in the absence of Air Force awareness activities in entire markets, but it also strained relationships within key communities that recruiters have worked years to foster.

Department of Defense research suggests 75% of America's age-qualified youth are not otherwise qualified for military service due to factors such as obesity, education level, health issues, as well as criminal activity to include drug involvement. When combined with a low level of interest in the Military among high academic quality youth, it is challenging for the military services to meet annual accessions goals from the pool of propensed and eligible youth who qualify in the top three mental aptitude categories (Cat I-III A). JAMRS concludes the ability to convert non-propensed youth will be crucial to the future success of the Air Force and cites advertising as one of the most effective tools to facilitate this conversion.

At a time when the Air Force requires a greater share of high-quality youth to meet our growing demand for high tech skills, such as Cyber, it is crucial we maintain properly-funded and consistent advertising and marketing programs aimed at converting non-propensed high quality youth to meet our recruiting requirements. With reduced recruiter presence in the field and reductions in other resources, it is critical we properly invest in advertising and marketing campaigns.

Initial Enlistment Bonus Program

AFRS uses the Initial Enlistment Bonus (IEB) program to compensate for reduced recruiters in the field. Bonuses serve as a force multiplier by generating much needed awareness and providing the necessary incentive for individuals to enlist in critical Air Force specialties.

The Air Force relies on the IEB program to inspire, engage and recruit youth into career fields that have been historically hard to recruit and/or qualify for by awarding a monetary bonus as an incentive. AFRS depends on this program to produce a sufficient recruit pool to access requirements for these high-demand, low-density career fields such as Battlefield Airmen and Linguists. Currently, we offer bonuses for nine specific career fields. The value of this program is captured in a RAND study, The Enlistment Bonus Experiment, R-3353. RAND found that while holding the total number of enlistments constant, an increase in bonuses targeted to hard-to-fill occupations increased enlistments in those occupations by 43 percent. Despite budgetary pressures, the Air Force has ensured adequate funding for IEBs for the career fields that have traditionally been hard to recruit for as well as to meet the demands of emerging career fields such as Cyber. Since FY10, the Air Force has budgeted \$14.5M annually for its IEB program to meet the recruiting needs and anticipates adequate funding in the future.

Recruitment of Applicants with Undocumented Dependents

Air Force policy does not currently restrict enlistment of otherwise qualified applicants who have undocumented dependents. Applicants are asked on the Security Clearance Questionnaire (SF86) if they have any family members who are not US citizens. If they answer “yes”, they must explain their affiliation on the questionnaire. The Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) has initiated a policy review, in coordination with all Military Services, regarding the enlistment of individuals with undocumented dependents. When the review is completed, the Air Force will review current practices to ensure it complies with OSD’s guidance.

With respect to HR 2377, currently the Air Force allows non-US citizens to enlist if they have a current, valid INS Form I-551 (Permanent Resident Card or “Green Card”) and meet all other requirements to enlist. Additionally, we use the Military Accessions Vital to National Interest (MAVNI) pilot program to enlist individuals holding approved visas to fill specific language and cultural requirements. In both cases, these applicants are verified by United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) prior to enlistment.

CONCLUSION

The Air Force has benefited from an economy experiencing slow growth and high unemployment rates; however, we are already seeing indications of slowed interest in potential recruits as the economy shows signs of improvement and youth have more life options. Leading indicators project a slow decline in accession quality and a reduced recruit pool for certain career

fields. An agile and responsive recruiting program will be even more critical to maintain the All-Volunteer Force and to create the Air Force of the future.

Air Force recruiting efforts are intricately linked to meeting accession goals and require constant investment. Although the size of the recruiting force has decreased commensurate with declining accession requirements, we have changed the process for selecting recruiters to ensure that all recruiting positions are filled. In addition, we recognize there may be a minimum recruiter level that must be maintained to ensure our recruiter force remains effective; we are beginning the analytical work to define this minimum recruiter requirement. The reality is that a properly-sized recruiting force may need to be linked to more than just accession numbers. As we continue to refocus efforts to ensure our recruiting force is adequate to meet future accession needs—both in size and skill aptitudes—it is also critical that we supplement the overall recruiting program with a robust advertising campaign and a fully-funded and targeted initial enlistment bonus program.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, I want to thank you and the members of this Subcommittee for your advocacy on behalf of the men and women of the Air Force. The quality of our Airmen has never been higher—they are well educated, highly trained, and ready to meet our Nation's call to duty. The Air Force remains poised and committed to continue the success of our All-Volunteer Force and will continue to evolve to meet the dynamic demands of recruiting in today's environment and that of the future. We recognize this cannot be achieved without the continued support of Congress. We thank you for your leadership and unwavering commitment to ensure the success of the All-Volunteer Air Force during these unprecedented times.