

**DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
PRESENTATION TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE  
ON  
MILITARY PERSONNEL  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**SUBJECT: SENIOR LEADER MISCONDUCT – PREVENTION AND  
ACCOUNTABILITY**

**STATEMENT OF: GENERAL STEPHEN W. WILSON  
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## **Introduction:**

Chairman Coffman, Ranking Member Speier, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify before you today.

Air Force Senior Officials<sup>1</sup> are expected to be individuals of the highest character, ready to lead 670,000 total force Airmen with our core values of selflessness, integrity, and excellence in their actions. For this reason, we emphasize leadership development programs focused on ethics and the prevention of misconduct throughout an officer's career. Should an officer falter despite our developmental steps, we maintain an aggressive system of accountability to uphold trust across the force.

Our commitment to misconduct prevention begins from the moment of accession and remains energized throughout a career-long continuum of learning. Every officer, starting at lieutenant, is provided detailed instruction on ethics and conduct in our commissioning sources. Our goal there is to set the tone for a career of service. Captains complete more advanced studies in those areas during Squadron Officer School. This is deliberately timed to prepare them for mid-level leadership positions in line units across the globe. Further, a full academic quarter of instruction for majors at Air Command and Staff College, to include a week-long focus on the law, expands on knowledge regarding ethics, misconduct, and accountability. This expansion pairs with their transition into senior staffs or leadership roles over large numbers of Airmen.

Our continuum of learning continues to sharpen prevention and accountability as officers reach senior ranks. For example, squadron commanders attend training

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<sup>1</sup> Our use of the term "Senior Officials" means Active Duty, retired, Reserve, or National Guard military officer in grades O-7 and above, and any officer selected for promotion to O-7 whose name is on the O-7 promotion board report forwarded to the Military Department Secretary (including ANG Colonels selected by a General Officer Federal Recognition Board for a Certificate of Eligibility).

courses with advanced instruction on ethics, misconduct and our system of accountability. At the rank of colonel, new group commanders attend two full days of Senior Officer Legal Orientation (SOLO) focused on advanced training in the law and individual and agency accountability. Later, if they are selected for assignment as a wing commander, these colonels return for an additional two days of legal training at SOLO. We build on these courses with a deep focus on ethics in our one-star developmental courses including Senior Leader Orientation Course and CAPSTONE. Additionally, in-depth instruction in ethics and power follows during the Advanced Senior Leader Development Program and Leadership at the Peak, our two-star and three-star courses. We also embrace the importance of the command team in development and have widened our continuum with tracks in ethics and conduct for senior officer spouses at a majority of the aforementioned courses.

Despite our aggressive curriculum efforts, we recognize that trends or gaps rise to the surface. Subsequently, we seek 360-degree annual feedback on our general officers via survey inputs from subordinates, peers, and superiors. We have extended that to receive input from our sister services and other government agencies. Additionally, we allocate focused time to discuss ethics and conduct at our tri-annual 4-star summits (CORONA). These forums serve to maintain currency across our senior most officers while also enabling key points to reach the force via their policies, commander's calls, base visits, and guest lectures at our development courses. In aggregate, we remain steadfast in our commitment to ensure senior officers, their staffs, and their spouses are prepared for the ethical standards of military service.

While we continue to invest in misconduct prevention and the goal of zero

offenses, we also understand the critical role that our system of accountability plays in upholding trust across our force. For scope, senior official misconduct in the Air Force has generally fallen into one of three categories over the last five years: violation of government ethics rules; improper handling of personnel matters; and unprofessional relationships. Every complaint is thoroughly investigated and assessed by dedicated teams of investigators and legal advisors, to include multiple layers of independent oversight. Of 181 investigations into senior official misconduct, 77 cases resulted in a substantiated finding over the previous five years.

Procedurally, our Inspector General (IG) Reports of Investigation are forwarded to the appropriate commander for command actions. The commander receives advice from legal counsel in evaluating the case and in making the disposition. This is accomplished on a case-by-case basis while remaining consistent with laws, regulations, and the fundamentals of due process. Options could range from no action to court-martial, based upon the parameters of each circumstance. Adverse personnel actions may include relief from command, reassignment, removal from promotion lists, and officer grade determinations. The latter can result in a substantial reduction in retirement benefits. Collectively these procedures are consistent with the principles of command, ensuring that misconduct is addressed at the appropriate level.

In all substantiated cases, the IG report of investigation, properly redacted, is available in response to media or Freedom of Information Act requests. This includes the release of the specific administrative disposition as a method to enhance the public's knowledge of, and confidence in, our system. Our appeal process, through the chain of command, ensures any concerns are properly addressed.

For its strengths, our system is not without shortcomings. We must continue to focus on improving timeliness. The current slow speed is having negative second and third order effects on the readiness of our force. Improved timeliness will reduce the stress on complainants, subjects, and the larger force as it navigates delays in assignments, promotions, separations or retirements. Together with our sister services as well as DoD-IG, we are working to identify and develop investigative efficiencies.

Chairman Coffman, Ranking Member Speier, in closing, we appreciate this committee's continuing support of the Air Force and your interest in our efforts to prevent senior leader misconduct. This hearing has allowed us a welcomed opportunity to review and improve important processes. The American public and all Airmen must have confidence and trust in our methods to develop senior leaders of character and to hold them accountable. We intend to consistently improve at all turns and look forward to partnerships with the DoD and Congress toward that end.

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