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PRESENTATION TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SUBJECT: DIVERSITY IN RECRUITING AND RETENTION

STATEMENT OF:

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INTRODUCTION

Chairwoman Speier, Ranking Member Kelly, Distinguished Members of this Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee to discuss the Air Force's ongoing efforts to increase diversity. The United States Air Force considers diversity and inclusion a warfighting imperative critical to successful mission execution across the entire range of operations. The challenges we face today are complex, multi-domain, and evolve at an ever-increasing pace. To solve these security challenges, the United States Air Force believes we must attract, recruit, and retain talented Americans from all backgrounds. We must leverage and optimize the diverse sets of ideas, experiences, and perspectives necessary for generating solutions across our spectrum of challenges. Personal life experiences, geographic and socioeconomic backgrounds, cultural knowledge, educational background, work experience, language abilities, physical abilities, philosophical and spiritual perspectives, age, race, gender, and ethnicity all inform a person's identity and when harnessed provide an asymmetric advantage. As such, the Air Force set a goal to mirror the population of Americans eligible to serve by race, gender, and ethnicity. To track progress toward that goal and the various lines of effort designed to achieve it over time, we've implemented a monthly Diversity and Inclusion Council chaired by the Chief of Staff of the Air Force. The council's permanent membership includes commanders and senior decision makers from the Air Staff, Air Education and Training Command to include Air Force Recruiting Service, the United States Air Force Academy, and Air University including the Commander of the Holm Center (responsible for ROTC and OTS). Advisors include current and retired diverse general officers, members of the Women's Barrier Analysis working group, and officer and enlisted Airmen representing a variety of diverse groups. The current population of Americans eligible to serve includes 57.5% women, 7% African Americans, and 9.5% of Hispanic ethnicity. Our Air Force currently consists of 22% women with a slightly higher percentage of officers versus enlisted Airmen, 15% African Americans (with only 6% in the officer corps), and 13% with Hispanic ethnicity (with 7% in the officer corps). While we've made great strides, as the demographics indicate we have a long way to go to satisfy and maintain this warfighting imperative.

Recruiting

Readiness is foremost about having the right number of capable Airmen within our Air Force. Today only 29% of 17 - 24 year old men and women in the United States are eligible to serve and only one in eight have a propensity to serve in the military. This competitive market for talent places an even greater challenge on attracting and recruiting diverse Airmen into the force. The Air Force has made strides toward improving our diversity with an increase of female Airmen by four percent over the last 10 years and a 5% increase for racially and ethnically diverse Airmen (African American, Hispanic, and others) over the same time. While positive, these modest gains are not keeping pace with the changing demographics of the military eligible population and are

at a slower pace than we desire. Recognizing these facts, our Diversity and Inclusion Council has focused on accelerating our gains and improvements over time.

To help in this regard, the Air Force has moved out on setting up a Total Force recruiting service responsible for recruiting and coordinating efforts across all three components. Under a common commander, with staff and support representation, the Total Force team is working toward integrating common databases to share and hand off leads, common marketing contracts and efforts, and one-stop shopping for adjudication of medical or other accession waivers. In addition, our Air Force Recruiting Service has partnered with our civilian recruiting teams at the Air Force Personnel Center, both located at Joint Base San Antonio-Randolph in Texas, to leverage and conduct joint recruiting events which encompass strategic marketing for diversity in our force. Our ultimate goal is to ensure we are hiring and building a diverse force to best utilize the talents required to maintain a lethal force.

Recognizing our operational career fields, particularly rated career fields associated with aviation, tend to advance to higher ranks at greater proportions, we have embarked on improving diversity representation within these communities. Our pilot force today is only 8% women, 2% African American, and 5% Hispanic officers. The Air Force created a Rated Diversity Improvement (RDI) Strategy to “engage, collaborate, and innovate” across the four primary lines of effort: pre-accessions, accession, initial training, and career. The RDI Action Plan features 20+ unique initiatives and projects with ten of them being funded in FY19 totaling over \$10M.

In 2018, we created a focused detachment under our Air Force Recruiting Service to lead projects on recruiting diverse candidates into operational career fields. One of its projects focuses on exposing under-represented groups to aviation and other operational career fields. Many youth from under-represented groups are not aware of opportunities in aviation and have low natural exposure rates. Air Force Junior ROTC (AFJROTC) teaches Citizenship, Character, Leadership, and Service. AFJROTC Cadets are ten times more likely to join Air Force ROTC (AFROTC) and twenty-five times more likely to enter USAFA compared to non-AFJROTC high school students. The JROTC students are 60% minority students and 40% female. The AFJROTC Flight Academy has increased its diversity of students by 5% over the past two years, currently at 45%. In 2019, 31% minority (3% increase from 2018) and 29% female (8% increase from 2018) joined the Flight Academy. Since standing up in 2018, the AFJROTC Flight Academy classes have already produced 122 new pilots, 28 ROTC scholarships, and 12 Academy appointments. While these numbers are small now, we believe making an investment in today’s youth will prove significant over time.

Another project increased representation from operational and diverse populations within key instructor and recruiting positions. We reinvigorated the rated community into Officer Instructor and Recruiting Special Duty opportunities where officers or airmen from 56 under-represented

groups were selected; 17 ROTC Detachment Commanders (17.6% of selects), 19 ROTC Instructors (5.8% of selects), and 20 AFRS/AU/USAFA/BMT Instructors (30% of selects). We also recognize recruits must see an avenue to their future success and must see role models they can aspire to become. Prior to 2016, 99% of the Air Force's positions were already open to women to include flying combat aircraft, which opened in 1993. Since that time, we have had multiple female fighter wing commanders and four female 4-star generals including a female 4-star Combatant Commander and a currently serving female 4-star commander at Air Mobility Command. The percentage of active duty women serving in both combat-related and flying roles is 13.7% (9,027). While we've made progress, to increase the numbers of female Airmen who rise to senior levels within the force we must also increase the overall recruited population.

We have focused on increasing our female applicant pool within the officer accession sources. We set an initial target to achieve growth in applicants to 30% female and achieved that mark at the Air Force Academy for the class of 2023 and we admitted 28.1% of those female applicants. The most recent graduating class in 2019 was more than 25% female, a 4% increase from 2012. Within our ROTC program, we raised our applicant pool to 28% female with an actual cadet class of 25.5% marching toward the initial 30% applicant pool goal. The 2019 ROTC class consisted of 25% female, a 1.5% increase since 2012. Finally, our 2019 OTS classes were 18.7% female, which is a 2.5% increase since 2012.

Recruiting talent is also dependent on our Air Force being an inclusive organization. The Air Force is a standards-based all-volunteer force recruiting all who can meet our rigorous standards regardless of background, race, gender, religion, etc. Since June 2018, we have accessed and made accommodations for over 27 members practicing Sikh, Muslim, Heathen, Jewish, Norse, Easter, and Russian Orthodox to allow these talented Airmen to serve while still respecting their religious dress and appearance requirements. These Airmen serve as role models for other talented Americans who can potentially see themselves serving in our Air Force as well.

Women's Recruiting Initiatives

We have targeted several venues focused on recruiting women into operational career fields. Women in Aviation International (WIA) teamed with Girls in Aviation (GIA) to participate in some special events. Air Force female rated members volunteered to assist with learning stations, answered questions, and provided mentorship to young girls interested in aviation-related careers.

The annual AETC Women's Fly-In had 18 female pilots who met in Fort Worth for professional development and mentorship. The event included engagement with several local ROTC detachments highlighting aviation opportunities for women in the Air Force.

The Aviation-Inspiration-Motivation (A.I.M.) High Outreach Program is designed to engage local youth by inviting them onto base to interact with Air Force role models. It is an innovative

program supporting Rated Diversity Improvement and Total Force Integration through four Lines of Effort: Youth Engagement, Community Outreach, Professional Development, and Networking. The Air Force has opened the application process to accommodate a variety of applicant sizes and heights, removing a barrier that prevented women from applying in larger numbers. Waivers and adjustments by aircraft type are being worked and future aircraft designs are incorporating greater flexibility from the start.

Minority Recruiting Initiatives

Air Force members teamed with USAFA and Gold Bar recruiters to attend a 100 Black Men Scholarship college fair. Active Duty service members attended sharing their stories. This event made an impact on how students will think about their future, as many did not understand that a career in aviation was possible.

The Air Force sponsored 30 AFROTC cadets (primarily from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)) and 20 Total Force Officers to attend the Black Engineer of the Year Awards (BEYA) in Washington D.C.

The Air Force was also a featured exhibitor at the National Air and Space Museum's annual African-American Pioneers Family Day and our AFJROTC & Civil Air Patrol teams hosted an essay contest on "How do the Tuskegee Airmen still influence the Air Force today?" for approximately 150,000 total AFJROTC and Civil Air Patrol (CAP) Cadets. Capitalizing on our Tuskegee Airmen heritage, we recently renamed the Airfield at the US Air Force Academy the Gen Benjamin O. Davis Field. The naming ceremony was widely attended and now provides prospective USAFA candidates an example and role model of diverse success and inclusion within the Air Force.

The Air Force also participated in the Core4STEM Event held at the DC Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. The event provided middle school students with the opportunity to learn more about science, and inspire them to pursue careers in STEM related fields. The first day focused on Hispanic females and the second day predominantly Hispanic males. The teens were able to fly the VR flight simulator, discuss Air Force career options and commissioning sources, and were inspired to pursue aviation careers in the Air Force.

The Air Force also instituted partnerships with Women in Aviation, Super Girl Pro, TED Women, the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE), Organization of Black Aerospace Professionals (OBAP), Hispanic STEM Week (HESTEC), SnoCross Racing, and Formula Drift to enhance and attract our diverse populations.

Retention

The Air Force recognizes recruiting is the starting point of the eco-system, with retention playing an equally important role in building a more diverse force. While our overall diverse population and recruiting numbers have improved, we have not been as successful in retaining women and diverse Airmen for longer careers. The retention rate for female officers in years 6-10 of service is 50% of the retention rate for their male counterparts. Likewise, the population of female officers at the O-6 and General Officer ranks is 15% and 8.3%, respectively, compared to 25% at the company grade officer ranks. The population of non-white officers at the O-6 and General Officer ranks is 14% and 6.6%, respectively, compared to 29% at the company grade officer ranks. We have been able to do much better among our enlisted corps where 31% diverse Airmen at E-9 is more comparable to the overall enlisted diverse population in both race and gender. To be an employer of choice, the Air Force must develop and retain our Nation's best and brightest. Recognizing this we have been identifying and addressing barriers; leveraging diverse perspectives; developing innovative solutions; and supporting viable, forward-leaning initiatives to resolve challenges and improve retention among our under-represented groups.

The Air Force created several barrier analysis working groups to identify barriers to retention of women and diverse Airmen. Some of the areas identified for improvement included policies that limited service flexibility, equipment and uniform items that provided unnecessary challenges and annoyances, and development opportunities that need to be fully exploited.

Policy Adjustments

The Air Force has implemented several policy initiatives to assist women in balancing family and career without having to sacrifice one over the other. One policy, 'Child Career Balancing Time' allows new mothers to defer their decision to separate up to 12 months after delivery. This provides an opportunity to experience the programs and resources available to assist with balancing career and family priorities. The program also directs an experienced mentor to help new mothers navigate their challenges. The goal is to provide additional time and experience for new mothers prior to making a retention or separation decision.

The Air Force has also expanded and improved our childcare programs. We have ongoing efforts to reduce wait times, maximize certified employees, increase available space, augment capacity through in-home providers, and offset costs for off-base childcare. We are also providing non-traditional services during irregular duty hours, including 24/7, Missile Care, Deployment Care, and Overseas Community Child Care options.

The Air Force also implemented the FY17 Military Parental [Non-Chargeable] Leave Program, which allows a mother to take six weeks, the family primary caregiver to receive six weeks, and the secondary caregiver to receive 21 days within the first year of birth or adoption. Further, female Airmen are exempt from deployment, PCS, or TDY for 12-months after giving birth unless they

volunteer. AF Guidance Memorandum 2019-36-02 was also published, which requires units to provide nursing mothers access to a lactation facility, e.g. room, pod.

The Air Force continues to utilize the Career Intermission Program (CIP). The program provides flexibility for Airmen looking to pursue goals such as advanced education, raising or starting a family, or aligning career timing for dual military couples. While we are only four years into the program and measuring the effectiveness, it appears to be working. In CY18, 54% of CIP participants were female and 100% of the Airmen (6) who completed the program and their follow-on commitment have elected to stay in the service.

Another new policy identified from a barrier analysis group reduces restrictions on pregnant female Airmen who perform some operational or flight duties. As of 23 September 2019, pregnant remotely piloted aircrew, missile operations duty crews, and certain fully qualified pilots aircrew & ground-controlled Airmen no longer require waivers to return to flying status which allows members to maintain readiness longer and reduces requalification flying hours.

The Air Force expanded the high year of tenure limits for Senior Airmen, Staff Sergeants, and Technical Sergeants to retain technical skills and experience. We also reduced the number of forward deployed 365-day assignments by 20% from the last fiscal year and are projecting to reduce that number an additional 38% in FY20, utilizing reach-back or shortening tours to help stabilize the operational tempo for our Airmen. While these adjustments improve retention for all, they are particularly important in our efforts to retain talented diverse Airmen. In fact, operational tempo and separation from family are among the highest retention barriers identified by our women's barrier analysis working group.

Equipment and Uniforms

Just this past summer, the Air Force began designing flight equipment specifically for female aviators. In conjunction with the Air Force Uniform Office, the Women's Initiative Team led a female fit program (FITMENT) event at Norfolk Naval Air Station. The event outfitted 75 women in the unisex Army Aircrew Combat Uniform (A2CU) flight suit and the Massif 2-piece female flight suit. The data captured in this event was used to develop a 2-piece female flight suit and improved the wear of the current women's one-piece coverall. The Norfolk FITMENT advanced the state-of-the-art aviator bladder relief for both the Air Force and the Navy after receiving feedback on two different bladder relief systems. Lastly, the FITMENT event used the head and face measurements to support the modeling efforts for the Air Force Next-Gen Fixed Wing Helmet and oxygen masks projects.

The Air Force is also working adjustments to female ground combat support equipment, such as ballistic vests, helmets, and other support equipment.

Development Opportunities

Knowing opportunity and advancement have a lot to do with retention, we have increased focus on ensuring exposure for younger officers to key developmental positions such as selection for Aide-de-Camp and Executive Officers for senior leaders. By way of policy, we ensure all selection slates for these key positions have a minimum of one qualified female or qualified diverse candidate for consideration. In a short period under this policy, we have seen a 17% increase in female selections and a 21% increase in African American female selections.

We have also increased our 2019 rated mentoring pairs by 30% over our 2018 participation. Female Airmen involved in mentoring (mentor or mentee) increased by 15%; African-American Airmen increased by 12%. These mentoring pairs, facilitated by our on-line matching tool known as MyVector, are essential in supporting the development of diverse Airmen.

The Department of Veterans Affairs also collaborated with the Department of Defense to implement the first Women's Health Transition Training. The program is an in-person and virtual course designed to provide a female perspective to Active-Duty, Reserve, and National Guard servicewomen who plan to transition to civilian or Reserve/National Guard status. We see this as an important action in retaining women within our Total Force as they transition from one component to another and continue to serve.

CONCLUSION

Diverse, resilient, and ready Airmen, both military and civilian, are the bedrock of the Air Force's readiness and lethality. We believe increasing the overall diversity of our force is a warfighting imperative. Although we are making strides, we still have a long way to go to increase and retain a more diverse force. The Air Force continues to fully operationalize diversity and inclusion to leverage the Nation's greatest strength – its remarkably diverse citizenry – for decisive, lethal advantage.

Your Air Force is evolving to compete, deter, and win with unmatched power through the air, space, and cyber domains. We must ensure our Airmen have the resources, training, development, and tools to meet these demands. We are committed to prioritizing and resourcing what is most important and look forward to partnering with Congress in our endeavors to protect and defend our great Nation. I thank you for your continued support of your Air Force — those in uniform, our civilian professionals, and the families who support them.