

Written Statement
Brigadier General Ty Seidule, US Army (Retired)
Visiting Professor of History, Hamilton College; Professor Emeritus of History, West Point
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Chairman Grothman and Ranking Member Garcia,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the committee.

I have three points to make today.

First, the United States armed forces are the best in the world because we reflect and represent the greatest country in the world. Diversity is the military's strength because diversity is America's strength. No other nation can bring together such disparate people to create a military as effective as ours. Anytime someone criticizes our military, I must ask. Have you ever worked with another military? I have. It's not even close. We are so much better. Better organized, better equipped, better manned, and better led than any other military in the world. Today's military, your military, my military is deterring war across the globe while preparing to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic as our oath prescribes.

Second, the military makes significant social change when Congress demands it. While President Truman ordered the military to desegregate in 1948, it didn't really happen until the 1970s when Congress demanded it. Other major changes made by Congress include - Women attending the service academies, ending "Don't Ask Don't Tell," ending combat exclusion for women, and removing Confederate commemoration. The military reacts to Congress, not the other way around.

Third, the military's half century commitment to equal opportunity and diversity has created a more lethal, effective, and cohesive force. In 1971, the military was falling apart. Race relations were at its nadir and drug use at its peak. The armed forces were wrecked and unable to defend the nation. Over the next twenty years, DoD instituted and internalized a culture of diversity that transformed the military and brought victory in the first Gulf War. The military has been working on diversity for a long time because it works.

Those are the points I'll discuss, but first, I'd like to tell you about my family and me.

I served in the US Army for nearly thirty-six years, forty if you include my ROTC time. My research and experience and by extension my remarks are army centric. Go Army!

My wife, Shari, was an Air Force brat born at Clark Air Force Base, Philippines. Her dad was a West Point grad and a fighter pilot. As an army spouse, Shari helped soldiers' families in peace and war. She is also the politician in the family, serving as an elected school board member at Fort Irwin, Fort Knox, and West Point.

My two sons are here with me today. Peter served four years in the army with the 1st Cavalry Division and deployed to Poland and South Korea. He proudly served in the first artillery battalion with female cannoneers. My son Wade graduated from college using my GI Bill. Both boys lived their entire lives on army posts until after they graduated from college.

We are a proud army family. I'm honored to have them here with me today.

My story is different.

I didn't choose the army because of patriotism. I signed up for the money. My dad was a teacher and my mom a nurse and we couldn't afford my college tuition, so I took an ROTC scholarship. Never thought I would serve more than four years. I stayed for nearly four decades because I loved serving with soldiers. I loved teaching cadets. I'm a soldier for life.

It was in the army that I learned the strength of our great nation. It's diversity. The ability to take immigrants, rural, urban, Black, white, men, and women and create the greatest army in the world.

In 1985, I became a tank platoon leader. We had fifteen men living in old Nazi barracks in Mannheim, Germany during the Cold War. Swastikas still festooned the building. Our soldiers bought these huge speakers and then would negotiate, successfully, when to play rock, rap, and country. They changed each other – and they changed me. The army changed me. My service changed me.

After coming back from the Gulf War, the army sent me to the Ohio State University to become a historian. I taught military history at West Point for two decades. I tried my best to live up to West Point's mission statement to educate, train, and inspire leaders of character for the nation who lived the values of Duty Honor Country.

That's who I am. Now, I'd like to use my expertise - history - to explain why diversity and equal opportunity was and remains crucial to our modern military.

In 1948, President Harry Truman issued executive order 9981 integrating the US military. He couldn't go through Congress because Southern Democrats in the House and Senate blocked any anti-segregation legislation. With African Americans violently excluded from voting in the South, segregationists had a lock on many important committee chairs. All Truman could do was issue an Executive Order.

The military did not immediately integrate. In fact, the first two Secretaries of the Army resigned because they wouldn't implement integration in a timely fashion. Only the high number of Korean War casualties forced General Matthew Ridgway to integrate his army. Segregation was immoral, and it was also inefficient.

Without Congress creating laws, the military slow rolled integration. The last segregated military unit finally disbanded in 1954. Yet, that did not mean that every service member could serve in every billet.

The Department of Defense tried to make it better, slowly. In 1963, DoD issued the first Directive to ensure "all activities" were "free from racial discrimination" in a policy they called "Equal Opportunity." Now, commanders would be responsible for ensuring all servicemembers

could live and work without fear. Yet, it wasn't until 1970 that local commanders could declare an area off-limits because it discriminated based on race.

Without Congressional action, the armed forces remained an unfair and unequal place for Black soldiers. In 1963, ten states still had zero Black National Guardsmen. As late as 1969, Mississippi had one Black National Guardsman. Not 1%. One.

Leadership remained a problem too. In the 1960s, the army had 3% Black officers and the Navy and Marine Corps had .2%. Tokenism reigned throughout the military. Families paid the price. Black service members could not rent many houses outside some bases. The children of Black servicemembers still went to segregated and unequal schools as late as 1969.

By the early 1970s, the effects of the Vietnam War, drug use, and racial prejudice had created a broken military. In Knielingen, West Germany, two white soldiers stabbed three Black soldiers to death.ⁱ In 1971, a barracks fight between a Black airman and a white Airman at Travis Air Force Base, California led to a riot that led to 135 arrests, 10 injuries, one fatality, and extensive property damage.ⁱⁱ The navy wasn't immune from the conflict with a race riot aboard the USS Kitty Hawk in 1972.

As one white NCO told a reporter in Frankfurt, "Race is my problem. Not the Russians, Not Vietnam. Race." A Black officer who studied the issue described, "The race problem – a war which is being fought every night in barracks and other places where our soldiers gather."ⁱⁱⁱ

Uniformed and civilian military leaders by 1970 realized that they had a "race problem" that was destroying their ability to defend the nation. In 1971, they created the Defense Race Relations Institute. They mandated race relations training to the entire force. Some of their solutions worked. Some were ham-fisted and discarded. Instead of denying race and seeing only the uniform, military leaders embraced and highlighted differences among ethnic and racial identities.

When Congress ended the draft and created the All-Volunteer Force, the army now had to recruit from all over the country at the worst possible time – after the US military's first defeat. The military's reputation was at an all-time low. Yet, the army had to appeal to everyone to recruit a volunteer force, especially underrepresented minorities.

Congress helped again by passing the Equal Opportunity Act of 1973. Using that legislation, the army created Equal Opportunity Non-Commissioned Officers in every battalion and higher unit with the mission to ensure all soldiers received a fair shake. The army created an Equal Opportunity bureaucracy and it worked. It's still extant to this day.

If the army suffered from racism, so too did West Point. In the 1930s, Cadet Benjamin O. Davis, Jr's fellow cadets silenced him because of his race. No one would talk to him, a form of psychological torture at an isolated place like West Point. The Class of 1959 was called the "Black Class" because it had five African Americans, a record number. Through the 1960s no class had more than a handful of Black cadets, ensuring that the army had few Black officers and almost no Black generals.

The Naval Academy was even worse. In 1970, Annapolis had 4300 Midshipman. Only 23 (.5%) were African American.

Minority Admissions started at the Service Academies in 1969. To ensure the officer corps reflected the American people and the enlisted ranks, West Point had to seek out Black candidates.

The military didn't fully integrate, didn't try to solve the "race problem," until the 1970s when it had to create an All-Volunteer Force on the heels of the Vietnam defeat. It didn't solve every problem, especially at the senior ranks, but it was ready for war again in remarkably quick order.

Less than twenty years after the debacle in Vietnam, the military showed it was again the finest in the world. During the 1991 Desert Storm operation, the US military destroyed the 4th largest army in the world in a matter of days. The army NCO Corps during that period was 31% African American. True, the Black officer corps was less than 10%, but by addressing the "race problem," the army became more effective.

The success of equal opportunity policy saved us after the defeat in Vietnam and led us to victory in Desert Storm. I know. I commanded a diverse cavalry troop in the 82nd Airborne Division during that war.

In the Department of History at West Point where I taught for two decades, we worked to inculcate cadets to think critically, write clearly, and understand the history of their nation, their army, and the world. Wisdom through history was our motto. Like every member of the West Point faculty and staff we strived to ensure cadets live up to our mission: Duty Honor Country.

The faculty at West Point are the most engaged, energetic, innovative, and effective instructors anywhere. They were and are true patriots who serve the nation to the very best of their ability. One of my greatest honors is my continued association with West Point as a Professor Emeritus of History.

While at West Point, I saw our leaders nearly double the number of underrepresented minorities and women. The Corps became better, stronger, and more representative of the enlisted force and our client – the American people.

When I served in tank and infantry units, we had no women. By law, women weren't allowed to serve in combat arms units. Weren't allowed into the upper echelons of army leadership. That's just un-American and ineffective. When the army deploys, it fights on land and on land 8 billion people reside. 51% of whom are women. We are far, far more effective with women in all ranks of our forces.

At West Point, I taught a woman who graduated but was unable to follow her dream to serve as an infantryman. She received a Rhodes Scholarship and while she was in the UK, the combat exclusion ended. She rebranched infantry, graduated from Ranger School and commanded an infantry company. She was the toughest, brightest cadet I met in twenty years. Our army is better for her service.

Another female cadet I taught, a boxer, branched artillery. She graduated near the top of her class and became the first woman to command a 105mm artillery platoon in combat, firing at ISIS in Syria.

When I commanded a battalion, we suffered under “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy that forced everyone to lie about who they loved. A friend deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. Her partner and their children could not access any military facilities. No commissary, no health care, no childcare. Now, because Congress ended “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” her family is a proud military family. There were naysayers who said ending the policy would hurt readiness. They were wrong. No one doubts now that having a diverse force helps the military. That is America.

At West Point, I went to the Spectrum/Knights Out Gala, the LGBTQ alumni organization and cadet club created soon after the end of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.” It was a joyous event. Finally, cadets could live honestly. Yet, I also talked to several West Point grads who told me that they were outed and had to leave the service before the policy change. Their partners were in tears. These officers couldn’t serve because of who they loved. Our military is far better having them serve than kicking them out.

Recently, I served a Vice Chair of the Naming Commission created by Congress. I was so honored to raise my right hand and take the oath again in 2021. Under the stellar leadership of Admiral Michelle Howard, we found and recommended removal or renaming of 1,111 items that commemorated Confederates. We finished on time, under budget, and had 100% of our recommendations accepted and implemented.

During the commission’s work, I visited six army posts and saw the diversity of our leaders and soldiers in action. They impressed me with their professionalism and dedication. My visits showed me that despite the extensive deployments around the world, our army remains lethal and ready.

In both my experience and my study of history, a diverse and inclusive military is a more cohesive fighting force. Any policy that creates Equal Opportunity for our service members is neither progressive nor political. They are proven National Defense policies that have made our military more effective and our country safer for over 50 years.

Thank you again for allowing me to join you today in the People’s House.

I’m truly honored.

ⁱ Beth Bailey, *An Army Afire: How the US Army Confronted Its Racial Crisis in the Vietnam Era* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2023), 2-3.

ⁱⁱ Congressional Research Service, “Diversity, Inclusion, and Equal Opportunity in the Armed Services: Background and Issues,” R44231, October 24, 2017, 17.

ⁱⁱⁱ Bailey, *An Army Afire*, 3.