

STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DEFENSE

MILITARY & CIVILIAN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

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Chair McCollum, Ranking Member Calvert, and members of this distinguished Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today, along with my esteemed colleagues from the military departments, to discuss the Department of Defense's efforts to recruit, retain, and develop the military and civilian workforces of the future.

Over the last 18 months of confronting COVID-19, we have seen time and again that our men and women in uniform, and DoD civilians, continue to meet missions at home and abroad. They must continue to be recognized and commended for their sacrifices and commitment to this Nation. In the two months I have served as the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, I am awed and humbled every day by our Service members and DoD civilians for their incredible talent and hard work to address new national security challenges. Yet they can only continue to do this through a sustained emphasis on workforce development—one that focuses on recruiting, retention, training and education of a workforce that can compete and win against our most technologically advanced competition, now and in the future. We know we are in fierce competition for talent, and we must address this issue with the same urgency and emphasis we place on development of weapons systems or operational readiness.

From the start of this Administration, the Secretary of Defense made it clear that taking care of our people and developing the workforce would be at the top of his agenda. To that end, Deputy Secretary Hicks established the Deputy's Workforce Council, or the DWC, to support this priority. The DWC is a senior governance and deliberative body consisting of the most senior members of the Military Departments, including my three colleagues here on the panel with me today, and representatives of the Office of the Secretary of Defense and Joint Staff. The DWC is charged with addressing head-on the most consequential and compelling workforce issues facing the Department, such as sexual assault, suicide, domestic violence, family stability, safety, as well as tackling the personnel and manpower strategies necessary to position ourselves for the future. While the DWC is a new initiative and we have just begun our work on these major issues, we are encouraged by the positive and unanimous commitment of the Department's leadership to addressing these very important challenges. We are also very grateful for your leadership on Defense workforce issues, especially as reflected in this Subcommittee's Report language.

During remarks given this summer before the Global Emerging Technology Summit of the National Security Commission, Secretary Austin presented his vision of developing an

Innovative Workforce, noting that the most important investment is in our people. That vision includes recruiting, training, and retaining talented individuals, often young people, to lead the Department into the future. He highlighted the need for innovative thinking with respect to managing our people, cultivating talent, and creating new career paths and incentives for service, both uniformed and civilian. Among other things, this includes incorporating tech skills in basic-training programs, promoting data literacy across all elements of the workforce, and driving significant shifts in the way our institution thinks about the intersection of technology and personnel.

We must start with how we recruit. The Department relies on multiple levers to supporting recruiting efforts, including financial incentives, and marketing/advertising campaigns; the Services balance the use of these levers to effectively and efficiently meet their recruiting missions. The Department is dedicated to overcoming the perceived gap between the American people and the military by expanding and bolstering the strategic tools needed to increase outreach efforts to reach a diverse pool of youth across the nation. Only 29% of today's youth are eligible for military service without a waiver, and only 2% are eligible, high-quality, and likely to serve. Medical disqualifications, including weight issues, remain the primary reason for disqualification. However, we remain committed to expanding our outreach, including to underrepresented populations, and widely sharing the Defense Department's mission and the opportunities it offers. We also recognize that to recruit and retain the best and brightest, we must have a diverse and inclusive force, representative of the nation they serve. The Military Services leverage relationships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and Minority Serving Institutions to expand the Department's reach across demographics, and to help convey the benefits of Military Service. Our marketing efforts are not limited to prospective recruits. Influencers such as parents, grandparents, counsellors, and teachers also have a significant impact, and, based on findings from our research data, the Department has invested in Hispanic language marketing efforts, dedicating 15% of media investment to reach Latin-x Influencers across a variety of media platforms.

The Department must also remain vigilant to ensure the military compensation package remains attractive to recruit and retain the talent we need today and into the future. In Personnel and Readiness, we will continue to review policies to assess the impact of recruiting efforts, and the Military Services are using targeted retention levers to mitigate shortages. They are using a

mix of tailored retention bonus, coupled with non-monetary incentives as tools to increase retention in critical career fields and technical specialties. For officers, we are particularly focused on Aviators, Surface Warfare Officers, Submarine Officers, SEALs, Cyber, and Medical personnel where we know retention challenges exist due to a strong demand signal from the civilian labor market. In the enlisted specialties, we are targeting Cyber, Human Intelligence, Special Operations, and Aircraft Maintenance technicians where we know retention challenges exist as well. Reserve Component members, to include the Guard, also bring unique capabilities and professional expertise to the Total Force, gained through years of experience from both their civilian and military careers. We are able to capitalize on their skills, particularly in high-tech fields such as cyber, space, and artificial intelligence (AI), through an accession option known as lateral entry (also available for Active Duty). This program allows the Department to recruit highly qualified individuals directly from the civilian population to fill critical requirements, with the ability to enter at advanced grades based on the level of their education and experience.

The Department's civilian workforce is a critical element of the Total Force, made up of over 790,000 employees (appropriated funds) worldwide, each performing a vital function in support of the Warfighter. The Department recognizes the need to recruit the right civilian talent to maintain our competitive edge and succeed against modern threats. Civilian hiring reform is a top priority for DoD and a national security imperative. The Department is proactively focused on developing its pipeline of future talent. As critical enablers of our warfighters, DoD civilians serve in a wide variety of roles and areas around the country and the world. Many of you have military installations in your districts and home states; so you may know that more than 90% of the DoD civilians are outside of the National Capital Region, out at our posts, bases, camps, and installations. The DoD civilian workforce possesses capabilities, expertise, and skills that directly impact DoD's warfighting mission. They are dedicated professionals who provide training, maintenance, and sustainment of our ships, planes, tanks, and other weapons systems. They are welders, mechanics, and electricians. They are doctors, nurses, social workers, victim advocates, and teachers that take care of our men and women in uniform, and their families. They run and manage military installations, take care of the facilities where our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Guardians, and Marines live and train to fight our wars. We must recognize them as integral partners in our Total Force, and develop life-cycle programs and pipelines for recruiting, retaining, reskilling, and upskilling like we do with our military personnel.

The Department competes with other Federal agencies and the private sector for technical and innovation talent. To achieve a competitive edge, we are investing in branding and outreach, and increasing our use of skill and competency-based assessments. In June of this year, we launched the DoD Civilian Careers Website to promote civilian employment opportunities and career paths, and to debunk perceptions that DoD service is solely uniformed service. We are also using social platforms such as LinkedIn, GlassDoor, and Handshake to better connect the Department with professionals and students alike, allowing hiring managers to expand their outreach capabilities.

Congress has provided significant support to DoD's recruitment and hiring needs, providing streamlined direct hiring authorities for high demand skills. On September 30, I provided guidance to DoD Components on maximizing the use of hiring flexibilities, to include direct hiring, which will allow us to attract and recruit civilian talent with expertise in AI, data science, and software development. The Department is proactively focused on growing and developing its pipeline of future talent and has seen great success in the use of a variety of internship, scholarship, and fellowship programs, which are managed both at the enterprise and component levels.

DoD is currently expanding its use of public-private talent exchanges in areas related to DoD modernization priorities in AI, directed energy, and machine learning in order to provide opportunities for DoD employees to expand knowledge within their functional area of expertise. We must also provide adaptive and relevant professional civilian education that emphasizes innovative thinking and ingenuity in warfighting concepts, ensures responsible management of national defense assets, and builds expertise through a concentration on data-centric digital skills and culture. We provide STEM-focused research grants and scholarships, in an effort to harness new talent that will allow us to grow our science and technology workforce.

Under the umbrella of the Deputy's Workforce Council, we are at the nexus of innovative workforce development for the Department. Along with our partners in Acquisition & Sustainment, Research & Engineering, the DoD's Chief Information Office, Chief Data Office, and Joint Artificial Intelligence Center, my staff is working to support the Military Departments, Combatant Commanders, and other elements of the Department in delivering the most qualified, capable, and technologically proficient force possible. We recognize that a lifecycle of investment in our Service members and their DoD civilian colleagues will allow us to win the

battles of the future on the battlefields of the future. With continued improvements, we believe we can ensure our Nation's military remains the greatest fighting force the world has ever seen. Thank you again for the opportunity today to showcase our current efforts in this area. We also appreciate the Subcommittee's continued support for the men and women who serve our great Nation, and look forward to your questions.