

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
PRESENTATION TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SUBJECT: MILITARY PILOT SHORTAGE

STATEMENT OF:

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INTRODUCTION

Your Air Force has been globally engaged for the last 26 years in combat operations. During that time, America's Air Force provided air dominance through *global vigilance, global reach, and global power* for our joint force. Make no mistake, your Air Force is always there.

However, being “always there” comes at a cost to equipment, infrastructure, and most importantly, our Airmen—and we are now at a decision point. Sustained global commitments and recent funding constraints have affected capacity and capability for a full-spectrum fight against a near-peer adversary. Compounding this issue, an upcoming surge of mandatory retirements for airline pilots and increasing market for global commerce is causing the civilian aviation industry to begin hiring at an aggressive rate. This confluence of circumstances has birthed a national aircrew crisis.

NATIONAL AIRCREW CRISIS

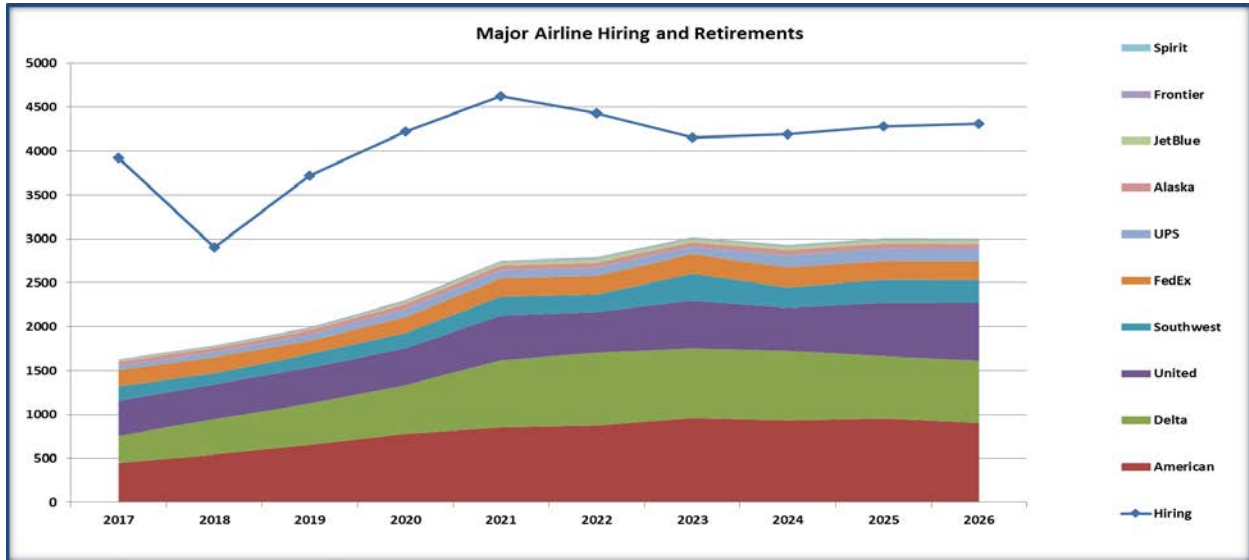
The national aircrew crisis is the result of multiple factors: high operational tempo over the last 26 years, a demand for our pilots from the commercial industry, and cultural issues that affect the quality of life and quality of service of our Airmen. At the end of FY 2016 the total force including active, reserve, and guard components was short 1,555 pilots across all mission areas (608 active, 653 guard, 294 reserve). Of this amount, the total force was short 1,211 fighter pilots (873 active, 272 guard, 66 reserve). Unfortunately, our greatest concern is the active fighter pilot shortage is projected exceed 1,000 by the end of FY 2017.

The nation requires Airmen to be “always there” to deliver air, space and cyber effects. These capabilities demand resources and time to train in order to ensure readiness. In the aircraft maintenance field, we were short approximately 3,400 aircraft maintainers at the close of 2016.

Because of this shortage, we cannot generate the sorties needed to fully train our aircrews. Though our end-strength has decreased 38% since 1991, we have experienced significant growth across several mission areas. The increased operational tempo levied on remaining personnel removes the time required to train for conflicts in different environments. A quarter-century at war has strained the force through reduced sortie rates and training availability. At current force structure levels the operational tempo and deployments that your Air Force maintains in order to support the joint force simply does not allow time for personnel to adequately train for future conflicts. More than an entire generation of airmen have prioritized operations over training. Our aircrews are not able to maintain full-spectrum readiness against all threats with these conditions.

Civilian aviation companies are actively recruiting the world-class experience of our rated Airmen. Air Force pilots are highly attractive because of their proficiency, diverse experience, and the standardization and quality of military aviation training. A 2016 RAND study, requested by FY16 NDAA and endorsed by OSD, modeled a potentially large growth in hiring in the airline industry over the next decade, which could require the Air Force to significantly increase retention efforts. RAND modeled major airline hiring levels between 3,200 – 3,800 pilots per year and an average 13 percent increase in airlines salaries. In reality, actual airline hiring and salary increases surpassed those predictions. According to Future and Active Pilot Advisors, major airlines hired more than 4,100 pilots last year and salaries increased by 17 percent. These annual hiring levels are expected to continue for the next 10-15 years (Table 1).

Table 1. Airline Hiring and Retirements



Sources: FAPA.aero/hiringhistory.asp (Future and Active Pilot Advisors) and [www.airlinepilotcentral.com/airlines/legacy/delta air lines](http://www.airlinepilotcentral.com/airlines/legacy/delta_air_lines)

Table 2. 2015 Rated Exit Survey Results “Top 5 Influences to Leave”

Pilot Influences	Top 5
Additional Duties	37%
Maintaining work/life balance and meeting family commitments	31%
Availability of Civilian Jobs	24%
Home Station Tempo (length of duty day/work schedule)	22%
The potential to leave your family for a deployment	21%

Civilian job prospects are not the sole reason the Air Force is losing talent. A 2015 exit survey revealed additional motives for separation, highlighting negative impacts to the quality of life and quality of service of our aviators and their families (Table 2). Pilots are making choices to leave the service on factors like additional duties (creating the daily flying schedule, vault

security duties, ancillary training, and administrative support) maintaining a work-life balance, and the pace of work while at home from deployment. This combination of high operational tempo, civilian airline pilot demand, and cultural issues have created a perfect storm--one the Air Force is acting quickly to address. Your Air Force's action plan to mitigate these shortfalls is three-pronged: reduce requirements, increase production and increase retention.

MITIGATION EFFORTS – REDUCED REQUIREMENTS

The demand for rated pilot experience is insatiable. However, the Air Force no longer has available capacity to man historical requirements with pilots unless it is absolutely critical. The 2017 Rated Staff Allocation Plan reduced the total number of pilots assigned to institutional organizations by 13% when compared to 2016. These key staff positions, such as planners at Combatant Commands, Air Operations Centers, and Training units are currently manned at 23-26 percent for fighter pilot specific positions and 79-84 percent in all other rated positions. Even with these reductions, the Air Force can only fill 96 percent of fighter pilot requirements at operational units. The Air Force is implementing additional initiatives to mitigate shortages on staffs, deployed positions, and in the training enterprise. Voluntary return to active duty programs allow members of the Air Reserve Component to fill staff and training positions. Additionally, the Air Force is exploring opportunities for Air Reserve Component members to volunteer for 179- and 365-day deployments.

MITIGATION EFFORTS – INCREASED PILOT PRODUCTION

The Air Force recognizes the need to increase pilot production and has taken steps to expand Undergraduate Pilot Training to maximum training capacity. However, sufficient

manpower, infrastructure, and operations and maintenance resources would be needed to support any future increase in throughput. The Air Force is actively pursuing additional ways to increase production across the entire training pipeline to mission-ready status. This includes creating two new F-16 Formal Training Units, increasing the number of total force active-associate units, leveraging opportunities to increase active duty fighter pilot absorption at Air National Guard (ANG) fighter units, and exploring a specific helicopter track for undergraduate pilot training to increase capacity for fixed wing pilots.

The Air Force appreciates Congress authorizing and funding an increase in active-duty end-strength to 321,000 for FY17. This essential growth enables the Air Force to train and develop new pilots and maintain legacy aircraft longer than before. This immediate end-strength increase is vital. The Air Force will consider end-strength increases as it works with the Secretary of Defense to develop the Fiscal Year's 2018 President's Budget request. Further, we must retain these newly trained Airmen.

MITIGATION EFFORTS – INCREASED RETENTION

Given the American taxpayer investment and the substantial time required to train and season an Air Force pilot, it is vital that our nation retains this talent. The Air Force employs a variety of monetary and non-monetary force management initiatives to produce the right mix and number of experienced Airmen. The Air Force will implement the first increase in the Aviation Bonus in 18 years. A tiered business case analysis model identifies areas of greatest need, and our pilots who continue to serve beyond their initial service commitment will receive up to \$35,000 per year, authorized by the FY17 NDAA. Air Force is also considering incentives for

hard to fill assignments where many Airmen choose to separate from service rather than accepting the position.

Retaining our pilot force goes beyond financial incentives...it's about culture. The Air Force is implementing many non-monetary efforts to strengthen the culture and improve the quality of life and quality of service for our Airmen. We reduced additional duties, removed non-mission-essential training courses and outsourced select routine administrative tasks. All of these efforts allow our pilots to focus on their primary duty: flying.

We increased the transparency and flexibility of the assignment process to promote family stability. We are also exploring options that allow active duty pilots to work for the civilian aviation industry through the Career Intermission Program and then return to the active force upon completion of that intermission.

BOLD INITIATIVES

But we are not stopping at these mitigation efforts. The Air Force is aggressively pursuing bold initiatives to address the shortfalls in pilot manning and stabilize the inventory over the long term. Restructuring retention packages and making fundamental changes to how we manage our Airmen will take time. But our goal with these long-term solutions is to set the conditions for the Air Force to regain and maintain a full-spectrum, mission-ready force in support of the National Military Strategy.

We know based on exit survey data that not all pilots separate from the Air Force for the same reason. Therefore, the Air Force must divest a "one size fits all" retention model, and we should tailor retention packages to the individual Airman from a host of options. This could include a traditional financial bonus, or it could include other incentives like preferential basing,

longer timelines between required Permanent Changes of Station (PCS), or methods for deployment relief. In any case, Airmen can choose a retention package that fits their current needs.

Maintaining a work/life balance and meeting family commitments is paramount to our servicemembers. When the Officer Personnel Act was passed in 1947, only 25 percent of married couples with children had two income earners. Today, that number is over 60 percent. Moving families every 2-3 years makes it difficult for spouses to pursue and maintain a career. The way we relocate our Airmen must keep pace with today's family, or we will lose talent.

Additionally, our Airmen deserve an updated assignment system that can meet manning requirements as well as ensure mission success. Therefore, a beta test is currently underway that could change how we execute assignments. This test involves the use of algorithms to optimize assignments based on the needs of the Air Force and desires of our members and their families—an assignment system for the 21st century.

In the past, the Air Force used warrant officers for mission sets that required technical proficiency. While reinstating this model is not an impossible option, other courses of action may deliver the same desired result in a much shorter timeline. The Air Force will examine possible alternate career paths for pilots. A tailored number of our pilot force could diverge from the current “up-or-out” career progression model into a technical, non-command career track. This would allow them to remain in service while focusing principally on flying duties. This would retain valuable talent and keep credible instructors in operational squadrons and schoolhouses where they are needed most.

CONCLUSION

The Air Force is committed to a holistic strategy to maintain our pilot inventory by reducing requirements, increasing pilot production, and improving retention through bold monetary and non-monetary programs. While we aggressively pursue creative means to respond to the demands on our pilots, our attention will be focused on developing an agile set of solutions and will not hesitate to seek the Congress' support for revised or new authorities and resources in the future. We appreciate your support as we face this national crisis for our most valuable resource, our talented Airmen, and believe our actions should be bold and decisive to retain a group core to our identity.