

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, VETERANS AFFAIRS,
AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS FOR
2026

HEARINGS
BEFORE A
SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS
FIRST SESSION

SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, VETERANS AFFAIRS,
AND RELATED AGENCIES

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INNOVATIVE TECHNIQUES IN MILITARY CONSTRUCTION

TUESDAY, MARCH 11, 2025.

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

Mr. CARTER. This committee will come to order.

In today's hearing we will examine opportunities for the use of innovative technologies in military construction. But first I want to take a moment to welcome new subcommittee members.

For the majority I would like to welcome Representative Alford from Minnesota—Missouri, I am sorry—who will be serving as vice chair, and Representative LaLota from New York.

Joining the subcommittee for the minority from my great State of Texas is Ms. Escobar. Welcome, and from California, Representative Levin.

This subcommittee serves the people who serve our nation, and provides vital investments for the members of our armed services, their families, and veterans. We have a long history of bipartisanship on this subcommittee, and I am committed to maintaining that tradition in this Congress. I urge all of my members of this subcommittee to keep this in mind today and in all committee hearings in the future.

We are here today to examine the potential use of innovative technologies for military construction. While current military construction possesses and produces high-quality infrastructure, the construction timelines for projects may be lengthy, and may—and many believe that the DoD pays too much for what it buys. One study found that military construction cost premium was as much as 35 percent for some types of facility.

Given today's fiscal challenges, we must find efficiencies that reduce construction timelines and cost. If we harness the power of new technologies such as 3D printing, we can deliver high-quality infrastructure for our warfighters and their families and be better stewards of Texas—of taxpayers' money.

Joining us today is four distinguished witnesses: Mr. Dave Morrow, director of military programs for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Mr. Keith Hamilton, chief engineer, Naval Facilities Engineering Command; Mr. Thomas Healy, chief executive officer for Hyliion Incorporated; and Mr. Brent Richardson, principal research scientist of energy and infrastructure environment for CNA.

As a reminder to members, today's panel is here to discuss the emerging construction methods, their facilities, feasibility, cost effectiveness, and durability. I ask you to refrain from discussions not germane to the reasons we are here.

Now I would like to recognize Ms. Wasserman Schultz for her opening remarks.

Pardon my voice. It seems to be going south to Texas. [Laughter.]

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. I thank the gentleman for yielding. Thank you, Judge Carter. Welcome to our subcommittee's new members and to our witnesses.

I look forward to another year of working together to invest in quality services and benefits for our veterans, ensure our military readiness, and improve the quality of life for our service members and their families.

I appreciate the interest my friend, Judge Carter, has in this important topic, and I look forward to a productive conversation about the ways in which this subcommittee can help bring innovation into military construction.

Before I address this topic, however, I want to take us back to the last fiscal year's hearings where I, along with other Democratic members of this subcommittee, shared our concerns with reported proposals for 22 percent cuts to funding levels. At that time there was a bipartisan consensus that cuts to the vital programs funded in this subcommittee should not happen. Yet now, a couple of months into the Trump Administration, we are seeing cuts under a different name implementing the illegal playbook of Project 2025.

Under the guise of "waste, fraud, and abuse," the Administration is planning to cut 80,000 VA jobs and is canceling nearly 600 contracts, endangering veterans' access to timely and sufficient care and benefits. Beyond the VA, the Administration is firing veterans in numerous agencies across the country and cutting other programs that veterans rely on, like SNAP and Medicaid. I refuse to let veterans and the direct services we provide to them be defined as "government waste." That is utterly appalling, and a complete betrayal of the men and women who have put their lives on the line in service to our country.

Veterans and people who care for them are not government waste. These cuts and firings are causing immediate impacts on veterans like Ben, who was recently interviewed by the publication, Task & Purpose. Ben is a disabled veteran who had a positive job performance review while working at the Department of Agriculture, where he helped other veterans with grants to fix health and safety hazards in their homes. Yet Ben was inexplicably fired, in the careless, cruel approach President Trump and Elon Musk have taken to cut jobs across the Federal Government.

Meanwhile, internationally, our allies are left scrambling as Secretary Hegseth focuses attention on Fox News culture war priorities rather than deterring Russia and our competitors abroad. The Secretary spent his first days banning books in DoD schools, restoring base names that honor Confederate soldiers, and banning qualified individuals who are serving honorably from serving in our military just because of their gender identity.

If the goal here today is to promote innovative forms of military construction and improve the readiness of our armed forces, I would argue that indiscriminately firing 5,400 DoD employees is the wrong move. Improving our military installations' resiliency against extreme weather should be a priority, not firing generals for political grievances.

Investing in construction methods that could speed the delivery of housing for our service members should be a priority, not spending nearly \$50,000 of taxpayers' money to paint the Secretary's government-furnished house and pretending it is an emergency.

Reducing the cost of our military construction projects should be a priority, not threatening tariffs on our allies, which we know will only cause steel and timber prices to skyrocket.

I am hopeful that we will have a fruitful conversation on the ways we can reduce barriers to alternative construction methods and drive innovation in military construction. The length and expense of the military construction process, as my friend, Judge Carter, mentioned, is a challenge, and it impacts the number of projects which can be funded in any given year. This problem only grows more acute as the services are increasingly building in expensive, remote areas like Guam. I hope the ideas we discuss here today can be a part of the solution to these increasing costs, and to the costs over the full life cycle of our military facilities.

Moreover, we know the devastating impact natural disasters had on military bases in recent years, from hurricane damage in my home state at Tyndall Air Force Base and MacDill Air Force Base after Helene and Milton to the devastation on Guam from Typhoon Mawar. We cannot bury our heads in the sand and ignore the climate threat to our military installations, as well. Investments in resiliency now will save us billions of dollars in recovery later on.

Some alternative building materials like mass timber represent a possible solution to making installations more resilient to extreme weather events, while also reducing the service's carbon footprint and contributions to the climate change problem. When it comes to mass timber products, details matter. For mass timber to truly be a part of a climate solution, it must be sourced in a sustainable way. When this does occur, mass timber products provide a benefit of carbon storage, as well as reduced carbon emissions compared to traditional materials like concrete and steel.

But I have concerns with how this administration has already been stewarding our land and resources. Recklessly clear-cutting forests, cutting down old-growth trees, or ignoring the Endangered Species Act and other environmental laws is short-sighted and dangerous and will not advance our goals that we have here in this committee.

I would like to thank the four witnesses for being here today and for their expert testimony.

I yield back.

Mr. CARTER. Okay, we will now turn to our witnesses for today.

Without objection, your entire written testimony will be included in the record.

I will now recognize each of you for an opening statement, and we will then proceed with questions.

TUESDAY, MARCH 11, 2025.

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

WITNESS

**DAVE MORROW, DIRECTOR OF MILITARY PROGRAMS, U.S. ARMY
CORPS OF ENGINEERS**

Mr. CARTER. Mr. Morrow.

Mr. MORROW. Chairman Carter, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to discuss the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' efforts to research and utilize innovative technologies, techniques, and materials in military construction projects.

Over the last two-and-a-half centuries the U.S. Army engineers have evolved to provide engineering expertise to the Army and to respond to the nation's toughest engineering challenges. The USACE mission includes civil works, military programs, research and development, and disaster response. Today I want to focus on our military programs and research and development missions.

We support our combatant commanders in 110 countries around the globe through military and international services programs. We support three million active duty military, veterans, civilians, and their families. USACE relies heavily on the private industry to deliver innovative technologies and techniques in military construction.

The Unified Facilities Criteria, or UFC, are developed through a tri-service coordination that sets basic technical requirements that must be followed to deliver a code-compliant, complete, and usable military facility. Any innovative design solution that meets the UFC and mission requirements is acceptable, and USACE encourages design and construction solutions from our industry partners that meet these requirements.

Our research and development mission, vested in our Engineering Research and Development Center, or ERDC, is to discover, develop, and deliver trusted engineering and scientific solutions for the warfighter and the nation. ERDC provides engineering technology leadership necessary for force protection, force projection, sustainment, and civil works missions. The USACE organizational structure supports delivery and innovation through 44 districts that execute construction projects for the local regions. USACE has regular engagements with the other military services, which fosters innovation through information sharing and common training opportunities. This allows USACE to benefit from the experience of a diverse project execution and leverage those lessons in military construction.

So one technology that can be used for expeditionary CONUS or MILCON applications is additive construction, or construction 3D printing. Additive construction has potential to reduce costs, manpower, logistics, and time while opening the door for improved and new applications such as unconventional countermeasures. ERDC has taken a leading role in acceleration of technology transition with the private sector. This includes development of the UFC lan-

guage to allow additive construction in 80 percent of the United States and in regions where seismic activity is not an issue.

This is still a developing technology. Pilot projects at locations such as Fort Bliss, Camp McGregor, and Tyndall Air Force Base have led to increased confidence in additive construction and military structures. To expand this technology for higher-risk areas, a consolidated testing effort needs to be completed.

ERDC is currently conducting research and field demonstration projects on innovative cement solutions utilizing non-traditional chemistries. Advantages of these products can include rapid-set hardening times, supply chain advantages, and activated chemical solutions for protection against specific threats. Synthetic polymer materials, called geosynthetics, are being designed and manufactured to solve civil engineering problems, including separation, filtration, drainage, reinforcement, and containment.

USACE has supported testing and evaluation of mass timber materials. We recently designed the Army's first barracks made primarily with mass timber structural elements, and are soliciting interest in construction of a project at Mountain Home Air Force Base calling for the incorporation of mass timber design. Utilizing mass timber in these projects may reduce construction timelines. Fiber-reinforced polymer composites are under investigation to meet military interest in corrosion resistance, load maintenance, critical infrastructure.

In an increasingly complex global security environment, our commitment to innovation in military construction is not just about building structures, it is about building the resilience and readiness our forces need to prevail. By working with industry to leverage these advancements, we can deliver more durable, sustainable, and cost-effective infrastructure for our military, ensuring taxpayer dollars are used efficiently while equipping our troops with the best facilities in the world.

Thank you for your time today, and I look forward to your questions.

[The information follows:]

RECORD VERSION

STATEMENT BY

MR. DAVID B. MORROW
DIRECTOR OF MILITARY PROGRAMS
UNITED STATES ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, VETERANS AFFAIRS,
AND RELATED AGENCIES
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FIRST SESSION, 119TH CONGRESS

INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGIES AND TECHNIQUES IN MILITARY CONSTRUCTION

MARCH 11, 2025

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COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Introduction

Chair Carter, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to discuss the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (USACE) efforts to research and utilize innovative technologies, techniques, and materials in military construction projects.

From the appointment of the first uniformed Army engineers by the Continental Congress on June 16, 1775, over the last 250 years U.S. Army Engineers have evolved to encompass the twin pillars of modern engineer operations, providing engineering expertise to the Army, and responding to the nation's toughest engineering challenges. The USACE mission includes Civil Works, Military Programs, Research and Development, and Disaster Response.

For this hearing, I want to focus on our Military Programs and Research and Development missions. USACE performs major construction and construction-related services for the Army, Air Force, other assigned U.S. Government agencies and foreign governments. We support our Combatant Commanders in 110 countries around the globe through a very robust military mission and Interagency and International Services program. These facilities service 3 million active-duty military, plus veterans, civilians, & their families.

USACE relies heavily on private industry to deliver innovative technologies and techniques in military construction. The Unified Facilities Criteria (UFC) are developed through tri-service coordination and sets the basic technical requirements that must be followed to deliver a code-compliant, complete and usable military facility. The UFC are also regularly updated to incorporate the latest codes, national standards, statutory, executive, and departmental requirements. Any innovative design solution that meets the UFC and mission requirements is acceptable and USACE encourages design and construction solutions from our industry partners that meet these requirements.

USACE also takes an active role in developing innovative mission-focused technologies and techniques. Our Research and Development mission, vested in our Engineer Research and Development Center (ERDC), is to discover, develop and deliver trusted engineering and scientific solutions for the warfighter and the Nation. ERDC is

comprised of seven laboratories in four states and has eight field offices from Alaska to England. It supports the USACE mission in military construction, installation support and support to Warfighter operations overseas and in the battlespace to ensure that facilities, infrastructure and installation services are resilient, ready and efficient. ERDC also maintains civil and military engineering technology leadership necessary for force protection, force projection and sustainment, and civil works missions.

Innovation is critical to achieve mission requirements, in maintainable, life-cycle cost effective, high-quality, and safe facilities. Through leveraging industry standards, industry partners, and military-focused R&D, we create conditions for responsible use of innovative technologies and techniques in military construction.

Organization

The USACE organizational structure supports delivery *and* innovation. USACE is organized geographically into 44 Districts that execute construction projects for the local region. Each District recruits and develops professionals, supporting training, professional licensure, and generates local expertise that enhances our successful construction project delivery.

These Districts execute work for Civil Works projects, Army, Air Force, Defense, Interagency and International partners. USACE has regular engagements with the other military services which fosters innovation through information sharing and common training opportunities. This activity with other services allows USACE to benefit from the experience of diverse project execution and leverage those lessons in military construction.

Innovations

Additive Construction: One innovative technology that can be used for expeditionary, CONUS, or MILCON applications is Additive Construction (construction 3D printing). Additive Construction has potential to modernize expeditionary, CONUS, and MILCON construction to reduce costs, manpower, hard labor, logistics, time, while opening the door for improved and new applications (e.g., unconventional countermeasures). While each scenario and equipment solution differs, the primary

benefits come from the potential ways that Additive Construction can increase efficiency of construction of structures from bridges to buildings to barriers (manpower, logistics, freedom in geometry, and more). USACE ERDC has taken a leading role in alignment of the field and acceleration of technology transition with private sector. This includes development of the unified facilities criteria language with the Tri-Service Structural Discipline Working Group to allow additive construction in 80% of the US and in regions where seismic activity is not an issue.

This is still a developing technology with a lack of historical structural performance data compared to traditional construction. Through pilot projects at locations, such as Fort Bliss, Camp McGregor, and Tyndall AFB, the knowledge and lessons learned from proceeding efforts have led to increased confidence in Additive Construction in military structures. In order to expand this technology to be appropriate for higher risk areas, a consolidated testing effort to characterize the field needs to be completed. Additionally, the current UFC language is being updated with the intent to write less stringent requirements based on new data field wide.

Novel Cement and Concrete Mixes: The ERDC is currently conducting research and fielding demonstration projects on other innovative materials and techniques as well. This includes innovative cement solutions utilizing non-traditional chemistries. Advantages of these products can include rapid set and hardening times, supply chain advantages, and activated chemical solutions for protection against specific threats. For example, these innovative products tailor chemistries to increase performance and longevity in situations such as protection against Petroleum, Oils, and Lubricants (POLS) and providing more effective surfaces for Vertical Take-Off and Landing (VTOL).

High performance and advanced strength concrete materials, and an improved design methodology for implementing them, are being incorporated into tri-service criteria for hardened structures across the globe. They are expected to enhance resilience of MILCON hardened structures.

Geosynthetics: Synthetic polymer materials called geosynthetics are being designed and manufactured to solve civil engineering problems including separation, filtration,

drainage, reinforcement, and containment. These materials help separate dissimilar materials and protect quality engineering materials from contamination with unwanted materials. For example, geonets and geocomposites can provide a drainage layer that is easily placed and reduces construction costs and time. Geogrid materials are routinely used to reinforce soil and aggregate, which allows project engineers to utilize local materials and reduce costs. Geomembranes are frequently use in containment basins and landfills to contain harmful effluents, retaining them to the localized designated area, and not allowing contamination of surrounding areas.

Mass Timber: USACE has also supported testing and evaluation of mass timber materials for contingency application and is working to clarify business practices to ensure industry understands where there are opportunities to incorporate these materials into MILCON applications. USACE recently designed the Army's first barracks made primarily with mass timber structural elements. The ERDC team's efforts working with the District design team, allowed them to make adjustments that will enable incorporation of mass timber products with greater confidence. USACE is currently working through potential siting conditions and looks forward to advertising opportunities to potential build partners on this barracks project. USACE is also currently soliciting interest in construction of project at Mountain Home Air Force Base, calling for incorporations of mass timber design. Utilizing mass timber in these projects may reduce construction timelines and the resource demand, if taken into account early with a risk-informed approach.

Composites: Fiber-reinforced polymer composites are under investigation to meet military interest in corrosion-resistant, low maintenance critical infrastructure. USACE aims to leverage a newly developed design standard to reduce maintenance requirements of exposed framing supporting critical infrastructure. This technology is especially applicable to highly corrosive environments, including sea spray that is common in coastal regions, and provides an electrically insulating, radio-transparent structure for improved signal range or reduced risk of electrical shock. Where composite framing is not feasible due to logistics or engineering challenges, the coatings systems will continue to offer solutions.

Conclusion

In an increasingly complex global security environment, our commitment to innovation in military construction is not just about building structures – it's about building the resilience and readiness our forces need to prevail. The innovations highlighted today represent not only progress in military construction technology but also a smart investment in the future of our armed forces. By working with industry to leverage these advancements, we can deliver more durable, sustainable, and cost-effective infrastructure for our military, ensuring taxpayer dollars are used efficiently while equipping our troops with the best facilities in the world. Thank you for your time today and we look forward to your questions.

TUESDAY, MARCH 11, 2025.

NAVAL FACILITIES ENGINEERING SYSTEMS COMMAND

WITNESS

KEITH HAMILTON, CHIEF ENGINEER, NAVAL FACILITIES ENGINEERING SYSTEMS COMMAND

Mr. CARTER. Thank you. Now we will turn to Mr. Hamilton.

Mr. HAMILTON. Thank you, Chairman Carter, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, distinguished members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on how Naval Facilities Engineering Command, or NAVFAC, is leveraging innovative construction techniques and technologies in military construction.

NAVFAC has a worldwide team of dedicated engineers and architects, planners, project managers, contracting officers, and other professionals who design, maintain, acquire, and construct facilities and infrastructure to support our warfighters at home and abroad. We are continuously collaborating with industry to identify and implement new, innovative infrastructure solutions, and to apply industry best practices that help make our U.S. warfighters more lethal, adaptable, effective, and resilient.

NAVFAC is actively testing and employing innovative technologies, materials, and methods for design and construction today, and we are leaning forward to increase collaboration with industry, academia, and other government partners to identify and leverage future opportunities. I will provide a few examples.

We realize that we must think, act, and operate differently in order to meet the many time-critical fleet and Marine Corps missions and requirements that we face today. This includes the employment of new and innovative solutions to reduce the cost and increase the speed of infrastructure project delivery. To address this issue head on, we have developed an Acceleration and Affordability Campaign Plan, and as a part of implementing that plan, and in coordination with our Navy Installations Command, we have issued guidance that at the start of every new military construction project NAVFAC's planners and engineers are required to evaluate whether the project can use alternative construction methods to meet the warfighting mission requirements while driving lower costs and accelerating the project delivery.

For many of our projects under construction today, NAVFAC uses some form of industrialized or modularized construction to pre-fabricate facility components at off-site private fabrication yards. We see tremendous benefits in this technique, and we see it as an opportunity to employ this approach. We are working to expand its use and to be able to leverage it for far greater economies of scale. We think this scale can be achieved by using industrialized construction for facilities where we have standard designs and repeatable modules that can be grouped in programming and acquisition, then constructed at the off-site fabrication plants and brought to the project site for final assembly.

In fact, we are using the other transactional authority that Congress provided in 10 U.S.C. section 4022 to pilot development of an industrialized construction project that will build a child develop-

ment center in Little Creek, Virginia. We then hope to scale that pilot approach to a number of child development centers that will be constructed in the Mid-Atlantic and southwest regions in the next few years.

NAVFAC is closely following and is keenly interested in applying additive construction methods, or 3D printing. We have seen tremendous advances in the technology, and we see continually improving capabilities and costs that are achieved through these methods. NAVFAC is also piloting the use of new and improved materials for use in military construction projects. We are constructing a Navy child development center in Hampton Roads, Virginia that uses cross-laminated timber. At Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point we are piloting the use of high-performance concretes in a major new F-35 hangar and aircraft sustainment center. NAVFAC is working to expand our use of various types of composite fiber reinforced polymers, particularly for retrofitting and strengthening existing structures.

NAVFAC is working to identify and develop near-term and long-term applications exploiting the power of artificial intelligence, or AI. We are partnering with the National Renewable Energy Lab and National Institutes of Building Sciences to identify use cases where AI can be employed in the planning, design, and construction to increase efficiency, reduce costs, and accelerate project delivery. We are also exploring potential efficiency tools with several leading AI companies, including early capabilities and generative AI for planning and design.

Finally, in addition to using the section 4022 other transactional authority which has shown real value in identifying and leveraging industry innovation, NAVFAC is exploring the use of alternative delivery methods such as progressive design build, lean design build, and construction manager at risk. These approaches are being used in the private sector to encourage innovation, speed project delivery, and reduce cost. However, we are finding that this—that there may be statutory or regulatory changes that are needed for us to fully leverage these approaches.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am proud to be a part of an organization that continuously pushes engineering boundaries to provide affordable infrastructure for the DoD that helps to ensure the lethality, resiliency, safety, and warfighting effectiveness of our military forces.

I look forward to your questions.

[The information follows:]

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SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY CONSTRUCTION,
VETERANS AFFAIRS, and RELATED AGENCIES,
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

STATEMENT OF
MR. KEITH HAMILTON
CHIEF ENGINEER AND ASSISTANT COMMANDER FOR
PLANNING, DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION
NAVAL FACILITIES ENGINEERING SYSTEMS COMMAND

BEFORE THE

HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY CONSTRUCTION,
VETERANS AFFAIRS AND RELATED AGENCIES,

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
MARCH 11, 2025

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SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY CONSTRUCTION,
VETERANS AFFAIRS, and RELATED AGENCIES,
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Chairman Carter, Ranking Member Wasserman-Shultz, distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on innovative military construction techniques.

Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command (NAVFAC) is responsible for the acquisition, design, and construction of Department of Defense (DoD) facilities and infrastructure to support our warfighters at home and abroad. Our worldwide team of dedicated engineers, architects, planners, project managers, contracting officers, and other professionals are continuously identifying and implementing innovative infrastructure solutions to make U.S. warfighters more lethal, adaptable, and resilient. NAVFAC's Engineering & Expeditionary Warfare Center (EXWC) partners with industry experts, research universities, and the Army Engineer Research and Development Center to provide research, development, testing, and evaluation to deliver technology and unique solutions for the warfighter that focus on the expeditionary equipment, ocean and shore facilities of enduring bases, and forward-deployed and expeditionary locations for military operations. Finally, as a designated member of the DoD Tri-Service Unified Design program, NAVFAC collaborates with the other services to develop, continuously update, and maintain facility requirements, criteria, and specifications to ensure the most current commercial standards, industry innovations, and best practices are applied consistently across the Navy and the DoD.

Current Innovation Initiatives

Many of NAVFAC's completed facilities and projects under-construction leverage innovative construction approaches to best meet warfighter needs.

- Industrialized Construction (IC) – NAVFAC uses industrialized construction to prefabricate facility components (e.g., drydock structural elements, pre-engineered metal buildings (PEBs), parking garages, tilt-up and pre-cast concrete structures, and exterior curtain walls)

at off-site private fabrication yards to enable greater affordability and address workforce, supply chain, and logistical challenges. We are working with industry to expand our use of Industrialized Construction, especially at remote or isolated locations.

- Tension Fabric Structures (TFS) – TFSs demonstrate great benefits such as lower cost and reduced delivery time, and we are working through some challenges we’ve observed with TFS durability and inability to withstand high windborne debris events. Last year, NAVFAC issued guidance directing our field offices to evaluate the use of Alternative Construction Methods—such as TFS, PEB, and IC—on all projects, and we also developed new guide specifications for TFS with respect to aircraft hangars.

Evolving Innovation Initiatives

NAVFAC is actively testing and employing innovative technologies, materials, and methods for design and construction today, and we are leaning forward to increase collaboration with industry and government partners to identify and exploit opportunities to reduce project costs and delivery time.

- Additive Construction (also known as 3D Printing and Additive Manufacturing) – Although commercial capability and capacity is currently limited, NAVFAC continues to investigate additive construction for application to permanent, expeditionary, and austere missions. Initial analysis focused on use cases supporting expeditionary mission requirements, including INDOPACOM requirements, where austere facilities with non-complex systems and structures present acceptable risk exposure. With the ability to "print" building components and even entire structures layer by layer, 3D printing significantly reduces material waste and labor costs, while enabling the creation of complex, custom-designed parts that are difficult or impossible to produce using traditional methods.

- Modular, Industrialized, or Off-site Construction – NAVFAC is aggressively investigating and piloting modular construction techniques for a host of potential uses where the facility solutions include standard, repeatable modules that can be constructed at an off-site fabrication plant and transported to the project site for final assembly. The modular construction industry’s code-compliant facility production offers lower cost and faster delivery solutions for certain facility types—like child development centers and unaccompanied housing—if the government has acquisition approaches that contract for a sufficient quantity of common facility types or components to attract fabricators who are then willing to invest in scaling up and tooling their plant for the expected workload.
- Alternative Delivery Methods – NAVFAC is exploring the use of alternative delivery methods, such as Progressive Design-Build, Lean Design-Build, and Construction-Manager-at-Risk, to apply modern best practice delivery methods being used in the private sector that encourage innovation, speed project delivery, and reduce cost. Using the Other Transaction Authority (OTA) pilot authorized by Congress, NAVFAC is piloting a modular constructed child development center. Effective application of these innovative delivery methods often requires enabling legislation or regulatory change, and we are working to identify where such statutory or regulatory change is necessary to facilitate these innovations and improvements in project delivery.
- Mass Timber (also known as Cross Laminated Timber (CLT)) – NAVFAC is supporting a Navy pilot project that includes broader use of CLT for a child development center in Hampton Roads, Virginia. The facility will use a hybrid mass timber exterior envelope consisting of CLT walls and diaphragms. DoD has expressly acknowledged the applicability

of CLT with the creation of a guide specification. As the CLT construction industry matures, CLT may prove more competitive and could be utilized more broadly in DoD construction.

- High-Performance Concrete (HPC) - Recent HPC advancements have led to significantly higher performance, durability, strength, and resistance to extreme environmental conditions; as well as improved thermal and acoustic properties. These characteristics align well with the harsh environments at many Navy and DoD installations. HPC has been used extensively for our piers, runways, and other critical infrastructure; and we are broadening its application. The U.S. Marine Corps and NAVFAC are piloting the use of HPC for a new F-35 Hangar at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point.
- Carbon Fiber Reinforced Polymers (CFRP) – CFRP is increasingly being used in military construction, particularly for retrofitting and strengthening existing structures. CFRP materials are lightweight, durable, and highly resistant to corrosion, making them an ideal choice for reinforcing structural components, such as beams and columns, and fabricating panels for walls, flooring, and ceilings in naval facilities. CFRP materials are also versatile and can be used in a variety of applications, from repairing damaged infrastructure to enhancing the performance of new construction. Their use has expanded within NAVFAC projects as they provide significant strength without adding unnecessary weight, and the ability to incorporate special material properties to achieve radio frequency shielding, ballistic and explosive resistance, and other special requirements for military application.

Future Innovation Initiatives

NAVFAC is aggressively exploring and pursuing opportunities to employ Artificial Intelligence (AI) in our Planning, Design, and Construction space. We are also collaborating with

the Army Corps of Engineers and Air Force Civil Engineer Center to share information and identify areas of mutual interest to pursue solutions.

- AI Technology Exploration Workshop / Palo Alto Summit – In 2024, NAVFAC EXWC met with 10 leading AI companies that offer tools in the planning, design, and construction space. We are currently evaluating their capabilities to determine how they might best be applied.
- AI-Enhanced Structural Design Investigation – NAVFAC EXWC is testing and evaluating a firm that provides an AI-enhanced structural design capability. We are entering into a more formal partnership to give the company several facility design use cases so we can evaluate their capability in terms of cost, speed, and quality.
- AI Tools to Pre-award and Post-award Design and Construction Management – We are partnering with the National Renewable Energy Lab and National Institutes of Building Sciences to identify use cases where AI may be employed to increase efficiency, reduce costs, and accelerate project delivery.

Conclusion

As Chief Engineer for Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command, I am proud to be part of an organization that continuously pushes engineering boundaries to ensure the lethality, resiliency, safety, effectiveness, and affordability of our forces. I look forward to your questions.

TUESDAY, MARCH 11, 2025.

HYLIION INCORPORATED

WITNESS

THOMAS HEALY, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, HYLIION INCORPORATED

Mr. CARTER. Thank you.

Mr. Healy.

Mr. HEALY. Chairman Carter, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for having me here today.

I would like to start off with a question. What if our military could produce electricity through a mobile generator that provided better electricity than even the U.S. grid? Well, I am here today to introduce a new superior power generation technology, one that is reliable, efficient, fuel flexible, and mobile.

I founded Hyliion out of my dorm room at Carnegie Mellon, and it has been an American startup story. We took the company public on the New York Stock Exchange in 2020. We have raised over \$700 million of capital, and we have begun delivering our Karno modular power plant, which we believe will fundamentally change how electricity is produced.

If there are three key things to remember about what we are doing, it is first that it is one solution that can be used across all applications; second is it offers fuel flexibility, reliability, and the performance of military needs; and the third is it is manufactured through 3D printing, which enables us to make it here in the U.S.

So let's go back to that first point about one solution across all applications. What if military vessels, autonomous vessels, what if bases, what if vehicles could all use the same power generation solution, leveraging the same parts and the same service across all applications?

The Karno generator is designed to be scalable, as well, starting with a 200 kilowatt base unit that then can be stacked together to deliver multi megawatts for military bases. That base unit, just for reference, is about the size of a bed of a pickup truck. So it is extremely compact. This vision is already becoming a reality. We actually just delivered our first unit to the Navy, and they are going to not only be testing it for autonomous vessels, but they are also going to be testing it for stationary applications.

The second point I made was why Karno. So this is a fuel agnostic solution. It can operate on over 20 different fuels including diesel, natural gas, propane, JP-8. So imagine if our troops are deployed somewhere in the world where it is kind of unsure of what fuel they are going to have available to them, and it is unsure if that fuel is even contaminated. Our technology eliminates those concerns because now the system—you start feeding it fuel, and it will sense what fuel it is receiving, adjust accordingly, and deliver electricity.

Now, reliability is also key. So this system is designed with only one moving part, and even that part glides on gas bearings. It is similar to, like, an air hockey table. So that eliminates the need for

oils, eliminates maintenance, or substantial maintenance, and eliminates lubricants. So as you think about, like, autonomous vessels, where there isn't anyone on board to actually maintain the engines, reliability is critical.

Additionally, we want to look at efficiency. So the Karno generator, when you compare it to the grid, the grid is about 36 percent efficient. So, you know, your standard wall outlet. The Karno generator will be able to deliver efficiencies up to 50 percent. That means that we are going to use less fuel to make the same amount of power.

Now, it does all these things while also having a very low noise profile. It is similar noise level to, like, an air conditioning unit. It also has a low heat profile, meaning the system is less detectable. Any one of these advantages alone could convince you to move away from diesel generators, but we have been able to package all this into one solution, our Karno generator.

So the question comes up of, like, well, why hasn't this been done before? That brings me to my third key point, which is 3D printing. So if you go back 200 years ago, there were steam engines, there were diesel engines, there was this thing called a sterling. Engineers always knew that sterlings could be or would be the most efficient way of making power, but you could never manufacture a sterling. Fast forward to today. Thanks to advancements in 3D printing, we are able to make parts like this one here that are extremely complex, allow us to unlock efficiencies that now make sterlings a reality or, as we like to call it, the Karno generator.

So I think this is going to be passed around.

So I want to be transparent with where we are in this process. As I shared, we just delivered our first unit to the Navy, and we have other early adopter customer units planned through the middle of this year. We believe the system will deliver everything I have shared today, but we are still in the final stages of development. We are testing the system and continuing to refine it. So as we go forward, we would like to expand our relationship with the military, especially as we start scaling. We have already set up manufacturing both near Austin, Texas as well as in Cincinnati, Ohio. Yes, Austin, and so that is going to ensure that this is domestically produced.

Chairman Carter, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, and distinguished members of the committee, our military has been known for having the best technology, and we need to make sure that remains true for power generation, as well. With Hyliion's Karno power plant, we are delivering the three key things that are important. It is one solution that can be used across all applications. It offers fuel flexibility and reliability, as well as it is made here in the U.S., thanks to 3D printing. Thank you.

[The information follows:]



KARNO™

**Written Testimony Before the House Military
Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies
Appropriations Subcommittee**

**Innovative Technology Opportunities for Military
Construction Hearing**

March 11, 2025

**Hyliion's Innovative KARNO Modular Power Plant
Utilizing Additive Manufacturing Creates Energy
Resilience in Military Applications**

WITNESS STATEMENT OF:

Thomas J. Healy

Founder and Chief Executive Officer
Hyliion Inc.
www.hyliion.com



Introduction

Chairman Carter, Ranking Member Wasserman-Schultz and distinguished members of this Subcommittee, it is an honor for Hyliion to be afforded this platform to discuss the benefits of the KARNØ generator for military applications. We will describe how the KARNØ generator can serve as a strategic asset to provide energy resiliency and contribute to national defense and security. We thank the chairman and the committee for this opportunity.

About Hyliion

Hyliion was founded in 2015 and is committed to creating innovative solutions for flexible and affordable electricity production. The company's focus is providing modular power plants powered by an innovative new linear generator that can operate on a wide range of fuel sources and deliver significant advances in efficiency, operating cost, power density, emissions, and noise levels compared to conventional electricity generating technology. The KARNØ generator achieves these remarkable advancements due to unique design elements that are enabled by advanced additive manufacturing or 3D printing. Headquartered in Austin, Texas, and with research and development in Cincinnati, Ohio, Hyliion is initially targeting the defense, data center, commercial and waste management industries with a locally deployable generator. Beyond stationary power, Hyliion is addressing mobile applications, including marine. Hyliion recently delivered the first 200 kW generator to the US Navy for further testing and validation to confirm its ability to be deployed as a power source in future unmanned naval vessels.

Hyliion's KARNØ Technology Enabled by Additive Manufacturing

An impressive example of American ingenuity and manufacturing, the KARNØ generator represents a contemporary approach to modernizing 19th century-era Stirling technology. Stirling power system adoption has been hindered by conventional manufacturing



challenges such as design complexity, heat exchanger efficiency, and low power density.

Modern additive technology has now advanced to a stage where components can be efficiently produced with the intricate geometries and precise details necessary for crafting efficient, power-dense generators that also feature other advantages that are favorable for defense applications.

The KARNØ generator is distinguished from conventional generating systems such as reciprocating internal combustion engines or gas turbines. In contrast, the KARNØ generator harnesses the power of heat to propel a linear generating system, deriving its linear motion from temperature differences inside the engine. The generation of heat within the system occurs through flameless oxidation of fuels like natural gas, hydrogen, or propane. This thermal energy causes helium gas enclosed within a sealed chamber to expand and cause an oscillating motion of a connected piston-shaft system. A set of permanent magnets affixed to the shaft pass through electric coils to produce electricity.

The KARNØ generator is expected to surpass the efficiency of conventional reciprocating generating systems of a similar size when employing various fuel sources. Notably, its high efficiency remains consistent across a broad range of output power levels.

An additional advantage of the KARNØ generator is an expected reduction in maintenance requirements and cost. Conventional generators incur high usage-based maintenance expenses. The stresses and friction of internal combustion impose significant wear on components, necessitating the use of oil-based lubricants, filters, and the periodic replacement or refurbishment of key parts. The KARNØ generator's advantage arises from having only a single moving linear actuator per shaft (4 shafts per 200 kW generator), which glides on low-friction helium bearings.

This innovative design significantly mitigates efficiency losses, enhances the system's operational longevity, and eliminates the need for oil-based lubricants. Consequently, the KARNØ



generator is expected to operate much longer than a conventional generator before requiring periodic maintenance or an overhaul and require less manpower to maintain while in operation.

The KARNØ generator is modular, allowing for a highly customizable power solution by stacking additional generator systems to meet specific power needs. This modularity enables tailored energy solutions for various operational requirements, ensuring optimal performance and efficiency. Hyliion is currently developing a 2 MW power solution that is suitable for military bases, data centers and other applications with larger power demands.

Another advantage of the KARNØ modular power plant is its ability to achieve near-zero emission of pollutants, regardless of the type of fuel used. This is a result of advanced technology that automatically recirculates exhaust gases, enabling the elimination of pollutant gases such as nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide and volatile organic compounds. This feature also enables the KARNØ generator to operate without the need for the complex and costly aftertreatment systems typically required by conventional generators to meet environmental standards.

Military Applications

In today's complex global landscape, energy resiliency and power stability are needed for the operational success of the US military around the world, particularly within the Indo-Pacific Command (INDO PACOM). This region, characterized by vast distances, diverse terrains, and a range of geopolitical challenges, necessitates a robust and reliable energy infrastructure to support military activities, particularly in the face of natural disasters, cyber-attacks, and adversarial actions aimed at disrupting power supply.

The KARNØ generator is designed to provide flexible and resilient electricity with a low heat signature, minimal sound, and low maintenance needs while in operation. Its ability to



utilize a wide range of fuels, including contaminated fuels, ensures functionality in unpredictable environments. The KARNØ generator can operate in any orientation and its compact form factor allows for easy deployment and integration into mobile platforms, offering versatile and reliable power solutions for diverse military needs.

The KARNØ generator's simple design enables straightforward serviceability when required, and in the case of multi-KARNØ power arrays, allows for individual generators to be removed and replaced without taking down the entire power system. Additionally, since key components of the KARNØ generator are additively printed, service and replacement parts can be readily fabricated when needed. This design approach ensures that repairs and maintenance can be conducted swiftly and efficiently, minimizing downtime and enhancing the overall operational readiness of military forces.

KARNØ Generator Powered Autonomous Vessels and Other Applications for the US Navy

Since 2023, Hyliion has been working with the Office of Naval Research to create a power solution for Navy ships and stationary power applications. The KARNØ generator is highly versatile, providing adaptable power solutions to meet the unique demands of US Naval operations in maritime environments including the Unmanned Surface Vessel cross-platform requirements in a megawatt-scale modular system.

KARNØ Powered Microgrid for Military Bases

The vulnerability of electrical grids to cyber-attacks can jeopardize the functionality and security of military installations, making a robust and reliable energy solution imperative. The KARNØ generator's advanced capabilities ensure a steadfast power supply, safeguarding critical operations even in the face of infrastructure disruptions. Its ability to operate independently from



the main grid, coupled with its ability to use a wide range of fuels, make the KARNØ generator a strategic tool in maintaining operational readiness and security for military bases globally.

Tactical, Ruggedized, Mobile KARNØ Generator for Forward Operating Bases (FOBs)

Hyliion has begun initial discussions with the US Army to create a mobile KARNØ generator power solution that would have the capability to be deployed anywhere in the world. FOBs are often situated in remote and hostile environments where traditional power sources are unreliable or impractical. The KARNØ generator excels in such scenarios, overcoming challenges related to unknown fuel types, potential fuel contamination, harsh environmental conditions and the need to have a small footprint that can be transported around the world.

Challenges and Opportunities

Recent advancements in additive manufacturing are enabling the fabrication of larger, more complex parts with greater speed and precision. Additive manufacturing is commonly used today in a broad range of applications, including aerospace, medical implants and automotive. The technology is enabling component manufacturing to move from prototyping to large scale production. KARNØ generator technology is an example of these advancements. While additive presents a groundbreaking advancement in manufacturing technology, further increases in capabilities are possible and being pursued by GE and other manufacturers of this equipment.

Conclusion

Chairman Carter, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, and members of this Subcommittee, we are grateful for having this opportunity to present the groundbreaking capabilities of the KARNØ generator. The KARNØ generator, with its innovative use of additive manufacturing, is a testament to American-made ingenuity and our dedication to providing reliable, scalable, and cutting-edge energy solutions to our military.

TUESDAY, MARCH 11, 2025.

CENTER FOR NAVAL ANALYSES

WITNESS

**BRENT RICHARDSON, PRINCIPAL RESEARCH SCIENTIST OF ENERGY,
INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENVIRONMENT, CNA**

Mr. CARTER. Thank you.

Mr. Richardson.

Mr. RICHARDSON. Chairman Carter, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on innovative military construction techniques.

CNA's Center for Naval Analyses provides our sailors, our Marines, and the broader national security community with objective analytics to improve the lethality and effectiveness of the joint force. Our sole mission is to support the decision-making of military leadership.

The study we conducted for Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Infrastructure Modernization and Resilience included the identification of barriers to innovative construction techniques in MILCON. This study was important because the results showed that a forcing function to use such techniques should be developed.

There are several options to bridge the gap between industry and DoD efforts to adopt innovative construction techniques.

First, a DoD technology roadmap for MILCON would provide necessary guidance for both DoD and service component labs to make informed and targeted investments toward innovation. Such a roadmap would establish during—enduring capability needs and measured focused areas for identified MILCON outcomes. One specific use case, for example, is to leverage artificial intelligence technology to provide a scalable, fast, and reliable aid for design and construction management efforts. A published MILCON technology roadmap would also provide a demand to—demand signal to industry to drive development of specific technologies, potentially leading to private-sector investment. This could also foster the subsequent development of industry standards and best practices, thereby advancing the further adoption of innovative techniques.

A second recommendation is to adhere to a collaborative, front-loaded design process. This would entail the inclusion of construction contractors early in the design process for the purposes of leveraging additional innovative construction knowledge and experience that is newly emerging in the private sector. Industry experience shared by a construction contractor during the design phase of a project can provide valuable benefits to the government, including the identification of regionally available innovative techniques, technologies, and the supporting workforce.

Construction contractors with regionally specific expertise can also serve as a resource in the identification of potential construction challenges in the design phase. This allows the designer of record to minimize construction risks and facilitate the most efficient construction means and methods. NAVFAC, Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command, has undergone such efforts and

recently published a guide for early contractor involvement in the design phase of MILCON projects.

Lastly, while our analysis highlighted existing DoD efforts toward the inclusion of innovative technologies in MILCON such as additive manufacturing and mass timber, without a technology road map in place and industry engaged in the design phase, DoD investment in such technologies is not prioritized, and private sector interest is not encouraged.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I look forward to your questions.

[The information follows:]

Statement of Mr. Brent Richardson, Principal Research Scientist, Center for Naval Analyses

Chairman Carter, Ranking Member Wasserman-Shultz, distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on innovative military construction techniques.

CNA is a nonprofit, analytic organization of about 700 scientists, analysts and staff dedicated to the safety and security of the nation. Our analysts can be found on aircraft carriers and military bases, in squad rooms and crisis centers, working side by side with operators and decision-makers to ensure our national and homeland security.

CNA's Center for Naval Analyses provides our sailors, our marines, and the broader national security community with objective analytics to improve the lethality and effectiveness of the Joint Force. Our sole mission is to support the decision-making of military leadership. As a clearinghouse for Navy, Marine Corps, and Department of Defense (DOD) operational data, we base our analytics on decades of information we have collected and maintained on the lethality, readiness, cost, and performance of military platforms and systems.

As a Civil Engineer Corps officer in the Navy, I have spent my career gaining direct insight and understanding of the military construction (MILCON) program. Now, as an analyst at CNA, I lead work related to the MILCON program, for example, examining the impacts of Typhoon Mawar on critical DOD infrastructure for the INDOPACOM Commander.

The DOD currently faces specific challenges to incorporating innovative construction techniques into MILCON projects. As such, the FY23 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), Section 2851, required the Secretary of Defense to commission a study examining barriers to

incorporating innovative techniques. In response to the FY23 NDAA, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (DASD) for Infrastructure Modernization and Resilience (IMR) asked CNA's Center for Naval Analyses to conduct this analysis. I am honored to be here today to present the results of this project.

Innovative construction techniques can be described as products or techniques that depart from the traditional means of construction and further advance efficiency—reducing project costs and/or construction time. One example is additive manufacturing (AM) which may include the automated process of “printing” a three-dimensional solid object from a digital file using concrete as a medium instead of procuring the item. Another example is the use of mobile sensors on construction sites to capture and update construction progress in real time.

We have observed that the DOD is using innovative construction techniques for MILCON. The Department recently employed additive manufacturing technology to construct barracks at Fort Bliss, Texas, and has a planned project for constructing a barracks using a second innovation, mass timber technology, at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington. Effective use of both technologies can reduce construction times and labor requirements, thus reducing the overall project costs compared to traditional construction means and methods. However, these technologies are not yet widely used by both the DOD and construction industry so incorporation into construction decision-making is hampered.

Our approach to examining barriers for the inclusion of innovative construction techniques for MILCON projects included an examination of criteria change requests related to innovative techniques, Unified Facility Criteria (UFC) documents, Federal Acquisition Regulations, and the MILCON planning process. We also held discussions with subject matter experts (SMEs) within

the DOD to include senior personnel at DOD and service component labs. Our approach and analysis revealed several barriers such as:

- Innovative techniques typically require evaluation, demonstration, and validation before industry accepts the technique as a best practice or standard. Therefore, industry may not be incentivized to use innovative techniques unless such techniques are proven, documented, and cost-effective. This can prohibit use of innovative techniques in MILCON as industry standards and best practices directly influence MILCON construction methods.
- Though DOD and service component labs have established selection criteria for selecting solicited study topic areas and projects and have researched innovative technologies, there is not a formalized process for identifying such study topic areas and projects specifically for MILCON.
- Discussions with UFC working groups and service component labs indicate that the manner in which innovative technologies are tested and evaluated by DOD labs do not always translate into the performance requirements necessary to update UFC documents. This directly impedes or stalls efforts for adopting the new technologies identified.
- Regional availability of innovative technologies and the workforce necessary to employ innovative technologies is variable and can be difficult to ascertain.

There are several options to bridge the gap between industry and DOD efforts to adopt innovative construction techniques. **First, a DOD technology roadmap for MILCON would provide necessary guidance for both DOD and service component labs to make informed and targeted investments towards innovation.** Such a roadmap would establish enduring capability needs and measured focused areas for identified MILCON outcomes.

This technology roadmap would also identify the priorities for military construction advancement research, identify options for construction process improvements, as well as identify some specific technologies feasible for adoption. For example, one specific use case is to leverage artificial intelligence technology to provide a scalable, faster, and reliable aid for design and construction management efforts.

A published MILCON technology roadmap, available to industry, would also provide a demand signal to industry to drive development of specific technologies, potentially leading to private sector investment. This would also foster the subsequent development of industry standards, thereby advancing innovation.

A second recommendation is to adhere to a collaborative front-loaded design process. This would entail the inclusion of construction contractors early in the design process for the purposes of leveraging additional innovative construction knowledge and experience that is newly emerging in the private sector. Industry experience shared by a construction contractor during the design phase of a project can provide valuable benefits to the government, including the identification of regionally available innovative technologies and supporting workforces. Additionally, construction contractors—with regionally specific expertise—can serve as an additional resource in the identification of potential construction challenges in the design phase. This allows the designer of record to minimize construction risks and facilitate the most efficient construction means and methods. NAVFAC has undergone such efforts and recently published a guide for early contractor involvement in the design phase of MILCON projects.

Lastly, while our analysis highlighted existing DOD efforts towards the inclusion of innovative technologies in MILCON (such as additive manufacturing and mass timber), without a technology roadmap in place and industry engaged at the design phase, DoD investment in such

technologies is not prioritized and private sector interest is not encouraged. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I look forward to your questions.

Mr. CARTER. Well, thank you very much, and I will start out with the Army.

Mr. Morrow, these new technologies like 3D printing and additive manufacturing hold a promise. Where does the Corps stand on the actual use of these and what research do you have on the reliability and strength in both cold and hot weather?

Mr. MORROW. Thank you. Thank you, Congressman, for that question.

So currently, the UFCs allow additive construction or 3D-printed construction and seismic zones A and in seismic zones B with a shake table test to demonstrate that the means and methods for that are structurally sound. So in those areas we are completely supportive to go into higher seismic zone areas or multi-story buildings. I think additional testing is required.

So our ERDC, our research and development center, you know, they are working closely with industry. They have continuing efforts to demonstrate that material and advance that material. But for routine military construction, if for example a design build RFP is for a single story building in seismic zone A or seismic zone B, there is nothing that would preclude industry from proposing on that.

So recently, the Navy and the Corps developed some joint training for our project managers, our technical staff, and our acquisition teams. Part of that training was innovative construction methods and innovative construction material. So we want to, you know, continue that education and ensure that out in the field, where the real work is done, you know, our team members are cognizant of new emerging technology. When they are evaluating proposals and planning projects, you know, they are keeping those in mind, as well. Thank you.

Mr. CARTER. Does anyone else want to comment on—I know we are all talking about seismic, and that is important, but what about the various heat levels we would—now, would it be, what you are making, be viable in Alaska or in the Arctic, as well as where I live in Texas, where it is hot? That is a good question. I would like—as you have talked about what you are doing, are you looking into those things? Because I think that is very important.

Mr. HEALY. I can maybe share a little bit about that.

So just going back to your last question of the reliability of 3D printing, so that part I shared was made through 3D metal additive. Chances are, if you flew to D.C., a greater than 50 percent chance the plane you were flying on was powered off of additive parts. So this has already been approved by the FAA, it is being used regularly. So additive is real, it is happening, it is being leveraged today.

In terms of the ability to operate in different environments, that part that got passed around is made out of cobalt chromium, one of the most resistant metals to heat and cold, as well. So our system is designed to be able to operate in the extreme cold, like 40 °C, as well as north of 40 °C, right? So that means it can go to Alaska, it can go to Texas, and actually, one of the unique things is it actually likes the cold, it actually performs better in the cold. So we are actually looking forward to a Navy deployment that is going to be going to Alaska.

Mr. CARTER. Do any of the others want to comment?

Okay. Navy, do you want to comment? Mr. Hamilton?

Mr. HAMILTON. Thank you, Chairman Carter. I would just add to the comments the gentlemen have made that I think, first, the additive manufacturing is very highly developed, and we use it extensively to manufacture parts. We use it to manufacture parts that are no longer obtainable in the market. We use it for troop deployments, where we can do things in an expeditionary environment. Additive construction is a very promising technology, and has developed very substantially over the last several years.

I think, to your question about how does it—how is it applied in different temperature zones, I think we know more about its application in warm temperature zones. I think temperature is certainly dependent on the types of mixtures that are being used for the additive construction. That has to be carefully monitored and maintained. We have less experience with it in cold weather environments. But I think all of those environments are important for the future development.

We believe this is a technology that will have great use as we go forward, and especially as we begin to address some of the seismic issues that would allow us to apply it in the Indo-Pacific regions.

Mr. CARTER. Thank you for bringing that up, because it is one of the questions I wanted to ask.

I visited the Indo-Pacific, and so has my colleague, and they have got a lot of issues over there. One of them is that sea climate, it is very hard on buildings. Do you have any—are you building anything in that area where you know how it is affected by the ocean, and the constant humidity, and all the things they have at Kwajalein, let's say?

Mr. HAMILTON. Yes—

Mr. CARTER. Or Guam.

Mr. HAMILTON. Yes, sir. Thank you for that question.

We, as you know, have a great deal of work across the entirety of the Indo-Pacific theater, and in Guam, as you mentioned, we have a very large construction program. We have a lot of infrastructure that is aged and damaged that we are working to repair and to harden, and we are using a wide variety of techniques and approaches to do that.

We have to be very sensitive to not just seismicity in the area. We have to be, of course, very mindful of the typhoon conditions that facilities have to endure in those locations. We have to, as you pointed out, understand the impact of the salt water conditions and other things that they are exposed to, and so that limits some types of materials.

We find that some steel materials, if they are going to be used in that area, have to be specially prepared for that kind of environment. If they are not—and we have certainly had steel components that have deteriorated very quickly in that environment.

We are beginning to look at the use of various reinforced—fiber-reinforced polymers that can be used in that kind of environment. There are some promising developments including panelized construction that is very resilient in those kinds of environments, and it is also very strong, has the ability to put fibers that provide dif-

ferent capabilities within that particular panel that is developed so that it might provide RF shielding for SCIFs, or it might provide armor or explosive resistance for different types of applications. So we find that to be a very valuable technique there.

The other thing that I would mention is that we are looking very hard at industrialized construction, the ability to prefabricate components in the United States and have those shipped to those regions in the Indo-Pacific theater for installation on the project sites. We find both cost and timing benefits of that application.

Mr. CARTER. On the concrete that they make with the with the 3D printing, do you have the—if you are doing that over there and on the islands, you got lots of sand. But do you have any gravel or any other source to make that concrete viable, or will it have to be shipped in there?

Mr. HAMILTON. Yes, sir. We have done testing with the additive construction, working with both ERDC and with the NAVFAC's Engineering and Expeditionary Warfare Center to see if we could use native materials. We did a pilot project in Guam, where we used all native materials to do the additive construction, and it was very successful. We did blast testing with those facilities which were very successful tests. We saw—it stood up very well.

We have also worked with salt water concretes so that for expeditionary use—not for long-term permanent facilities, but for expeditionary use—our troops can go in and use salt water rather than fresh water that would have to be brought in or purified on site to make the concrete. We found very similar characteristics in terms of strength and durability for a short-term, one or two-year construction that we might expect in an expeditionary contingency environment.

Mr. CARTER. Thank you.

Ms. Wasserman Schultz.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I have been the ranking member or the chair of the subcommittee since 2014, and most of that time I was serving alongside Judge Carter. I think, if he and I had a nickel for every reprogramming that we have signed in our roles due to increased construction costs, increased labor costs that were unanticipated by the military, we could retire.

President Trump has announced a 25 percent import tax on steel and aluminum, in addition to a broad range of other tariffs against countries like Canada, Mexico, and China. During this hearing he announced an additional 25 percent tariff on aluminum and steel against Canada. These countries are retaliating. They are levying tariffs in response, and boycotts. Among the wide range of negative inflationary effects these unnecessary actions will have on our economy, they will undoubtedly lead to our needing to sign more reprogramming requests due to increased unanticipated costs.

So I would like to hear from each of you what impact you expect to see on material and construction costs as a result of the newly-announced tariffs on products like steel, aluminum, including the potential impacts on labor costs which American companies rely upon.

Mr. Morrow, you can start.

Mr. MORROW. Thank you, Congresswoman.

I think the first point I would like to make is we have put a tremendous amount of emphasis on our project planning process and reducing the risk and getting all of the information possible for the site exactly to minimize any future reprogramming.

So many of the efforts to do—advance a project to a 35 percent design, get a better cost estimate, et cetera is already starting to pay dividends. So hopefully, we will have fewer reprogramming based on unanticipated costs. I think it is really too early to tell how the market is going to respond to many changes. One of the shortcomings of cost engineering is we have lots of historical data, but, you know, we can't, you know, look precisely into the future.

So our cost engineers, you know, follow the markets very carefully, try to incorporate all of the risk-informed decision-making they can into developing those estimates, but I think it is really too early to tell—

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Morrow, are you really telling me that an unanticipated 50 percent tariff on aluminum and steel is not going to—you are not sure whether that would cause unanticipated increases in costs to military construction projects?

Mr. MORROW. It depends, of course, project by project, where—you know, obviously, we follow the Buy America Act, and most of our material comes from this country. We are talking about other technologies like mass timber that could replace steel or concrete structures.

Every project is individual, and—

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Right.

Mr. MORROW [continuing]. I think the most—

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Okay.

Mr. MORROW [continuing]. Important thing we can do is to try to get the number right in the first place, so that everybody has decision space to make the appropriate—

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Unfortunately, all of what you are saying is true, and yet we still regularly have to—are presented with reprogrammings that are the result of unanticipated costs. So the system you are describing is not working, is not improving. So it is not working, is not improving, and it is just hard for me to believe that you are—I know you are being truthful, but it is hard for me to buy that you are not sure whether 50 percent tariffs on aluminum and steel are not going to result in increased costs.

Mr. Hamilton.

Mr. HAMILTON. Thank you, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, for the question.

I think the—you know, I certainly acknowledge the challenge that you highlighted with cost estimating, and especially in dynamic changing times in the markets. We have done a number of things to try to address those challenges. As Mr. Morrow identified, we have put a focus on better understanding market conditions and being able to predict them and incorporate them into our cost estimating processes. We have a chief economist that tracks all those economic trends and builds them into our building cost indexes that we apply to our projects. We have advanced our development of cost schedule risk analysis, are working to mature designs.

I think the innovations that we are talking about today in terms of materials and alternative construction methods is something

that helps us deal with some of the specific market turns, whether it might be concrete, or it might be steel, or various construction materials that have perturbations in cost. We now have more alternatives to be able to use cross-laminated timbers, or to be able to use tension fabric structures, or printed concrete materials and other things that help us—

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. But those are—

Mr. HAMILTON [continuing]. Avoid—

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. There is only two pilot projects per service on materials like that, so there is certainly not widespread use of those alternative materials. We are talking about the immediate impact of a 50 percent tariff on the materials that we are currently using.

So what you are describing, certainly in the long term, when we move away from these kinds of materials, but it is hard to wrap my mind around the idea that—I realize it is—no one wants to say what it is. The real answer is because we all know what it is. It is pretty obvious.

Mr. Richardson.

Mr. RICHARDSON. Thank you, Wasserman Schultz, for the question.

I was prepared to talk about barriers, potential barriers to including more innovative construction techniques in military construction. I would—so we didn't examine specific technologies, so I would say that these increased tariffs could potentially force us to be more innovative in employing constructive methods that could be used in the United States.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Which would result in job losses because if we are shifting away from the industries that we typically use materials from because they are too expensive, then obviously people will lose their jobs.

Mr. Chairman, I have just one other question.

From my home state of Florida to the far shores of Guam, our military installations face a greater threat than ever before from extreme weather events that are impacted—driven by climate change. Military construction, obviously, we have realized has to take into the account the danger of wildfires, hurricanes, severe storms, more depending on the location of projects. We have to increase our investments in resiliency now, because even if building resiliency into these projects is costly, we know doing nothing results in far greater costs to rebuild damaged and destroyed infrastructure.

So Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Morrow, what steps are you taking to ensure that all military construction projects prioritize resiliency?

How might alternative materials, like the ones mentioned today, play a role in improving the resiliency of our infrastructure?

Mr. HAMILTON. Thank you, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, for the question.

I think there are many things we can do and are doing to address this. I think it starts with understanding where we need to have different kinds of materials to withstand the kinds of environments that we are witnessing today, and some of the materials we are talking about today are specifically designed to deal with those harsh environments.

We are making sure that we are focused on updating our unified facilities criteria and guide specifications that incorporate those kinds of materials into the projects that we design. We are making sure that we harden areas, for example, as we try to recover from the Typhoon Mawar in Guam to harden the utility systems, to make them more resilient, more able to withstand the kinds of weather impacts that we have been experiencing, and make sure that we are prepared, we have redundancy in our systems where that is necessary to be able to continue military operations and the—in the face of those kinds of events.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you.

Mr. MORROW. Just, Congresswoman, two points.

One, I would use Tyndall Air Force Base as an example. Obviously, that installation was devastated following a hurricane many years ago. There has been a tremendous amount of construction there, and that those new facilities have fared very well in subsequent storms. So I do think we are learning lessons and we are continually improving.

Another strength that the Corps of Engineers has is our civil works mission. So we do a lot of coastal storm damage reduction projects, other projects of that nature. So when there are coastal installations, we have got that technology and that, you know, subject matter expert base to lean on. If it is a Navy or an Air Force project, you know, we work collaboratively all the time to make sure we are putting the right professionals to address those types of issues.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I know you and I have seen the impact of the salt water erosion and intrusion in the Pacific and in Florida. We have MacDill and Tyndall that are, you know, right on the water and are regularly exposed to the risks. So we need to make sure we are continuing to focus on resiliency. Thank you.

Mr. CARTER. Mr. Rutherford.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to all of our witnesses today, and I will ask you to give me a little grace on my voice, as well.

But I want to go back to the supply chain issue for a moment, because I think it is very important not just in light of tariffs, but after COVID-19 we saw how fragile all of our supply chains are. One of the things that we have done—I would like to ask you, Mr. Hamilton—one of the things that we have done in HUD is on some programing we have allowed them a two-year appropriation, and that—the response has been very positive. Can you talk about how—well, a couple of things. How would that help with your supply chain issues with cross-laminated timber, for example?

I know they did a project up in Joint Base Lewis-McChord. I think Mr. Richardson talked about that. Can you talk a little bit about what that might mean to cost and development?

Mr. HAMILTON. Yes, sir. Thank you, Congressman Rutherford, for the question.

We do struggle today as our construction projects are more and more costly, especially with our O&M appropriations, which are one-year appropriations. Today the average cost of our large, O&M-

funded projects are larger than the military construction projects we funded not that many years ago.

As we look at those projects, we also find that both for military construction and O&M-funded projects we have many specific components and equipment, sometimes materials that are long lead, sometimes a year-and-a-half, two, three years for substations and electrical switchgear and other things. So the ability to have that equipment purchased in advance so that it is available when the construction project needs it is really important to allow the project to be able to finish in a timely manner.

The length of appropriations is challenging because, as you execute a very large, O&M-funded appropriation—appropriated project with a—with the expiration of the funds, you are both squeezing it on the front end and often challenged to have a large number of those projects all going out to competition at the same time in the latter part of the fiscal year, and then you are executing it after the appropriation has expired.

So especially on those repair projects, you encounter unforeseen conditions, and those conditions—there is no longer a current appropriation to fund those changes so you have to reach back to previous appropriations, often delaying the project, raising the cost of delivery. So multi-year O&M appropriations would be very helpful to alleviate that issue.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. It has worked very well in HUD, Mr. Chairman. That is something we may want to look at also.

Mr. Healy, I am really—thank you, Mr. Hamilton—I am really intrigued by your development. One of the things that I am really concerned about for America's defense is, you know, these electromagnetic pulses. Is your generator protected from those EMPs, or can it be?

Mr. HEALY. Yes, thank you, Congressman. Today it is not protected from EMP attacks. But what I will share is through our journey we have been working with the Navy, and the Navy has continued to give us military specs that we need to be able to meet, and then our engineering team goes and achieves those.

A perfect example is Navy is going to run on diesel fuel. They wanted to be able to run on up to 20 percent contaminated with salt water diesel fuel. So then we go and we engineer the system to be able to do that. So that is something if, you know, the military is interested in, we would be happy to explore.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. That is pretty amazing, actually. I would like to ask Mr. Morrow.

The—in the 2025 NDAA we allowed—I forget the section. Let's see. We allow you to now use O&M instead of MILCON for budgeting for some of the beach erosion, other types of erosion at our military facilities like Blount Island Command in Jacksonville, where we have got some erosion on the island. Is the Navy planning on using that moving forward? Are we—is that all you need to start using O&M?

Mr. MORROW. So any time we have more flexibility on the types of projects we can fund, whether MILCON or O&M, it makes us more responsive and more flexible.

I am not familiar if we have—so when the Corps executes O&M, whether on behalf of the Army or the Navy, they do it on a reimbursable basis, and our organization is funded by those projects.

So we have had a number of recent changes to the O&M rules that have all been very, very helpful. So the most recent is in barracks, so we can now repair a barracks through a replacement of a new facility. That is a pilot initiative that—

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Okay, I—Mr. Morrow, I hate to cut you off, but I see my time has expired. But I will tell you I found it at section 2847. So if we could look at moving those projects forward, especially at Blount Island Command, thank you.

Mr. MORROW. Yes, sir.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. I yield back.

Mr. CARTER. Oh, man, I am losing my voice.

Mr. Bishop.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and let me thank the witnesses for their testimony this morning. Let me start with Mr. Morrow.

As you know, Georgia has the largest stand of privately-owned timber land in the nation, and we are proud of our efforts to be good stewards of the land and produce environmentally-friendly materials that directly contribute to sequestering greenhouse gases. In the advent of mass timber, the building material made from multiple layers of wood that you have described is amazing, it is an innovation, high quality, low cost, efficient, environmentally-friendly building construction. You are now able to build much larger and taller structures with this engineered wood.

In 2023 the Corps announced a new policy of considering at least one option where mass timber is a substantial structural component when comparing structural systems during the early design of vertical construction projects. Can you give an update of the new policy, and if you have seen an increase in the usage of mass timber in construction projects?

Do you have any suggestions on how we can reduce the remaining barriers to the adoption of mass timber in military construction projects?

Mr. MORROW. Thank you, Congressman. So a quick update.

We are at a 100 percent design for a mass timber barracks at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, and so that is an fiscal year 2025 MILCON project. So if we have an appropriations bill to execute that work, you know, we are poised to do that right now.

But you are absolutely right. Over the last few years there is much more code-compliant mass-timber cross-laminated timber capability. So we are encouraging all of our—you know, designers and on our design build construction contractors to bring to the table, you know, any innovative technology that is both code-compliant and meets the mission.

As commodity prices change, as, you know, the economic circumstances on the ground change, you know, that is when industry—we want to give them the most flexibility to bring the best ideas to the table, you know, to safely deliver quality projects on time and on budget.

So we really rely on our industry partners, you know, to be as innovative as possible.

Mr. BISHOP. You mentioned if we get an appropriations bill. With the majority pushing for full-year continuing resolution, I am very concerned that the lack of certainty and direction from Congress may severely hamper our armed services. So I would like to hear from you how this would affect MILCON projects that are currently in projects—in progress or those that are rejected for 2025 completion. Would a full-year CR delay future projects?

So we have two in Georgia for fiscal year 2029. Would those be pushed back?

Mr. MORROW. So if we weren't allowed new starts? My understanding is the current bill under consideration does allow new starts for military construction. But until it is passed, we won't know.

Mr. BISHOP. Okay, one other follow-up. The NDAA for fiscal year 2019 required the Department of Defense to stop purchasing PFAS by October of 2023, and to stop using them completely by October of 2025. What advancements has the Corps of Engineers made in this area as the deadline is quickly approaching? Or what testing is being completed on new materials so we won't find ourselves in the same situation years down the road battling hazardous materials?

Mr. MORROW. Yes, sir. So we have been prohibited from using PFAS or PFAS-containing materials primarily in AFFF or aqueous firefighting foam since 2016. However, our legacy systems, we need to decommission them, upgrade them to new systems, and we have been—you know, we are on a path to do that.

The final set of contracts to execute all of that recommissioning and upgrading those AFFF systems are ready for contract award this year. Current price tag, our estimate, is about \$56 million. It has not yet been funded, but we are ready to execute as soon as funding is made available.

Again, you know, the Corps executes these projects on a reimbursable basis for the installation management command.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you.

Mr. Hamilton, can you tell us what you have been seeing with regard to the use of mass timber with the Navy?

Mr. HAMILTON. Yes, sir, thank you for the question.

We also are doing a pilot project with cross-laminated timbers. Ours is a child development center in the Hampton Roads, Virginia area. That project is in design and will soon transition to construction.

We have found a lot of advantages to the cross-laminated timber. It is lighter than steel or concrete. It has resiliency features. It is actually very—compared to other wood components, very good in fire and even blast resistance. But one of the big advantages we found with it is it can be manufactured in a manufacturing environment which is very precise, cut with digital equipment and brought to the site in very precise component shapes and sizes and installed there, often saving time of in-field construction.

So we see this as an opportunity for future use in a number of different ways and, as you mentioned, now available to be used for higher—taller buildings than we had approved it for in the past.

Mr. BISHOP. Well, thank you very much. I think my time has expired.

Mr. CARTER. Ms. Bice.

Mrs. BICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the witnesses for being here with us this morning.

Let me first start out by saying that I am proud to represent the Oklahoma City metro area, which is home to Tinker Air Force Base. Tinker has made use of some innovative technologies like augmented reality to smartly design military construction projects like the Bomber Agile Common Hangar. Augmented reality has allowed Tinker to identify some unforeseen site conditions well ahead of time, which will reduce the cost and streamline project timelines.

Additionally, Tinker's Bomber Agile Hangar has the potential of reducing costs from not having to rebuild facilities and projects as often, thereby increasing the lifespan of these facilities. So I think that these innovative technologies have some incredible use, and I am glad that—to hear today that we are using some of them.

One of the questions I have—and it is probably more for Mr. Healy and Mr. Richardson—is can you talk a little bit about the challenges that you face with actually getting into, you know, the DoD and utilizing these new innovative technologies? The process for engagement, is it challenging for you all to actually enter the marketplace to be able to sell your product?

Mr. HEALY. We were fortunate that our relationship with the Navy actually began when this technology was still within GE. Obviously, GE has a massive relationship with the military, and then that contract moved over, and then we have subsequently been able to win additional contracts with the Navy going forward.

What we have found, if we are doing it the organic path, the SBIR is the best place to start. But I do agree with your comment of, as a start-up company, it is not necessarily easy to navigate the military.

Mrs. BICE. Mr. Richardson, would you like to add anything there?

Mr. RICHARDSON. Yes. So the study we did for DASD, examining barriers to the inclusion of innovative construction techniques in MILCON, showed that perhaps the establishment of goals and metrics could facilitate the use of more of these materials. For example, like identifying a specific technology and setting what—and establishing what percentage of MILCON projects would include said technology would be a way to overcome that barrier.

Mrs. BICE. Perfect, thank you.

Shifting to Mr. Morrow and Mr. Hamilton, in your experience have you seen regulations with green initiatives on military bases—to include mandating certain environmental standards—drive up the cost of MILCON projects?

Mr. MORROW. So it was referenced earlier, MILCON cost premium study. So when we evaluate the cost of MILCON, we kind of sort them into these are legal reasons why military construction is sometimes more expensive, these are regulatory issues, and these are policy issues. Often times with respect to those environmental issues, it is the first cost versus the life cycle cost, you know, and that analysis. So it certainly can drive first costs up, hopefully drive life cycle costs down. But that—you know, those policy issues definitely are a contributor to that MILCON—

Mrs. BICE. There is no guarantee, though, that those life cycle costs will go down. This is sort of an assumption or a conjecture based on information you have today, correct?

Mr. MORROW. Yes, and any of those policies there is a waiver process, and many of them are changing right now. But yes.

Mrs. BICE. Mr. Hamilton, would you like to—

Mr. HAMILTON. I agree with what Mr. Morrow said. I think that we often, as we look at the use of our facilities, the length and the variety of missions that a given military facility will experience over the life of the facility are very different than what is experienced in private sector. So the life cycle cost becomes really much more important than the initial cost.

Sometimes those investments that are driving costs up—and many of them do have statutory or policy drivers, but many of them do have reasons that pay off over the life cycle of that facility, and so we try to look at those two different components and balance, you know, the needs of the military for a given project.

Mrs. BICE. Would it be more helpful if you had flexibility, though, to make those decisions without the mandates or policy directives that are included?

Mr. HAMILTON. Yes, ma'am. Flexibility is always valuable.

Mrs. BICE. Thank you. Lastly, Mr. Hamilton, in your opening remarks you mentioned some statutory requirements that do need to change to allow more flexibility in the use of OTAs. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

Mr. HAMILTON. Yes, Congresswoman, thanks for the question.

I think this is an area that we are really looking hard at because, as Mr. Morrow said, we rely on industry to bring innovative techniques, constructions, materials to our projects. As you highlight, industry members are often hesitant to do that because there is risk in proposing those new technologies, there is risk in not being selected. We are trying to make our request for proposals have selection criteria that favor innovative solutions that drive down costs and speed delivery.

But there is still a familiarity because usually that partner is coming in not as a general contractor, they are coming in as a sub-contractor or a vendor, and so they have to form that relationship. The general contractor has to be familiar with that technology and feel comfortable in overseeing that in the project that they are responsible for, and that sometimes takes time. So I think things that partner that relationship help facilitate innovation.

The other point that I think is really important that I would make is that our current contracting requirements—some statutory, some regulatory—make it very difficult for us to bring constructors in early to partner with designers to walk through those means and methods and alternatives, and go through the use cases that might drive down costs and speed. So additional flexibilities that allow us to award a construction-type contract partnered with the designer early in the process would be helpful to bring innovation to projects.

Mrs. BICE. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I think it would be great for Mr. Hamilton to maybe give us some additional examples of how that could be utilized and what policy directives we may be able to implement to

help achieve those long-term goals. So with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield.

Mr. CARTER. Ms. Escobar, five minutes.

Ms. ESCOBAR. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, Madam Ranking Member. I am thrilled to be on the Appropriations Committee and on this subcommittee.

To our witnesses, thank you all so much for sharing all of this great information with us.

I get to represent Fort Bliss. It is a premier installation, and the 3D barracks that were printed on Fort Bliss are really exceptional, and I was proud to be on site for different components of the project. I would like to invite any of my fellow committee members who would like to come and see them to join me at Fort Bliss so you can take a look firsthand at the quality of the work.

We are all wanting to find as much efficiency and savings as possible. I have been so alarmed and concerned about the way that it is being done right now by the President and his buddy, Elon Musk, with the mass firings of watchdogs and people with key important experience. I think that costs us money in the long term, it doesn't save us money. But the conversations happening in this committee right now are what could actually save us money if we take the information that we learn here and actually put it into action.

We have data from our district, from Fort Bliss, about the MILCON projects there, and they are one example of where this subcommittee really could find some key savings. Many of the military construction projects—and this is true across the country—end up costing anywhere—in El Paso our data shows from 68 percent more than what is happening locally to 500 times more than what is happening locally when we compare housing built at our local university—same square footage, you know, kind of same parameters—to barracks construction. The cost differential is shocking.

So there are huge opportunities for us to change things up, and you all have given us some good examples. I think among those opportunities we can require comparative market analysis for all facilities improvement plan projects. We could empower a privatized housing partner to build barracks, as an example. We could establish major construction inter-governmental service agreements with local governments as an example. But 3D printing is another critical example.

So Mr. Morrow, I would love to dive in a little bit on this with you. What are—what kind—or actually, you know what? I am going to skip to the second question that I was planning on asking you. But what latitude do you think installation commanders need in order to utilize more 3D printing for things like barracks or for other construction projects?

When I was on site after the ribbon cutting, I asked the folks there—same question. What were the impediments? What were—what are the areas of opportunity where we can expedite this more? What do we need to do in order to make more projects like this successful and possible?

Mr. MORROW. Thank you, Congresswoman. That is a great question.

So our installation commanders and our garrisons are the requirements generators for all of the MILCON projects that eventually come to the Corps of Engineers or to NAVFAC for execution. So it really starts with, you know, what are their requirements on site, and if they can shape those to be conducive for innovative technologies. So a lot of it has to do with, you know, multi-story construction is going to be more problematic. You know, mass timber has its limitations on how large a building. But there is nothing that prevents them from, you know, creating a campus environment or something slightly different.

So again, you know, what we encourage people to do is be, you know, as performance-oriented in developing those requirements as possible, and not as prescriptive. When you do that, then it opens up opportunities for new ideas, innovative technology, et cetera.

I did just recently meet with our construction field team out of the Fort Worth district, a tremendous set of exemplary professionals. So thank you for those kind words.

Ms. ESCOBAR. Thank you.

I am out of time, but I think it would be important at some point to hear from all of you what are the barriers to making sure we move on this opportunity quickly so that we can focus on eliminating those barriers.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. CARTER. Mr. Franklin.

Mr. FRANKLIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, gentlemen, for being here with us this morning, a very fascinating topic to me, and there is also some transfer over with the Corps to the Energy and Water Subcommittee I sit on.

Mr. Hamilton, Ms. Bice stole the question I was going to ask you, because I know in your testimony you talked about statutory changes needed. I would love to follow up with you further on some of those, but I know, Mr. Morrow, it looked like you were chomping at the bit to hop in there, too, from the Corps' perspective. What are some statutory changes we can do to assist you with this process?

Mr. MORROW. So Mr. Hamilton referred to getting construction contractors involved early in the process, and we can do that within Federal acquisition regulations, but sometimes we have to really contort ourselves to make that. So we have ECI contracts and what we refer to as IDAC contracts, integrated design and construction contracts. But it does require a lot of extra contract administration and extra hoops to jump through.

So other transactional authorities, we have a MILCON construction pilot for all the services for OTAs. Again, it goes back to that comment the more flexibility we have, just like when we don't—if we tell a contractor exactly what we want, we are going to get what we ask for. If we tell them the requirements that we need, then we get those new ideas.

The same is true on the acquisition side for NAVFAC and USACE. You know, the more decision space we have and flexibility, the more innovative we can be in bringing those to bear.

So I would say right now we can't really do progressive design-bid-build, which is a common delivery method in industry, within

the constraints that we have, other than through an OTA. So that would be an example.

Mr. FRANKLIN. Okay. I look forward to following up with both of you and working with staff. So if we can—there are specific things we can do to assist in that process, then we need to do it.

Let's see, Mr. Richardson, you talked about DoD needing a road map. Can you talk a little bit more about that? What—how can we assist in that, and what would that look like?

Mr. RICHARDSON. Thank you, Congressman, for that question.

So the road map that we envisioned would look like the National Defense Science and Technology Strategy. So that strategy identifies critical technologies for national defense. So—and commercial, actually, leads—commercial industry leads the way in the development of those technologies. Those technologies are shared. That is—the strategy is—you can look it up on the internet. Because those are shared and available, we see academia, we see the Department of Defense, and we see industry innovating in that space.

So something similar to that but for MILCON, which would include the identification of technologies that would be critical to improving MILCON performance, would be what I recommend.

Mr. FRANKLIN. Okay, great. We look forward to working with you on something like that, as well.

Mr. Healy, thank you for your presentation. I was not familiar with what you are doing, and I would love to learn more. I would love to get a deeper dive on it. It sounds like you have figured out the better and the faster at scale. Will this be cheaper? It seems like it would be, just with all the problems it solves.

Mr. HEALY. So we expect that upfront costs will be more than a conventional diesel generator. But then it really comes down to what is your ROI, what is your payback? There are three key—two key advantages that we are offering.

So one is that improved efficiency, which means you are just going to use less fuel, which is—the majority of cost of operating a generator is the fuel that goes into it.

Then the second is the lower maintenance. So we are finding that—it depends on the industry. Actually, in military applications, where fuel is very expensive in some instances, it is going to mean you are going to have a faster payback. But in normal industries we are seeing it is in a few years that you actually break over and it is a positive return on your investment.

Mr. FRANKLIN. Do you feel that government contracting is set up to allow for the long-range horizon view, or is it just an up cost—whoever is cheapest to produce gets it?

I mean, do you feel that we factor ROI into—as we evaluate different options?

Mr. HEALY. I am probably not the best to comment on it at this stage, just because of where we are, where—we just have moved into the commercialization phase of things. Up to now it has been more of the development phase working with the Navy.

But one thing to share is additive manufacturing, 3D printing, it is new, right? If the military is going to demand volume of these type of solutions, that means the suppliers need to go out and procure 3D printers, set those up, and that process can take over a year to do. So any vision or any kind of visibility into the horizon

of demand and volumes is extremely helpful because this isn't just hire contractors to go build it. This is go buy new machines, new equipment that will be better at manufacturing.

Mr. FRANKLIN. Okay. Karno likes cold, so how about the moon or Mars?

Mr. HEALY. Yes. So outer space is something that is on theoretical. We think it can be done, but time will tell. We got to get things deployed here in the U.S. first.

Mr. FRANKLIN. Roger, thanks.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. CARTER. Mr. Levin.

Mr. LEVIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am truly honored and excited to be on this subcommittee, and I have the great honor and responsibility to represent Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton in beautiful southern California.

Just a couple of weeks ago I toured some of our barracks, and they need help. So I am very excited to be on this subcommittee, in part to see what we can do about the barracks there on base. We have got about 125 of them, and about half either need to be completely torn down or thoroughly rehabilitated.

The Marines that run the base, they talk about the barracks as operational necessity. No longer do they use the term "quality of life." It is operational necessity. It is about readiness. A lot of these junior enlisted Marines and sailors are living in sub-par conditions. You have got, you know, HVAC systems that don't work. You have got mold. You know, I toured one building where Marines had been living as recently as just a few months before, and it is just unacceptable that we would continue to have barracks in that shape. Towards that end, I am very interested in getting this fixed, and if 3D printing provides a way to do it maybe faster and cheaper, that is of interest to me.

But I wanted to ask—and maybe, Mr. Richardson, I will start with you, because you had some of this in your testimony—at Camp Pendleton we have got multi-level barracks, you know, bigger buildings. I was talking to my colleague and friend, Ms. Escobar, about the Fort Bliss barracks. Has there been any testing of larger barracks, larger facilities?

Can you tell me anything about higher initial costs, size constraints?

Obviously, in California we have these things called earthquakes that we are always concerned about, and then maybe whatever additional regulatory approval would be needed to do something like that.

Mr. RICHARDSON. Thank you for the question, Congressman.

We did not, as part of the study I mentioned, examine any specific technologies. But what I can tell you—and I know Mr. Hamilton or Mr. Morrow can comment on—

Mr. LEVIN. Yes.

Mr. RICHARDSON. If you are talking about building multi-story facilities, you are going to be limited into what innovative techniques or materials that you can use. For example, I believe that concrete printing is limited to one story.

Mr. LEVIN. One story.

Mr. RICHARDSON. One story now. However, a laminated timber is not.

Mr. LEVIN. Anybody else want to comment on this? Thank you.

Mr. MORROW. I would just say that the current requirement is single story seismic zones A and B, so potentially problematic. But more testing could result in increased seismic zone areas or multi-story building. For the Corps of Engineers, that testing is done out of our construction lab in Champaign, Illinois, and I—those people are amazing, and I would invite anyone on the subcommittee who would like a tour or to visit the facility, they would love to have you.

Mr. LEVIN. Can you reinforce the 3D-printed concrete with steel, as you would in a normal building?

Mr. MORROW. It is reinforced with steel.

Mr. LEVIN. What are the—so the constraints on multi-story are what?

Mr. MORROW. They are lack of testing.

Mr. LEVIN. Lack of testing. But that is going on right now in Champaign?

Mr. MORROW. That is the source where the Corps of Engineers does all its construction testing. However, you know, unless we have funding and a requirement—you know, so they are working with industry—

Mr. LEVIN. Yes.

Mr. MORROW [continuing]. Every day, but we have to have a requirement to work against—

Mr. LEVIN. Go ahead. No, you are eager to get in.

Mr. HAMILTON. I was just going to say, sir, that I think today the gantry crane printers are generally limited to one story, but there is a new printer technology that is—that has been developed and is in testing right now that is more of a single arm that can print up to 27 feet tall. That will allow us to get up to a second story, would allow you to print roofs. They are testing that technology today. I think, as that gets tested and we have analysis of the seismic resiliency of it, that is a new—that will open up new doors to much bigger use.

Mr. LEVIN. The folks there on base tell me that if they were to redo the—roughly half of the buildings, we are talking about well over \$1 billion. The Barracks 2030 Initiative says everything has to be redone by 2043. Any thought on the initial start-up cost for the 3D printing alternative, and then also when you think it might be commercially available?

Mr. HAMILTON. If I could, sir, I think—I am very familiar with Camp Pendleton. I rebuilt a lot of the barracks there, sort of the last generation—

Mr. LEVIN. So you get it.

Mr. HAMILTON [continuing]. Built the hospital there. So I appreciate your comments about it.

Mr. LEVIN. You did a great job with that.

Mr. HAMILTON. I think, in addition to 3D printing, industrialized construction is very well suited to the Marine Corps barracks program. It is an opportunity to have standard designs, to build modules that you can have fabricated in a manufacturing environment where you have the workforce, you have all the industrialized com-

puterized machinery, and you send those modules out to be installed on the site. A general contractor puts in the site work, the slabs, and really assembles the modules.

I think when you look at the long-duration barracks program that the Marine Corps is talking about, really recapitalizing their entire barracks infrastructure——

Mr. LEVIN. Yes.

Mr. HAMILTON [continuing]. That is ideally suited for that kind of event.

There are things we need to do to help that industrialized manufacturing or construction capability in the United States take off and take hold.

Mr. LEVIN. So we are out of time. I don't want to run long on my very first hearing, but I look forward to further conversation with you. We will take that back.

I will yield back.

Mr. CARTER. Mr. LaLota.

Mr. LALOTA. Thank you, Chairman. I have to admit I come to this first hearing with a little bit of bias on this Military Construction and VA subcommittee. My bias is informed by my years I spent in the Navy. I deployed to the western Pacific in 2001, 2003, and 2005, and just a few months ago I was able to visit some of the bases 20 years later that I was deployed to, and was left with a little less energy seeing some of the infrastructure there had been left abandoned, dilapidated, and is in dire need of our support here. I appreciate the witnesses and your expertise and your experience in helping to inform us here on this subcommittee panel on how we in Congress and our services can do a better job raising our standards. Some of the facilities I visited have those dilapidated structures, specifically in Japan, a number of them, and those dilapidated structures detract from their operational value, and they are outright dangerous and unusable.

Rightfully so, the Indo-Pacific Command is a large focus of our Department of Defense. They are anticipating and deterring threats from the CCP, Russia, and North Korea. Mr. Hamilton, given your expertise as one of the Navy's top engineers, how can our military, with Congress's support and the Navy specifically, be more agile in terms of acquisition and adoption of novel construction technologies, especially in that very important Indo-Pacific Command?

Mr. HAMILTON. Congressman, thanks very much for the question.

I also was stationed in Korea and in Guam, and deployed into the Pacific theater, and so I am very familiar with the challenges that they face there.

I do think that we need to have a long-term capital plan to modernize those facilities. As you said, many of them are far beyond their useful life, and we need to be providing facilities that can replace those and take the modern weapon systems, the modern missions that are expected to be deployed in those areas.

I think, contractually, I do believe that the industrialized construction technique that I talked about earlier is one that is very applicable to overseas, especially in the Indo-Pacific theater, where we could fabricate many of the components or modules in the states and have them shipped for installation. I think it gives us

the ability to be very agile so that those can be configured in different ways to meet different missions, and we can be very responsive to the military commanders' needs and where the priorities are as they change over time.

Mr. LALOTA. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Richardson, I—we were chatting before. You graduated three years after the best Naval Academy class that has ever been. I appreciate that and your service in the Navy Civil Engineer Corps. Can you add some perspectives to how the Navy, the military—specifically with Congress's support—can help improve more—get more projects done on time, within the right quality, and the right cost?

Mr. RICHARDSON. Thank you for that question and comment, Mr. Congressman.

So yes, there are certainly innovative technologies that could improve performance. I wish I was able to explore more of these technologies in our study. But going back to some of my earlier comments, establishing or identifying some of those technologies that could assist in perhaps better construction performance would be of value.

Mr. LALOTA. Thanks.

Mr. Morrow, I only have about a minute left, but with my remaining time a similar question: Where can Congress help our services knock down some of the bureaucratic red tape, or otherwise expedite the military construction as it relates to delivering projects that are at the right cost, at the right time, and the right quality, sir?

Mr. MORROW. Thank you for that question.

So what we are doing right now is trying to identify what—why MILCON costs more than private sector, and really produce as factual a document as possible: Here are the laws that impact our costs, here are the regulations that impact our costs, and here are the policies that impact our costs so that those policies can be changed if the new administration chooses, those regulations can be addressed through rulemaking, or those laws can be changed.

So I think my personal position is I am agnostic on those things. You know, we are here to serve and to support the administration and the Congress. But what—we want to present you the facts so that you know why that MILCON premium exists.

Mr. LALOTA. Thanks so much, sir. I appreciate, gentlemen, your expertise and your participation in today's hearing.

Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. CARTER. Mr. Guest.

Mr. GUEST. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and gentlemen, thank you for being here today.

Mr. Morrow, you mentioned—in your written testimony you talk about the important role that ERDC plays. I am from Mississippi, and so I have been—or I had the opportunity to visit the facility there in Vicksburg to see the great work that they do. My question to you is, as a body, how can Congress, how can this committee specifically—what can we do to support ERDC's mission and to make sure that you have the resources that you need to, as you say in your statement, to see that we continue to discover, develop, and

deliver trusted engineering and scientific solutions to the warfighter and the nation?

Mr. MORROW. Thank you for that.

So ERDC is an amazing organization across the globe, but they serve many, many stakeholders and customers and, like the rest of the Corps of Engineers, primarily operate on a reimbursable basis. So essentially, everything that the Corps does is based in law. So if there is a requirement and somebody goes to ERDC to execute that requirement, they get super excited to do that.

So working with industry, some of the pilots, you know, whether it is mass timber or additive construction, you know, they all, you know, come to ERDC through some legislative authority and appropriation. There is no better place, in my opinion, for that work to be done. But we—they do need that specific authority and appropriation for any of their work.

Mr. GUEST. Thank you.

Mr. Hamilton, I want to ask you one or two things real quickly. You stated in your opening statement—you kind of echoed some of the remarks of Mr. Morrow. You say that the primary role is to support our warfighters at home and abroad, to make U.S. warfighters more lethal, adaptable, and resilient.

First, thank you for—both of you—for refocusing that mission, to making sure that we are putting the emphasis on the warfighter, and that we are providing them what they need to place—when we place them in harm's way, that they have what they need to be able to perform that mission and to come home to their family safely.

Then you talk about different initiatives, some that are current, some that are evolving, pre-fabrication being one, additive construction, modular construction, all things in which we currently are either operating or intend to operate in the near future.

One of the facilities that served in my facility is Meridian Naval Air Station. They are home of the Training Air Wing ONE. Many of our naval aviators began their initial training up there in Meridian before going on for more specialized training. One of the projects there that we are working toward is one of the hangars there. Hangar two needs a new roof facility because of age, because of sometimes some of the inclement weather that comes through, particularly in the spring and fall, known as tornadoes and wind gusts.

We used to think that Hurricane Alley was there in the west. I believe now it has shifted to coming through the southeast, and so we often see those types of weather conditions really exacerbate the condition of some of the buildings there.

As we look at these innovations, we know some of these innovations are probably better used for new construction, and others for things such as renovations to hangar two or renovations to other buildings. Kind of talk me through how this—these innovations can be used both—again for the new construction, but also as we are looking at repairing and renovating existing buildings on military facilities.

Mr. HAMILTON. Thank you, Congressman Guest.

I think we have a real challenge across all the military services, but certainly from my place in the Navy and the Marine Corps,

with aging infrastructure, obsolete infrastructure, more repairs than we can afford to make in the timeframe they need to be made, and so there is always a challenge for us prioritizing.

I would say, as we have faced some very costly things like the Mawar, you know, Typhoon in Guam, where we have had to make some emergency repairs to the glass breakwater and other things that draw away from planned renovations and modernizations like the hangar roof that you spoke to, I do think there are opportunities as we go forward to build more resilient facilities and more facilities that will last longer because our facilities—we may build them for 50 years, we tend to use them for 80 or 100 years, and so we have to take that into account. I think that gets back to the life cycle cost analysis that when we invest in certainly something like a roof, we want a roof that is going to last a long time because it is probably going to be in place for a very long time.

But I think that we have to work through that in the, you know, both the repair of existing facilities and new construction. They are related, but they are different. I do believe we have more opportunity to apply some of these new technologies in new facilities, because it is very difficult sometimes to incorporate or blend these technologies with some of the existing facilities. But we do have polymers and fibers that we are developing that allow us to reinforce and strengthen existing materials like roof trusses or other materials that you might find in existing facilities that allow us to extend the life of them, and that is another area where I think we have benefits to do things faster and cheaper with some of the technologies that are being developed.

Mr. GUEST. Thank you very much.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. CARTER. Thank you, Mr. Guest, and I want to thank the panel for being here today.

I have a real interest in this. I apologize for my voice. It will get better tomorrow, I hope.

We look forward to working with you. I want to come visit your lab. Smart things, new things that work good and are mobile are fantastic, and we got to make it work.

The islands are going to be a challenge for the Navy and the Army and some others. Guam is a typical example. Labor issues, cost overruns, all of these things are going on in Guam. We got to get that straight. So I am hoping to take this panel over to—for a visit to the islands again, and keep that on our forefront because it is real issues.

Thank you all for being here. I appreciate every one of you.

I got one question for you. If we were using your generators when the power went out in Texas, would they have worked?

Mr. HEALY. They would have worked, yes. We wouldn't have had the freezing buildings and facilities that we had, and the health issues that we had, as well.

Mr. CARTER. Okay, good. Thank you. Thanks to the panel.

We are adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:09 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE MILITARY

TUESDAY, APRIL 8, 2025.

WITNESSES

SERGEANT MAJOR MICHAEL R. WEIMER—DEPARTMENT OF ARMY
MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER JAMES M. HONEA—DEPARTMENT OF
NAVY
SERGEANT MAJOR CARLOS A. RUIZ—MARINE CORPS
CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT DAVID A. FLOSI—AIR FORCE
CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT JOHN F. BENTIVENGA—SPACE FORCE

Mr. CARTER. Welcome everybody. We are glad to have you and we are going to have a good morning today.

Today's hearing is on the quality of life for our enlisted soldiers, sailors, Marines, Airmen, and Guardians, and their families. The five witnesses at the table represent the highest enlisted level of leadership for their respective branches.

I am pleased we are having this hearing again as we begin the 2026 cycle because I always like to see you guys first. This group of gentlemen have an insight that is critical. This hearing is of great importance to the identity of areas we can be more helpful for our service members and their families.

We remain committed to providing quality, high quality barracks and family housing but military quality of life is much broader. It includes where service members work, training, and eat. It includes where their children go to school, where their families receive health care.

So this is an opportunity to discuss the important connections between facilities readiness and quality of life. Investing in an infrastructure bolsters the military's ability to train and fight while also ensuring our service members and their families are taken care of at home is just as important. We owe that to them.

Now, before I recognize Ms. Wasserman Schultz, I'm going to tell you that 10 days ago or so I received a message from her. She said, my team is playing your team.

My team was Texas Tech and I have been badmouthing you for a couple of days and you are welcome to badmouth me and my team.

Being a gentleman, as all Texans are, I ignored that. Didn't say one bad word about Ms. Wasserman Schultz or her team. But I am glad that my team got beat by the national champions. That is good bragging rights. We take all the bragging rights we can get in Texas.

So congratulations. You have much to be proud of, and she is obviously a fan.

I now yield to Ms. Wasserman Schultz for opening remarks.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. What I can say is that if you look gentleman up in the dictionary your

photo is representative of all the meaning of that word. My alma mater and our fans have a reputation, rightfully so, for being extremely devoted and enthusiastic about our school and our school's success. I am a very proud Gator. Three generations, seven immediate family members that are Florida Gators.

Before I begin my opening remarks, I will just tout that we are now the only Division 1 school that has three football national championships, men's football national championships, and three men's basketball national championships. The only one quite proud. Go Gators.

There are lots of SEC schools represented here on this subcommittee. So most of us root for an SEC school when our own teams are not in it and it was fun one sidedly sparring with you and thank you for yielding, Judge Carter.

Thank you once again for holding this essential hearing and thank you for, you know, the years of cooperation and mutual respect in which we engage and I know that that will continue going forward.

We all know the importance of the quality of life, recruitment, and retention to the military services that are this Committee's responsibility. Our Committee, on a bipartisan basis, has always advocated for and defended our service members' quality of life during their active duty and I trust that that will continue.

But this Administration's continued callous disregard for service members, veterans, and their families threatens to overturn any progress that the services have made in their efforts. The Administration has fired at least 6,000 veterans across the government, including at the VA, which provides essential promise benefits to our veterans.

They are also targeting deep cuts to programs across the federal government that veterans and service members rely upon, including SNAP, WIC, and financial aid, while deploying an economic strategy that has started a trade war and sent global stocks tumbling.

At the Department of Defense the plan to fire 5,400 probationary employees and the civilian hiring freeze has sent the agency into chaos while unfairly making the lives of our service members more difficult.

The chaotic rollout of this hiring freeze has also left current civilian employees in limbo and essential jobs unfulfilled, often falling to our service members to take on double duty. We have heard reports that barracks managers and sexual assault prevention teams are among those included in this freeze, which will directly harm quality of life and increase the workload of active-duty service members.

Unfortunately, a similar pattern of a chaotic rollout of DoD's remote and telework policy has hampered opportunities for military spouses to telework. This telework made it easier for service members and their families to adjust to frequent moves.

This chaos does not make it easier for people to serve their country, and we certainly should not be actively denigrating those who do choose to serve, such as is the case with Secretary Hegseth's ban on transgender individuals openly serving in the military.

This order is not only cruel and pointless, it is counterproductive to the DoD's own goals of increasing recruitment and retention by needlessly reducing the recruiting pool for reasons which have nothing to do with an individual's qualifications or whether their skills are needed by the services.

Another example of this Administration's misplaced priorities is its push to erase history when DoD should focus its energy on real issues like holding privatized housing companies accountable for lead paint in family housing or addressing the deficit of housing for unaccompanied service members. Not on purging websites honoring the Air Force's first female fighter pilot who is a constituent, by the way, or World War II Women's Air Force Service pilots.

The Administration's history purge also apparently extends to the Tuskegee Airmen, as the Air Force removed training videos, including them, until public outcry forced the department to reverse course.

How do these actions show service members that we value their service and the sacrifices their families make? What effect do you think these actions will have on the efforts of military recruiters across the nation?

We should honor the service of those in uniform and fight for the quality of life of all of our service members. To truly improve the quality of life of those service members, we must address the continued deficiencies in barracks and privatized family housing. We must address sexual assault in the military, we must address shortages in childcare, and we must invest in the mental health of our troops.

These actions are essential so that service members can focus on their important jobs instead of worrying about who will watch their children, whether they will get sick from the mold in their homes or whether they are safe in their workplace.

This Subcommittee has recognized the value of these investments on a bipartisan basis, and I look forward to working together with my colleagues again for Fiscal Year 2026 to address these issues.

I was incredibly disappointed by the way the Fiscal Year 2025 process ended and the missed opportunity for this Committee to make the necessary investments to build on our progress in recent years addressing quality of life projects.

Nevertheless, we will be closely monitoring the spend plans DoD submits for the full year Continuing Resolution funding and I want to make it clear to everyone here today, my expectation is that the services prioritize those funds in a way that delivers on the promises made in the FY25 budget requests and in consideration of the bipartisan advocacy from members of the Subcommittee to invest in quality of life.

The spend plans must reflect the need for an importance of child development centers, barracks, schools, and other quality of life projects. The Army's FY25 budget request contained robust funding for barracks construction to tackle the service's housing deficiencies.

The Marine Corps has a comprehensive plan called Barracks 2030 for barracks investments. We cannot backtrack and sideline

these types of projects. Even great plans to improve quality of life will fail if they are not accompanied by appropriate funding.

Moreover, I hope the FY26 budget request, when we get it, contains a robust request for quality-of-life projects. I hope to hear from all of our witnesses today on how you and your service have worked since the hearing last year to address the inadequacies and oversight of privatized military housing providers, improve the maintenance of unaccompanied housing, and address the root causes of sexual assault within the military.

I want to thank the five witnesses for being in being here today, for your service, and for your valuable testimony.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. CARTER. Okay, now we will turn to our witnesses.

Without objection, your entire written testimony will be included in the record.

I will now recognize each of you for the opening statement and we will then proceed with questions.

We start with Sergeant Major of the Army Michael Weimer. Sergeant Major.

STATEMENT OF SERGEANT MAJOR WEIMER

Sergeant Major WEIMER. Chairman Carter, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, distinguished members of this panel, thank you for the invitation to speak on behalf of the soldier's, their families, and the Army civilians who make up the all-volunteer force.

I want to start off with the fact that I'm proud of everything that our soldiers have accomplished. They are fully focused and prepared to respond to their nation's call. Our soldiers remain engaged worldwide. More than 109,000 soldiers are deployed across the globe in support of either the nation, our allies, or our partners.

Standing ready we have 74,000 soldiers serving as part of the immediate or crisis response forces and critical to the success of those soldiers is their families. Their dedication, sacrifice and endurance through the stress of their soldiers being away from home or prepared to deploy at a moment's notice is unwavering.

The recent loss of our four teammates from 3rd Infantry Division in Lithuania has only affirmed this commitment.

Our purpose, direction and motivation remain aligned with our four focus areas. The first focus area, war fighting. The second focus area, delivering ready combat formations. The third, continuous transformation. And the fourth, strengthen the profession.

My role is to ensure we're ready to fight tonight if deterrence fails. As the tip of the spear in Europe and as the backbone of the joint force in the Indo-Pacific. The Army responds in times of crisis and is ready to fight and win when the nation calls.

This starts with training management. We are reinforcing the importance of leader's obligation to provide stable and predictable training management to give soldiers and their families time to plan against life's events that due to the nature of our mission to defend our nation and its interests often take us away from home for stretches of time.

At home station soldiers and families expect and deserve quality living conditions. We are dedicated to improving and sustaining

quality living conditions for accompanied and unaccompanied personnel housing.

Equally important are CDC's. We've streamlined the hiring process to combat staffing challenges and increase capacity as well as provide fee assistance to offset costs for installations and community-based childcare.

Spouses are vital to Army readiness. Enhancing spouse employment supports military families and retention. Launching the Department of the Army Volunteer Reassignment Program and providing employment readiness programs aids spouses during PCS moves reducing unemployment gaps and providing job predictability.

In support of our exceptional family members we are continuing to improve how our Enterprise EFMP interacts with our personnel system and improves communication to ensure appropriate medical and education services are available to all exceptional family members around the world.

Army installations require the right capabilities and capacity to support our formations. We're making tough decisions with our budget to ensure we transform at the speed of need but scale is our challenge.

It requires that our installations transform alongside the formations that call them home. New technology, new kit, and new equipment all matter, but if infrastructure doesn't support transformation efforts, it will negatively affect readiness.

Soldiers, families, and the larger Defense community's quality of life depends on and is impacted by quality, suitability and the conditions of their living and workplaces.

So far this year, we're on glide path to meet our recruiting and retention goals. Future Soldier Prep Course continues to successfully meet Americans where they're at and help them answer their calling to serve.

With work still to be done, we will not let off the gas in the pursuit of reducing harmful behaviors. We're committed to strengthening the profession and expanding our efforts across the entire force. We're focused on increasing lethality and we will be ready when the nation calls.

Maintaining this focus is paramount to our success. It requires that we continue to improve quality of life for our soldiers and families. Continuous Resolutions and flat budgets do not support stability or predictability that our soldiers and families deserve and it exacerbates quality of life issues.

Thank you for the work you have done to support your Army. It has been my honor to serve this past 30 years and the impacts of your support could not be more clear. I appreciate the opportunity and I look forward to your questions.

[The information follows:]

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**RECORD VERSION STATEMENT BY
SMA MICHAEL R. WEIMER SERGEANT MAJOR OF THE ARMY**

**BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, VETERANS' AFFAIRS AND
RELATED AGENCIES COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

FIRST SESSION, 119TH CONGRESS

OVERSIGHT HEARING - QUALITY OF LIFE IN IN THE MILITARY

APRIL 8, 2025

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY THE COMMITTEE ON
APPROPRIATIONS**

Introduction

Chairman Carter, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, distinguished members of this panel, thank you for the invitation to speak on behalf of the Soldiers, their Families, and the Army Civilians who make up our all-volunteer force.

The reason we exist is to fight and win when called upon. We have Warfighters continuously deployed around the world, in every capacity. There are thousands of Soldiers working, training, and living alongside our Allies and Partners, increasing interoperability, growing capabilities, and exchanging knowledge to ensure that alongside our Sister Services, Allies, and Partners, we are ready to fight and win at every point in the future. More than 109,000 Soldiers are deployed across the globe, and we have 74,000 Soldiers serving as part of the Immediate or Crisis Response Forces. Critical to the success of our Soldiers are their Families.

Their dedication, sacrifice, and endurance through the stress of their Soldier being away from home or prepared to deploy at a moment's notice is unwavering. It does not go unnoticed. Thank you for all the work you have done to support your Army. It has been my honor to serve over the past 31 years but there is much more that needs to be done and we need Congress's help.

Our purpose, direction, and motivation remain aligned with the four focus areas: 1) maintain warfighting readiness through tough realistic training that bolsters deterrence and ensures that any potential aggressor is never left unchecked; 2) operationalize installations to deliver combat-ready formations; 3) empower our Soldiers, Noncommissioned Officers, and Leaders at echelon to drive continuous transformation and increase lethality at an unprecedented pace; and 4) strengthening the profession through enforcement of standards so we provide disciplined forces.

Warfighting

I am proud of everything our Soldiers have accomplished. They are focused on warfighting readiness, prepared to respond to their Nation's need in times of crisis to fight and win while defending enduring National interests. Our Soldiers remain engaged worldwide. We are a Total Army and are orienting the focus of the Force – Active, Guard, and Reserve – on being trained, fit, disciplined, expert, cohesive and a lethal team of teams.

Alongside the Secretary of the Army and the Chief of Staff of the Army, we are creating a culture focused on tough realistic training and adopting a warfighting mindset – where our focus is keeping the word near in front of the term peer when it comes to our adversaries. Our leaders are the foundation of that readiness, cultivating an environment where Soldiers are weaponizing their passion for the profession of warfighting.

Predictable Training

Preparation starts at home station right now. We have no time to be stagnant as there is no second place in conflict. We are the most lethal Army in the world. We will remain ready to fight tonight. Leaders at echelon carry the weight of this responsibility. They lead the outstanding men

and women who raise their hands in service of their country. They are responsible for training Soldiers to be ready when the nation calls. Alongside other Army Senior Leaders, when visiting Soldiers, from Poland to Korea, I reinforce the fact that Soldiers need stable and predictable training. It increases quality of life and enables Soldiers and Families to achieve their goals while simultaneously ensuring the Army maintains its warfighting readiness.

Holistic Health and Fitness

Increasing human performance is a priority to retain a ready force as operational demands grow more complex. Holistic Health and Fitness (H2F) has been foundational in optimizing improved total fitness, reducing injury rates, and improving rehabilitation after injury, contributing to an increased overall effectiveness of Soldier Athletes around the world.

H2F is about more than just physical fitness. There are five pillars: physical readiness, nutritional readiness, spiritual readiness, sleep readiness, and mental readiness. H2F supports physiological and psychological needs by integrating strength coaches, athletic trainers, therapists, dietitians, religious affairs specialists, and coordinators within units. This ensures expert guidance for injury recovery, proper training for new Soldiers, and science-backed methods to improve combat performance and long-term health. H2F currently supports 55% of the force. Ensuring implementation across the total Army, the next phase launches a two-year pilot at four Army National Guard and two Army Reserve locations while adding 91 H2F teams to the Active Component. Investing in Soldier health and wellness will improve the readiness and lethality of the Army.

The H2F System provides a unified and holistic strategy the force deserves. It has shifted Army culture. A holistic approach to health and fitness builds ready warfighters and resilient Families. It ensures sustainment of an agile and adaptive Army, ready to provide the Nation with a professional, lethal, and decisive force that will win against any adversary.

Deliver Ready Combat Formations

Our Army installations project power to fight and win the nations wars abroad and are pivotal to defense of our country. Effective base operations are integral to these efforts. Additionally, base protection measures are critical to ensuring the safety and security of Soldiers and Families that work, live, and play on our installations.

Housing

Barracks and privatized housing continue to be a priority for the Army. Soldiers' living conditions significantly influence their quality of life, performance, and capacity to concentrate on their mission. The Army aims to provide each type of barracks with comprehensive sustainment funding to support Soldier well-being. In FY24, investments were directed towards new construction and upgrades, resulting in the creation of 1,910 new bed spaces and

enhancements to nearly 7,500 existing accommodations, reinforcing our commitment to providing quality living environments and enabling combat readiness.

Investment in privatized housing plays a crucial role in family life, and directly impacts warfighters' ability to focus on their mission. Between 2020 & 2024, privatized housing providers dedicated over \$1.3 billion to construct 439 new residences and enhance over 14,000 existing ones. In FY24, the Army requested and was appropriated \$50 million each to Fort Eisenhower, GA, and Fort Leonard Wood, MO, to facilitate construction of 76 new homes and 22 significant renovations at Fort Eisenhower. Plans are underway at Fort Leonard Wood to replace 60 outdated homes. Furthermore, a new privatization project which began in 2024 will introduce 75 new homes at U.S. Army Garrison-Miami by Summer 2027, while 26 residences at Tobyhanna Army Depot are set for demolition and reconstruction, highlighting the critical link between housing quality, family well-being, and overall military readiness.

Childcare

The Army acknowledges and values Congress' initiatives aimed at enhancing childcare accessibility for Soldiers and their Families. Reliable and high-quality childcare services are essential to enabling Soldiers to focus on their duties and missions with peace of mind. However, childcare staffing remains a challenge. To combat staffing challenges, the Army uses Direct Hiring Authority to expedite hiring actions and exercise a provisional hiring method with direct oversight of provisional hires. In FY24, we received more than 25,000 applications to be a Direct Childcare employee at CDCs across Army installations. Of those, over 4,000 have been hired with average onboarding times less than 40 days. Minimizing delays by expediting the process, thoroughly and with appropriate adjudication, directly support warfighting readiness. Additionally, provisional hires working under direct supervision receive a 50% or 100% reduced child care fee for the first child and 15% discount for additional children.

To address gaps in care, the Army offers fee assistance to help offset the cost of community-based care. For School Year 24-25, the provider rate cap is \$1,800. Currently, there is no waitlist for child care Fee Assistance program and Army Families can explore options and request child care anytime at militarychildcare.com.

In addition, the Army has established three first of its kind Intergovernmental Service Agreements (IGSAs) in locations based on identified need to expand access to care during non-traditional work hours for Active, Guard, and Reserve service members.

Spouse Employment

Spouses have always and will continue to hold a crucial role in the Army's readiness. Enhancing spouse employment opportunities is critical to fostering military readiness and retention as it supports service members' families, strengthens community ties, and empowers military spouses to build fulfilling careers amidst the unique challenges of military life. In January 2025, we launched the Department of the Army Voluntary Reassignment Program (DAVRAP) expecting it

will impact upwards of 800 Army spouses. It is designed to provide direct support to Army spouses during permanent change of station (PCS) moves by reducing unemployment gaps and providing predictability when moving from one installation to another. Additionally, the program enables Army spouses who are Department of the Army Civilians to explore vacancies at future duty locations.

The Army provides Employment Readiness Programs (ERPs) at the installation level, providing face-to-face employment support and connections to local and state employment opportunities. In FY24, ERP staff assisted over 6,900 Family members with spouse education and career opportunities. Since its inception in 2018, the Army's Civilian Employee Assignment Tool (CEAT) has processed transfers for 649 spouses who are non-appropriated fund employees.

Exceptional Family Member Program

As of December 17, 2024, approximately 49,000 Active Soldiers, or roughly 11% of the Active, have 55,000 Exceptional Family members (EFMs) enrolled. We are continuing to listen to families when developing EFMP improvements including centralized oversight, legal assistance, and in the Enterprise-EFMP system to make enrollment, assignment coordination, and family support more effective.

Since its inception in 2022, we're continuously improving how the E-EFMP system interacts with our personnel systems. The Army established a central Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA) EFMP office, which drives process improvement, enhanced coordination, provides training and education, and improves communication to ensure appropriate medical and education services are available at home station to all EFMs assigned around the world.

Nutrition

Ensuring optimal nutrition to sustain warfighters in both garrison and field settings remains a top priority. Enhancing Soldier welfare and readiness involves providing consistent access to high-quality nutritious food choices that improve performance. In FY24, initiatives such as food kiosks, food trucks, and meal prep programs have been introduced to offer Soldiers convenient and healthy dining alternatives. The significant uptake of over one million meals from kiosks in FY24 underscores the demand for accessible and high-quality food solutions. Presently, installations host 26 food trucks and 23 kiosks, with plans to open five additional kiosks by September 2025. Installation commanders are also leveraging resources like their Morale, Welfare, and Recreation offices to offer Soldiers and Families education on healthy eating options, managing weekly meal plans, and cooking classes.

The Army is introducing a key effort to modernize dining for our warfighters with Campus-Style Dining Venues (CSDVs) pilots at Fort Bragg, North Carolina; Fort Stewart, Georgia; Fort Cavazos, Texas; Fort Drum, New York; and Fort Carson, Colorado. This innovative approach shifts away from traditional dining setups towards contemporary food service concepts like

university campuses. We must ensure that Soldiers have the right fuel to excel in their missions, increase their performance, and, when needed, accelerates their recovery.

The Army is utilizing a balanced scorecard framework to measure the success of the Campus Style Dining Venue (CSDV) pilot across four categories of Satisfaction, Utilization, Health, and Financials. The balanced scorecard key performance indicators (KPIs) will be informed by existing authoritative Army data sources and additional data sources collected throughout the pilot (e.g. survey/interview data).

Installations

Quality of life is more than just barracks, housing, CDCs, and DFACs. They are each a pillar of quality of life for Soldiers and Families, but where Soldiers work – ranges, ammunition supply points, motor pools, company operations facilities (COFs), and maintenance facilities – must be part of the conversation. A Soldier performing maintenance on an M1 Abrams tank on a concrete pad in the middle of a motor pool in July at Fort Cavazos, Texas, because the tank won't fit in the maintenance bay is a safety issue, impacts quality of life, and affects warfighting readiness.

Army installations require the right capabilities, and capacity, to support our formations. We are making tough decisions with our budget to ensure that we transform at the speed of need, but scale is our challenge. It requires our installations to transform alongside the formations that call them home. New technology, new kit, and new equipment all matter, but if the infrastructure doesn't support our transformation efforts, it will negatively affect our readiness.

Continuous Transformation

Our Soldiers and Noncommissioned Officers are forging an imprinted feedback loop that is driving the Army's continuous transformation efforts. We are taking lessons observed from ongoing conflicts around the globe and turning them into lessons learned through implementation at combat training center (CTC) rotations. Each rotational unit operates under near constant sensing and targeting, is learning to use commercial technology, is dispersing over large areas, and is masking communications with false networks to appear unimportant rather than invisible in the electromagnetic spectrum – hiding in the noise.

Transformation in Contact

Each of our three Transform in Contact (TiC) brigades have entered the crucible of a CTC rotation – the most recent being 3rd Brigade, 10th Mountain Division at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany. Our other two TiC brigades, 2nd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, and 2nd Brigade, 25th Infantry Division also went through CTC rotations at the Joint Readiness Training Center, Louisiana, and out in the Indo-Pacific Theater during Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center rotations in Hawaii, respectively.

Soldier mindset is changing – in reality, led by new recruits. We are leveraging the incredible talent and intelligence of new recruits, infusing formations with new technology and allowing

them to experiment and innovate. Warfighters are determining solutions, and we are listening. Their feedback is driving acquisition recommendations to Army Senior Leaders. For the first time in our Army's history, this is our new normal. It creates buy-in. It creates a sense of purpose anchored to the calling to serve. This improves quality of life.

Retention

In two of these TiC brigades, we've seen an increase in retention rates. Between FY23 and FY24, 2BCT, 101st Airborne Division achieved over a 10% increase in reenlistment rates and 2BCT, 25th Infantry Division also achieved a more than 10% increased reenlistment rate. In FY24, across the Army, we retained 52,289 Soldiers in the regular Army and transitioned 7,490 Soldiers from the Regular Army into the Army Reserves or Army National Guard. We are laser focused on retaining the talent we need to maintain our warfighting advantage. With a retention target of 54,800, the Army anticipates reaching an end strength of 451,000.

Strengthening the Profession

We are on a great recruiting glide path for FY25. The Army is recruiting and investing in those who volunteer to take the Oath to serve their Nation. We take great pride and faith in our recruiting enterprise in their efforts to achieve our goals this year, just as they surpassed the FY24 recruiting goal of 55,000 with 55,150 new Soldiers. Looking at FY25, the Army has set a higher target of 61,000 new accessions with at least 10,000 in the DEP. These objectives require sustained dedication, but they build upon a robust foundation. The successes of FY24 and the anticipated outcomes for FY25 are the result of transformative initiatives within the Recruiting Enterprise, with enhancements in recruitment processes, training, leadership, marketing, medical support at MEPS, and improvements in Recruiter quality of life.

Future Soldier Prep Course

The Army is meeting Americans where they are at, enabling them to become Soldiers in the world's premiere land-based fighting force. We recognize that some citizens who desire to serve, may lack access to foundational educational or physical fitness opportunities. In this effort, the establishment of the Future Soldier Prep Course in 2022, has facilitated 33,560 trainees in overcoming academic and fitness obstacles to progress towards basic training, enhancing overall readiness. The FSPC helps young Americans get ready for the Army by offering special classes in academics and fitness. This program helps recruits meet the Army's standards for body fat and academic tests before starting basic training. The FSPC continues to prove effective in expanding the Army's recruitment pool while maintaining high standards of Soldier performance. In FY24, the FSPC has achieved an academic graduation rate of 91.9% and a 14.47-point increase in the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT). Also, the FSPC has achieved a graduation rate of 95% and average weekly body fat loss of 1.25%. In the dual-track program of FSPC, it achieved a graduation rate of 87.3%. We will not, and cannot, lower or change our service entry standards if we are to maintain our warfighting advantage.

Preventing Harmful Behaviors

The Army is taking a systematic approach to reduce and prevent harmful behaviors. To date, 52 installations had approved hiring actions for the Integrated Prevention Advisory Group (I-PAG). In the Active Component, 17% of the 668 positions have been on-boarded.

The Army's Integrated Primary Prevention Workforce, known as the I-PAG, works with leaders to build healthy climates and create environments free from abuse and harm by doing the following: (1) engaging the military community; (2) empowering leaders with data and research; (3) implementing prevention activities; and (4) sustaining progress over time. The I-PAG develops existing human resources, leverages collaborative relationships, and provides the infrastructure necessary to support the primary prevention of harmful behaviors like sexual assault, sexual harassment, child abuse and neglect, suicide, domestic violence, and retaliation.

The I-PAG will partner with existing prevention system partners, to include programs like Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP), Family Advocacy Program personnel, Suicide Prevention personnel, Military Equal Opportunity Advisors, and Chaplains, to include those in and around the military community to provide annual community needs assessments, annual comprehensive integrated primary prevention plans (CIPPPs) that include command climate assessments, and continual prevention activity evaluation through the Commander's Ready and Resilient Council (CR2C). We are committed to strengthening the profession by advancing research informed, data-driven, and integrated prevention efforts to support healthier command climates, enhance mission readiness, and foster a culture inhospitable to harmful behaviors so the Army's people can thrive.

Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention

Sexual harassment and sexual assault have no place in our Army. It divides cohesive teams, and it will not be tolerated. The recent policy changes outlined in the new Army Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP) regulation enhance prevention and implement the SHARP workforce model to reduce barriers to reporting and strengthen victim advocacy. To date, the Army has hired 51% of the civilian SHARP workforce needed for the transition. Additionally, we are focused on hiring special assignment military Sexual Assault Response Coordinators (SARCs) and Victim Advocates (VAs) in select deployed or operational environments.

Suicide Prevention

One suicide is one too many. Upstream prevention starts with command emphasis at the local level and pairing Soldiers with the right resources for the challenges they are facing to prevent suicides. The Army understands that not every stressor that Soldiers face is related to a behavioral health issue and a "one size fits all" approach will not work. We are committed to significantly reducing Soldier suicide by improving Soldier reception and sponsorship efforts, modernizing training capabilities, and improving prevention and response efforts within

communities and units. Currently, the Suicide Prevention, Resilience, and Squad Leader Development Course is provided at 33 Ready and Resilient Performance Centers across the force. We've added a Lethal Means safety module to Ask, Care, Escort Suicide Prevention Training to further increase awareness and emphasize the importance of engaged Soldiers and Leaders intervening when a teammate may be at risk.

The Army published an updated Suicide Prevention and Response Policy, AR 600-92, in October 2024. This regulation represents the Army's efforts to operationalize Suicide Prevention Response Incident Review Committee findings and guidance. Additionally, we are modernizing suicide prevention data sets to assist Senior and Installation Commanders with understanding prevalence and local risk trends over time. We recognize that there is still work to be done. We will continue every effort in this area with the goal of reducing these incidents.

Conclusion

In my 31 years of service to our Nation, and now as the Sergeant Major of the Army, I am proud and confident that the talented and intelligent Soldiers of today's Army will be ready when the Nation calls. I'd like to recognize the efforts of the Total Army – all three components – for their incredible work in defending our homeland, working alongside our Allies and Partners, and protecting our Nations interests. Our Soldiers are motivated and focused on transforming to meet the threats of today and the threats of the future, as the backbone of the Joint Force – with warfighting advantage at the core of it all.

Warfighting readiness relies on the fortitude and resolve of our Soldiers, and the power projection of our installation-specific infrastructure. Your continued support will ensure that your Army will continue to be the profession of choice for present and future generations, as we continue to build disciplined and cohesive teams, maintain tactical and strategic readiness, and sustain the momentum of transformation. The opportunity to deliver this testimony and your ongoing support of our Soldiers, their Families, and our Civilians is greatly appreciated. The Army's platform is its people, and your support signifies an investment in them as they fulfill their military obligations and then transition to become leaders within their communities.

Mr. CARTER. Thank you, Sergeant Major.

We will now go to Master Chief Petty Officer James Honea.

I will tell you a little story. I was at the vet the other day the guy walks in with his dog, is covered in flags and Go Navy. I said, what's the name of your dog? He said, Master Chief Petty Officer Dog. We call him Chief. I said, you must be in the Navy.

Master Chief Petty Officer HONEA. Probably really damn good dog, I bet you.

Mr. CARTER. Oh, a damn good dog.

STATEMENT OF MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER HONEA

Master Chief Petty Officer HONEA. Yeah. Chairman Carter and Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz also is a gentleman from Texas that also happens to be from Lubbock, Texas, I will also convey the, you know, the sentiments of Judge Carter and congratulations, go Gators, on all things there. But I will say this is that if you look up, gentleman in the dictionary, you'll still find Judge Carter's picture there published. My picture will never be there to replace that. We'll keep that one offline if you don't mind please.

Thank you all very, very much and as well as all the other distinguished members of the Subcommittee, I thank you for the opportunity to speak and more importantly, thank you for the good work that you do on behalf of our sailors and their families.

Our Navy's strength, grit, and professionalism continue to ensure the security and prosperity of our nation and sailors perform best when they are focused on war fighting, knowing their families are well supported and we appreciate Congress's ongoing efforts to improve their quality of life.

However, budget constraints since 2013 have hindered consistent support creating uncertainty for our service members. To grow our Navy we need a stable defense budget that invests in the sailors, their families and a culture of continued service.

When we invest in our Navy we remain unmatched and history shows this from the Great White Fleet to the Cold War. I urge Congress to continue investing in our Navy to strengthen our lethality and maintain our platforms and to take care of our war fighters.

Improving quality of life is crucial for our sailors and their families and four key areas that require attention: increasing access to medical care, supporting families with employment and childcare, investing in housing, and ensuring the professional and academic development of our war fighters.

Access to quality medical care is essential to maintain an all-volunteer force. While progress has been made, funding shortages in the military health system and the Defense Health Agency continue to affect care and provider recruitment. When care isn't available with inside our military treatment facilities we rely on the civilian networks but limited resources have impacted care delivery, provider recruitment, and TRICARE's ability to compete in the civilian insurance market.

TRICARE's reimbursement rates based on Medicare rates are often too low and delayed claim processing has damaged our trust in civilian partners. The Navy is committed in supporting the Defense Health Agency and we are working to improve civilian hiring, recruiting, and salary competitiveness.

I ask for your continued support in fully funding the military health system and finding innovative ways to ensure our Defense Health Agency's funding doesn't compete with our war fighting priorities.

Our military families are crucial to our service members' success. We recruit the sailor, but we retain the family and my wife will, while she may not have come in my sea bag, she has certainly helped me carry that thing for many years and we must continue to support in our families as they support us.

Many families, especially service members, rely on the dual income for financial stability and with your help we can assist them in finding that balance. Continued support across the federal enterprise to expanding employment opportunities for all military spouses will help provide continued career growth and maintain financial stability, especially during those PCS moves.

Another vital resource is quality childcare. Investments in child and youth programs have made a significant impact and I thank you all for that. Increased funding for Child Development Program facilities has reduced our Child Development Center wait list to an all-time low for the last 21 years and expanded fee assistance has allowed families to choose quality childcare when CDCs are not available.

However, shortages in facilities and staffing remain challenged. I believe that combining our CDC projects and fee assistance based on local need will address childcare shortfalls and if we approach childcare as a department-wide issue rather than service specific, we can solve it even more effectively.

I thank you also for the support of Basic Allowance for Housing for our junior enlisted sailors that will allow our junior sailors on sea duty to either live in unaccompanied housing or rent locally and that will improve their work-life balance.

The enhancement of the Military Housing Privatization Initiative to expand public/private venture projects for both the Hampton Roads and the San Diego region will provide an additional almost 12,000 beds.

I believe this will rapidly increase our sailor's quality of life and allow leadership the flexibility needed so that every sailor has the appropriate separation of work and home life.

I know Congress is invested in improving not only our unaccompanied housing but also our family housing and I look forward to continuing to work with this Committee in accomplishing this goal.

Technical skills alone, though, don't make an exceptional war fighter. Professional development and continuing education are equally vital. Education empowers our force and gives our sailors the need to outthink and out fight any challenge.

Enlisted leadership development is building more capable, confident leaders through a lifelong learning continuum. It starts early in a sailor's career and grows with them into senior leadership.

I urge your continued support for enlisted education, investments in enlisted leader development, and the United States Naval Community College as they are essential to enhancing readiness and producing agile, innovative, and lethal warfighters.

I am honored to serve alongside warfighters who stand ready to defend our homeland, support our allies and partners, and protect

the American way of life. As we navigate challenging budgetary decisions, it is essential that we continue to properly equip, train and position our force to fight and win.

Equally important is recognizing that quality of life directly impacts warfighter readiness. Expanding access to medical care, strengthening family readiness and ensuring sailors have a clear separation between their home and work life are vital to developing a force that is smarter, stronger and truly valued.

I thank you all and look forward to your questions.

[The information follows:]

NOT FOR PUBLICATION
UNTIL RELEASED BY HOUSE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY CONSTRUCTION
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

**STATEMENT OF
JAMES HONEA
MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER OF THE NAVY
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY CONSTRUCTION,
VETERANS AFFAIRS AND RELATED AGENCIES OF THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS QUALITY OF LIFE
APRIL 8, 2025**

NOT FOR PUBLICATION
UNTIL RELEASED BY HOUSE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY CONSTRUCTION
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Introduction

Chairman Carter, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, it is my privilege to speak with you once more on behalf of our Sailors and their families. Security and prosperity continue to be preserved as a result of the strength, grit, and professionalism of every Sailor, civilian, and family that makes up our Navy team.

Our Navy is at its best when Sailors are focused on warfighting. They do that with a clear mind – knowing their families are being supported and well taken care of. Over the last year Congress has continued to invest in the quality of life of our Sailors and their families and we thank you all for your hard work to remove barriers to their service.

As we strive to maintain the Navy the Nation needs, delayed appropriations continue to loom, stunting our ability to grow. Since 2013, our servicemembers have not seen timely defense appropriations, leaving servicemembers with an uncertain and less dependable quality of life. The actions we take today as a nation to grow our Navy will require a sizable investment to develop the competency and character of our Sailors, support their families, and create a culture where Sailors want to serve and continue to serve.

When a sizeable investment is made, our Navy is unmatched. History has proven this time and time again – from the creation of the Great White Fleet to the Cold War. I ask Congress to continue investing in our Navy and work to support our Budget Request with a timely appropriation so that we can strengthen our lethality, maintain our platforms, and take care of our warfighters.

We must remain focused on improving the conditions of military service and the quality of military life for our Sailors and their families as outlined in the Gates Commission of 1970. To do that, we must focus on four critical quality of life areas: (1) increasing access to

medical care, (2) continuing to support our families with spouse employment and childcare, (3) investing in housing projects, and (4) ensuring our Sailors continue professional and academic development.

Increasing Access to Medical Care

Access to quality medical care is one of the five pillars in maintaining an all-volunteer force and is a key focus of mine. By removing referral processes for mental health appointments and expanding the portability of clinician licensing, our Sailors well-being has improved, directly enhancing our combat readiness. However, our Military Health System (MHS) and Defense Health Agency (DHA) continue to experience shortages in necessary funding.

DHA, since its inception, has been wholly committed to caring for our beneficiaries. However, flat-lined budgets, growing civilian personnel shortages, and significant decreases in military end strength have resulted in mounting declines in direct care delivered at Medical Treatment Facilities (MTFs), affecting each of our fleet concentrated areas differently. When we are unable to provide care within our MTFs, we rely on civilian health care networks. For the past decade, this lack of resources has negatively impacted our ability to provide care, recruit and retain providers, and be an insurance network of choice in the civilian community when we refer patients outside of our fence line.

TRICARE should be an insurance network of choice. However, TRICARE's reimbursement agreements are paid based on the CHAMPUS Maximum Allowable Charge (CMAC) that is closely tied to Medicare's fee schedule and depending on the geographic region, can be lower than the Medicare rates. This is further complicated by provider limited negotiation power. Furthermore, our civilian partners have experienced delayed processing claims,

degrading trust that they will be paid on time. The DHA is aware of these problems and is working closely with the TriWest and Humana on solving the claim processing problems

The Navy is committed to supporting DHA. Our leaders have been working on improvements to civilian hiring actions including robust recruiting efforts and improving salary competitiveness and special pays. I ask for your assistance to ensure that full funding of the military health system remains a priority while developing innovative ways to support and fund DHA in consideration of competing warfighting capabilities.

Supporting our Families

Our military families are the key to our service members' success. We recruit the Sailor, but we retain the family. My wife may not have come in my seabag, but she has certainly carried the weight of it throughout my military career.

We must continue to support our military families as they support us. Most families in America, and especially our service members, require dual income in order to fully enjoy financial stability in today's economy. With your help, we can make strides to help them find their balance. Continued support across the federal enterprise to expand employment opportunities for military spouses will help provide continued career growth and maintain financial stability that Permanent Change of Station (PCS) moves otherwise disrupt.

Another essential resource to retain our families is the accessibility of quality childcare. Investment from this committee in the past few years has made significant impacts for our child and youth programs and I thank you all. The increased appropriations in military infrastructure for our Child Development Program (CDP) facilities has reduced the Child Development Center (CDC) waitlist to its lowest in 21 years. The support in expanding fee assistance has given our

families the ability to choose quality commercial childcare programs when CDCs are not a viable option. However, we still remain challenged in providing full capacity to meet our needs, and shortages of facilities and staffing continues to be our biggest barriers.

I believe a combination of evaluating area needs to build CDCs and fee assistance will be the answer to meet childcare requirements and mitigate shortfalls.

Investing in Family and Unaccompanied Housing

I would like to thank Congress for their continued support in paying Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) to junior enlisted members assigned to sea duty. Throughout my tenure as MCPON, this has been a primary focus that I am committed to seeing through completion.

The enhancement of the Military Housing Privatization Initiative to expand Public Private Venture (PPV) projects for both the Hampton Roads and San Diego region will provide an additional 11,513 beds. I believe expanding PPV across the Unaccompanied Housing portfolio will rapidly increase our Sailors quality of life. I know Congress is invested in improving not only unaccompanied, but also our family housing, and I look forward to working with this committee to accomplish this goal.

Ensuring Professional and Academic Enlisted Education

Technical competency is just one part of being an exceptional warfighter; professional development and continuing education are just as important. Maintaining an empowered force relies on education and is key to our warfighting advantage. Continual focus on education gives our Sailors the ability to outthink problems and make quick, decisive decisions during combat.

Enlisted Leadership Development (ELD) is on a steady course of forging better, more competent, and capable enlisted leaders. It is a learning continuum that starts early in a Sailor's career and continues to the most senior levels of leadership. The key to developing warfighting competency begins with ELD and is sustained by additional academic options.

I implore you to continue to support our enlisted education and development. Investments in ELD, in addition to the United States Naval Community College (USNCC), will strengthen operational readiness and make a more agile, innovative, and lethal Sailor.

Conclusion

I am proud to be part of an organization of warfighters that are ready to defeat and destroy those who threaten our homeland, our partners and allies, and our American way of life. As we continue to face difficult budgetary decisions, we must ensure our warfighters are appropriately equipped, trained, and postured to fight and win. We must also keep in mind how quality of life is instrumental to warfighting readiness. Increasing access to medical care, supporting family readiness, and giving each Sailor the necessary separation of work and home life are critical in making our Sailors smarter, stronger, and valued.

I thank you and I look forward to your questions.

Mr. CARTER. Thank you, Chief.

Excuse me. Now we will hear for Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, Carlos Ruiz.

Sergeant Major RUIZ. Thank you, Chairman. I appreciate it.

First, if I could acknowledge my beautiful bride to the left of me one seat back.

Mr. CARTER. You did real well, boy.

STATEMENT OF SERGEANT MAJOR RUIZ

Sergeant Major RUIZ. It's for my own safety, sir. A former Marine herself of 22 years and a champion for spouses and single parents throughout the force.

So with that, good morning, Chairman Carter, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to work together for the well-being of our service members and their families.

Marines today stand ready to support and defend the Constitution. Looming threats and global crises remain ever present and America looks to us to defend, protect, and when needed, violently execute. We do not ask for the task to be made easier, only for the resources to do it well.

We are here today to ensure that Marines are trained, housed, and equipped in a manner befitting their 250 years of excellence. Despite the challenges faced in recruiting the past few years, the Marine Corps never compromised on standards.

We uphold the rigorous qualifications demanded by a war fighting ethos. We do not lower the bar. We challenge America's best to rise to it. Last year, the Commandant deliberately increased the number of recruiters across the nation. This investment in both quality and quantity is not without cost, but it is necessary to ensure the long-term strength and readiness of our force.

In FY24, the unbeatable work of our recruiters, along with historically high retention rates within the force, resulted in the service achieving its required end strength. The message is clear. Marines love being Marines.

Over the past year, I have seen tangible improvements to infrastructure across the Corps but we are not done yet. The Commandant and I remain committed to the Barracks 2030 plan.

In 2024, we repaired or renovated 11 barracks, and in 2025 we identified 12 more for upgrades. Together these projects affect over 8,000 Marines. Multiyear investments into where Marines and their families live continue across our bases and stations in the U.S. and overseas. It is what Marines deserve.

War fighting excellence is not built in isolation rather, it is fostered through programs and resources supporting Marines physical, mental, social, and spiritual development across a range of initiatives.

So to that end, we are implementing Marine Corps Total Fitness, a network of support for Marines and families that addresses readiness and resilience in all stages of service. Every element of this program builds on our foundation of discipline, self-reliance, and purpose larger than self.

I'm excited about the strides we've made so far, and I'm looking forward to its expansion and its growth. Marine strength and resil-

ience fortify them from the inside, while individual combat equipment protects them from the outside.

The rapid evolution of war fighting technology requires us to modernize our gear while the timeless principles of war dictate that we preserve our battle proven legacies. As a result, our personal protective equipment must protect Marines not only from enemy fire, but also from emerging threats.

In our push to modernize platforms and weapons with the latest technologies, the protection of our most important asset must be counted among those investments. The Marine Corps is not just the branch of service. It is a promise. A promise that no matter the odds, no matter the fight, Marines are ready, willing, and able to answer the call. That is the standard. That is the expectation. That is the reality that has defined the Corps for 250 years.

Marines will always be the reason America's enemies fear what awaits them on the other side. I look forward to working with you to ensure Marines have the resources they need to win. I look forward to your questions.

[The information follows:]

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CONSTRUCTION, MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, AND RELATED AGENCIES

**STATEMENT OF
CARLOS A. RUIZ
SERGEANT MAJOR OF THE MARINE CORPS,
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
BEFORE THE
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY CONSTRUCTION,
VETERANS AFFAIRS AND RELATED AGENCIES
OVERSIGHT HEARING: QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE MILITARY
APRIL 8, 2025**

Chairman Carter, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, and distinguished members of the committee – thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of your United States Marines.

As we have since our founding 250 years ago, the Marine Corps remains focused on readiness and lethality. The Commandant of the Marine Corps has entrusted me with making quality of life a top priority. To that end, I have identified four key areas that will drive meaningful improvement: housing, a clean audit, Marine Corps Total Fitness, and individual combat equipment. Each of these areas directly impacts recruitment and retention by reinforcing trust in leadership, demonstrating institutional accountability, and ensuring Marines are equipped, housed, and supported to meet the demands of service.

Recruiting and Retention

In Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24), the Marine Corps exceeded its recruiting mission. This achievement reflects not only impressive numbers, but also the unwavering dedication of our recruiters. Their relentless pursuit of excellence inspires those who seek challenge, purpose, and honor through service.

There is a direct correlation between a Marine's success at recruit training and the time they spend preparing with their recruiter. As we look ahead to the rest of FY25, we are on track to meet our goal of 38,000 recruits. This will increase our delayed entry pool, stabilize the entry level training pipeline, and continue to fill our Active and Reserve formations with high-quality Marines.

However, recruiting success is just the first step. We are committed to keeping our most talented Marines in the fight. Our ability to retain experienced, combat-ready professionals is what ensures the Marine Corps remains the world's premier warfighting force. Thanks to continuous refinement of the selection process and initiatives designed to promote and retain the highest qualified Marines, we surpassed our retention goals in FY24. At the halfway mark for FY25, we have achieved 98% for first term and 108% for subsequent term retention.

The message is clear: Marines love being Marines. We will continue to demand the best of them and *for* them. Anything less would be a disservice to our mission, our nation, and our legacy of excellence.

Unaccompanied Housing and Family Housing

The Marine Corps is known for doing more with fewer resources, demonstrating ingenuity and resourcefulness in the means and methods of mission accomplishment. While obtaining the necessary funding is critical, we are also taking deliberate steps to maximize efficiency and ensure every dollar spent enhances our readiness. We are actively renovating, repairing, and repurposing our facilities and materials to avoid unnecessary waste. In 2024, we repaired or renovated 11 barracks that provide housing for approximately 4,200 Marines. In 2025, we have identified 12 additional barracks for repair that will house approximately 3,900 Marines.

In accordance with FY24 NDAA, we are improving the day-to-day maintenance and management of barracks. A new app, QSRMax, enables Marines to report and track urgent

facility needs from their phone. This brings process efficiency and transparency to the lowest levels. We are also transitioning barracks management to be overseen by civilian professionals for consistent oversight, maintenance, and accountability.

Family Housing remains a key focus for the Marine Corps. Through tenant satisfaction surveys, incentive awards, and safety inspections, we uphold the terms of our agreements with our public-private venture (PPV) partners and ensure housing meets the needs of our Marines and their families. The Marine Corps requested over \$201M in family housing construction and operations in FY24, which includes not only materials and equipment, but also the housing management professionals who provide the necessary oversight of over 23,000 PPV homes.

Marines do not seek luxury; they seek the opportunity to win. That opportunity begins with a fighting force that is well-housed, well-trained, and well-equipped. With your continued advocacy and support, we fulfill this commitment and honor the commitments of Marines and their families.

Audit

Over the past two years, the Marine Corps became the first military service to attain and sustain an unmodified or “clean” audit opinion. These accomplishments were not easy to attain but are a testament to the importance that every Marine places on accountability every day. Readiness for the warfighter requires accountability of our assets. This allows for informed, data-driven decisions that ultimately lead to successful mission outcomes.

Audits help us be ready and we look forward to clean audits becoming routine and unremarkable.

Marine Corps Total Fitness

The strength of the Marine Corps is measured not only by its firepower, but also by the resilience, readiness, and well-being of its individual Marines. Marine Corps Total Fitness (MCTF) combines modern science with timeless principles. The key to the program is the people – experts in areas such as cognitive performance, strength and conditioning, sleep regulation, financial literacy, and personal responsibility.

These programs strengthen the foundation of discipline, self-reliance, and a purpose greater than oneself. This approach is proactive rather than reactive. By embedding total fitness into daily life and making it a part of Marine Corps culture, it helps eliminate the stigma around seeking support. Marines will maintain their minds and bodies with the same precision and care they maintain their weapons and gear.

MCTF is designed to meet Marines where they are and give them what they need to succeed. It is not a one-size-fits-all system; instead, it is a collaborative effort that brings together experts from various disciplines to deliver personalized, targeted support. MCTF has been identified as a key resource in every major prevention and advocacy initiative within the Marine Corps. Although the program structured at the institutional level, it remains adaptable to specific needs of the unit, ensuring that every Marine – regardless of their location or mission – has access to these valuable resources.

In a demonstration of faith and investment, units are repurposing, re-tasking, and maximizing existing programs and facilities, stretching every resource to its full potential. With your continued support, we can broaden this model across the force and enhance it for optimal effectiveness.

Individual Combat Equipment

Marines operate where others cannot. Individual Combat Equipment (ICE) – the personal protective equipment Marines wear into combat – must be as effective and adaptable as the Marine wearing it. Our commitment to readiness includes a responsibility to continually improve. The gear that Marines use must evolve to protect against future threats. On tomorrow's battlefield, an electronic signal can be just as lethal as a bullet. Features that were once considered science fiction are now becoming necessities.

Recent advancements in manufacturing have developed materials that are lighter, stronger, more durable, and capable of providing multidimensional protection from lethal, electronic, and environmental threats.

Moreover, progress in exercise science and human performance, along with decades of combat experience, highlights the importance of offering expanded and customizable sizing options for a precise fit. The Marine Corps is currently conducting an anthropometry study to create an up-to-date and comprehensive database that will inform the design and procurement of ICE across the Force.

Marines train like they fight. We cannot wait for operations to begin for Marines to have access to the most advanced equipment.

Conclusion

The Marine Corps is not just a warfighting force – it is the enabler of the Joint Force. For the Marine Corps to continue providing the unique capabilities that give the President and Combatant Commanders real-world options, we must be properly supported. The Marine Corps has always been, and will continue to be, resourceful, innovative, and efficient.

At the core of every capability and every mission success is our people. It is not programs, policies or equipment alone. Marines are the ones to make the impossible into the possible. Every dollar invested, every decision made, every resource allocated must be done with one goal in mind: ensuring our Marines are ready to fight and win. They are the weapon. They are the difference. They are the reason the Marine Corps remains the “nation’s force in readiness”.

Mr. CARTER. Thank you, Sergeant Major.
Now we will hear from Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, David Flosi.

STATEMENT OF CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT FLOSI

Chief Master Sergeant FLOSI. Chairman Carter, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, distinguished members of the Subcommittee, I'm honored to join my fellow service senior enlisted advisors providing testimony today.

While there's always work to be done on this important subject make no mistake, your Air Force is the most lethal and ready-flying force in the world. I humbly represent more than 670,000 total Force Airmen who remain ready to deliver air power anytime, anywhere.

Thanks to each of you for your commitment to the quality of life of our service members. We need our Airmen laser focused on lethality and readiness and your support allows us to execute our important mission.

Today we confront strategic adversaries who are contesting every domain while intimidating and coercing our allies and partners around the world. China is aggressively expanding their lethal capabilities while Russia, Iran, North Korea and a variety of non-state actors continue to threaten American interests around the world.

In the face of this complex global strategic environment, we rely on our greatest strength, our Airmen, to out compete our adversaries. Since I last testified before this Committee, our Airmen have been busy, busy repelling complex Iranian drone and missile attacks against our allies, disrupting and defeating Houthi attacks on international shipping, and providing humanitarian assistance to victims of natural disasters at home and abroad, all while transforming our force to successfully execute our mission in contested environments.

We cannot afford for our Airmen to be distracted by inadequate housing, lack of access to health care and childcare, or other quality of life issues. Years of continuing resolutions and budgetary uncertainty required your Air Force to manage increasing risks, creating challenges for our Airmen.

We ask for your support in overcoming these difficulties to ensure our Airmen can focus on their main thing, defending this great nation and our way of life. While there are several quality-of-life issues to discuss, I'd like to highlight a few specifically. Dorms, access to health care and childcare, and pay and compensation, which all directly impact force readiness.

When it comes to dorms, we continue to focus our resources in this area. For our most junior war fighters we've dedicated more than a billion dollars across the FYDP to building dorm capacity where shortfalls exist, while also improving existing dorms. Thank you for your continued advocacy on this topic.

In addition, there are challenges in accessing healthcare services impacting our force readiness, particularly specialty and mental health care. We're committed to working with the Defense Health Agency and we're working hard on this in our department as well.

Our service members are benefiting from the Wingman-Guardian Connect program, which focuses on building connections, detecting risk, and promoting protective environments for our junior enlisted force.

We're dedicated to supporting the mental well-being of our Airmen and removing any stigma associated with seeking help when our Airmen need it. Force readiness is also impacted by available childcare. We continue to find ways to expand access to safe, affordable childcare options and support programs.

Additionally, the Department is working to further support families by improving spousal employment opportunities through reimbursement initiatives for both relicensing and small business start-up costs due to relocation.

With respect to pay and compensation, recent increases in military pay will especially help our junior tier. We need to address compression in the military pay table for our NCOs to ensure they are properly compensated for their leadership responsibility and technical expertise.

I've served as your Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force for just over a year now. In that time, I've traveled across the globe to connect with our Airmen and to see firsthand the barriers they face in accomplishing the mission.

I've learned no matter how much we work to improve quality of life, we will not get the desired effect as an Air Force if we don't focus on excess infrastructure. While it may not seem directly related to improving the quality of life of our Airmen, I assure you it's directly tied.

Over the past 30 years, we've eliminated 60 percent of our fighter squadrons, 40 percent of our end strength, but only 15 percent of our installations. Today, 30 percent of our infrastructure is excess to need. It all requires funding and manpower to maintain but provides no benefit to the mission our Airmen or our Nation.

Divesting, consolidating, and/or reallocating this infrastructure will free up funding to improve quality of life and the quality of our service. We must continue to leverage every option to ensure the quality of life for our Airmen is commensurate with the responsibility of protecting this great nation.

I want to thank this Subcommittee for its unwavering support on these and many other important issues.

Our Airmen, backed by their families and communities, stand ready. Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

[The information follows:]

Department of the Air Force

Testimony

Before the House Appropriations
Subcommittee on Military Construction,
Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies



Senior Enlisted Leader Perspective

Witness Statement of
CMSAF David A. Flosi
Chief Master Sergeant of the U.S. Air Force

April 8, 2025

NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY THE
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Quality of Life in the Military

April 8, 2025

Introduction

Chairman Carter, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, and distinguished members of this Subcommittee, thank you for your continued interest and support in the quality of life of the women and men who serve our great Nation. I am honored to join my fellow service Senior Enlisted Advisors to address issues impacting the lives of our Airmen and their families.

America's national interests are under attack around the world. China remains our pacing challenge, continuing to expand its military and intimidate our allies and partners. This threat is compounded by Russia, Iran, and North Korea, who are developing and fielding more advanced military capabilities. To face these threats, we must leverage our greatest strength, our Airmen, to continue to outcompete our adversaries. We cannot afford for our Airmen to be distracted by housing challenges, lack of access to childcare and healthcare, or other quality of life issues. Yet years of continuing resolutions and fiscal constraints have forced the Air Force to manage increased risk, creating hardships for our Airmen. We ask for your continued partnership to overcome these challenges and to ensure our Airmen can focus on their main thing—defending the Nation.

Aging Fleet and Excess Infrastructure

Since the end of the Cold War, the average age of our aircraft fleet increased from 17 to almost 32 years old. Our older aircraft retain their lethality, but require more maintenance, with maintenance actions per aircraft more than doubling from 1997 to 2024, and the average time for each action also increasing, putting an ever-growing strain on our Airmen. Excess infrastructure poses a similar challenge. Since the 1990s, the Air Force experienced a 60% reduction in fighter squadrons, a 40% reduction in Airmen, but only a 15% reduction in basing in the continental United States. Our Airmen are using limited resources to maintain infrastructure we do not need.

The Department of the Air Force (DAF) identified 1,200 vacant buildings across our installations, which could be demolished to reallocate funds towards maintaining our mission essential infrastructure.

Support to Families

Families are a source of support and stability, and despite all the stress and strain we put them through they do not get paid a dime. We must ensure our families have access to affordable, available, quality childcare programs to keep our Airmen focused on the mission. Child Development Center direct staffing levels increased to 86% in December 2024 compared to only 72% in October 2022. The childcare fee discount initiated for employees of our Child and Youth Programs helped drive this increase.

Military Family Housing and Dormitories

Every Airman requires safe and affordable housing, whether they live in dormitories, privatized military housing, or government-owned housing. Our current dormitory inventory consists of 58,476 permanent party beds with an additional 45,612 beds for Airmen in basic military and technical training. To combat aging infrastructure and less than desirable living conditions for some, the DAF is investing an estimated \$1.1B from FY22-FY26 in Facilities Sustainment, Restoration and Modernization (FSRM) funds, the largest FSRM investment in permanent party dorms in more than a decade.

There is also a need to add new dormitory capacity at many installations. As of late February of this year, three bases had dormitory bed deficits of at least 300 beds, and Nellis Air Force Base had a deficit of 590 beds. While the quality of life requirements for permanent party dorms established in the FY22 NDAA will be met, the need for new dormitories to expand capacity is clear. We must continue to invest in the Military Construction required to house our Airmen.

For FY25, we are investing \$550M in privatized and government-owned housing. The DAF's privatized housing inventory includes 52,181 units at 63 installations. For some of our privatized housing projects, economics of the deals failed to meet expectations. We plan to restructure some of these deals to prevent defaults on existing loans and to ensure the condition of these homes remains acceptable.

The DAF's FY25 government-owned housing inventory includes 15,271 units, but this inventory is being challenged by slow declines in quality as the housing inventory ages. We have \$78M in Family Housing Construction funds for FY25, and the DAF is working to prioritize needs and plan construction for future years of the Family Housing Construction program.

Access to Quality Healthcare

The Defense Health Agency's (DHA) recent consolidation of all military treatment facilities, though well-intentioned, has encountered obstacles, including long wait times, for both routine and specialized care, forcing some to seek off-base care and shoulder out-of-pocket expenses, delaying care and degrading readiness. To address systemic hurdles in the Military Health System, DHA and military branches are committed to identifying specialties and locations where access standards are not being met and collaborating with managed care contractors to develop and execute plans for bringing those provider networks up to standard. However, achieving this goal is complicated by the Military Health System's lower reimbursement rates for civilian providers relative to private insurers. This creates reluctance for some healthcare providers to accept military patients, further stressing already limited networks of providers in some areas.

Mental Health

Mental health continues to be a priority to ensure our Airmen are equipped to handle the stress and challenges inherent in the Profession of Arms. We are prioritizing training for all Airmen to recognize and manage the most common mental health challenges faced in forward operating environments. Historically, mental health issues have been a significant driver of in-theater evacuations.

There is a national shortage of mental health providers, and Airmen are not exempt from this shortfall. We do not have enough mental health clinicians to meet growing demand, which has averaged 36,000 new patients a year across the DAF. Additionally, current staffing ratios of 80% active duty and 20% civilian do not afford active-duty clinicians time to manage their direct-care case load and satisfy their own readiness requirements. Furthermore, the nationwide shortage of civilian clinicians makes it difficult to fill these positions.

Suicide Prevention

We are taking a data-driven, public-health approach, informed by best practices from academia, industry, and recommendations from a DoD-chartered independent review committee to prevent any Airmen from ever making the choice to end their life. The Wingman Guardian Connect program is one prime example of this approach. The program focuses on building connections in small peer networks and establishing healthy group norms. Implementation began in the third quarter of FY24 at nine high-risk Air Force installations. It is leveraging continuous process improvement and data collection to ensure positive impact as it expands to more locations. Full DAF implementation is anticipated to be completed in CY27.

Sexual Assault Prevention and Response

We insist on a culture where Airmen refuse to accept harassment and assault within our ranks. We see this change actively occurring because while reporting increased, prevalence

decreased—meaning our Airmen are supporting each other and trusting the system to do what it was designed to achieve. We are on track with Independent Review Commission directives to establish Congressionally mandated Sexual Assault and Response and Integrated Primary Prevention Workforces by FY27. We have currently hired 80% of the 630 positions, with 341 of 387 Integrated Primary Prevention Workforce positions filled and 165 of 243 Sexual Assault Response Workforce positions filled. These personnel are essential to improving care and developing preventative culture for our Airmen and our Air Force.

Enlisted Pay & Compensation

Enlisted pay is directly linked to readiness, retention and quality of life. Thank you for supporting the 4.5% pay increase. This raise increases our ability to compete with the private sector for talent. The 14th Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation found regular military compensation remains strong, but it recommended that DOD continue efforts in childcare and spouse employment initiatives, to remain competitive with non-military employment options.

Conclusion

Chairman Carter, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, and members of this Subcommittee, thank you again for this opportunity to represent our incredible service members and their families. Our Airmen, backed by these incredible families and supportive communities, stand ready, but we cannot maintain our lethal and ready force without your help to increase our funding and divest excess infrastructure. My fellow service senior enlisted advisors and I are honored to provide insight into the quality of life issues impacting our service. The decisions we make today, will directly influence our ability to defend our Nation for generations to come.

Mr. CARTER. Thank you, Chief Master Sergeant.
 Now we'll hear from Chief Master Sergeant John Bentivenga.
 Chief Master Sergeant BENTIVENGA. Bentivenga.
 Mr. CARTER. Bentivenga.

STATEMENT OF CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT BENTIVENGA

Chief Master Sergeant BENTIVENGA. Thank you. Thank you, Chairman Carter, and Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the critical importance of investing in the well-being of our Guardians.

With the United States Space Force now in our fifth year, the Nation faces an increasingly complex global security environment. The Secretary of Defense has been clear that to meet these challenges we must restore the warrior ethos, we must rebuild our military and we must reestablish deterrence. Nowhere is this more critical than in the space domain, where our Guardians stand as a visible front line, ensuring our nation's continued access to and freedom to operate in the space domain, the very foundation of space superiority.

The Space Force was established to deliver space superiority and address the needs of our joint warfighters in a rapidly evolving national security environment. The space domain has become increasingly competitive and contested, so our greatest risk is to remain with the status quo.

While the Space Force represents only 3 percent of the Defense budget, it underpins joint force capabilities across all domains. During the April 2024 Iranian missile attack, members of the 2nd Space Warning Squadron provided missile warning data that helped enable the interception of incoming projectiles and minimize casualties.

Right now, Guardians from the 18th Space Defense Squadron are tracking over 47,000 orbiting objects, an 89 percent increase since the service was established, ensuring space situation awareness for safe operations, including support to NASA and the International Space Station.

Tonight, members of the 2nd Navigation Warfare Squadron will be providing highly integrated position navigation and timing capabilities to the agricultural, finance, and transportation sectors of the United States economy.

As our Space Force truths state, the US Space Force's capabilities are critical to the joint force and the American way of life. Maintaining our advantage in space demands commensurate investment in our most critical system, the human weapons system, our Guardians.

Service members do not choose to stay in uniform because it's easy. They do so because it's challenging, but they understand the rewards of service are priceless. Quality of life investments that elevate the journey will attract and retain the talent the nation demands and the department needs.

This is why I look forward to working on the recommendations made by the 14th Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation. Updating Basic Allowance for Housing methodologies, improving cost of living allowance calculation policies, and raising the regular

military compensation benchmark are all vital initiatives to military life.

I also believe the recommended holistic quality of life review will provide informed and actionable data that will improve access to childcare and healthcare benefits as well as advanced military spouse employment initiatives. To provide a superior Guardian experience, quality of life programs that elevate the journey must be coupled with quality-of-service investments that cultivate the warfighter.

World class training and development are crucial for our Guardians who will employ all capabilities, kinetic and non-kinetic, to ensure space control. To meet the joint forces' evolving needs and stay ahead of strategic rivals our ability to develop the force for Guardians by Guardians must also mature.

The capacity to scout, train, and educate space minded warfighters beyond our current end strength increases will require appropriations and infrastructure investments. These initiatives will help create the future of space power and build a more lethal force for generations to come.

This is particularly critical as the space domain itself is becoming increasingly dynamic. The rapid growth in global space activity, while indicative of progress, also creates new vulnerabilities. We are witnessing a concerning shift from theoretical threats in space to daily occurrences.

Our adversaries are actively developing and deploying systems designed to deny, degrade, and disrupt our space capabilities, jeopardizing the very advantages space provides our nation and our allies.

The complexity and scale of these threats make it clear that the Space Force cannot succeed alone. Our ability to integrate seamlessly with the joint force, cultivate partnerships with the commercial space industry and strengthen alliances with partner nations will be essential to overcoming resource limitations and building a more resilient space architecture.

Members of this Subcommittee five minutes is barely enough time to give me—allow me to talk about the importance of quality of life and quality of service for our Guardians. But if I may, I'd like to leave you with three key takeaways regarding the Space Force.

First, the Space Force represents only 3 percent of the Defense budget yet underpins the lethality of joint force and safeguards the very fabric of American way of life.

Second, the Space Force has operated under a continuing resolution for 51 percent of our existence, limiting our ability to evolve as necessary. Third, the Space Force, to maintain space superiority, needs significant investment in our growth and development, and that's imperative.

I am eager to collaborate with the Subcommittee to provide our Guardians the tools and resources they need to succeed. Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

[The information follows:]

United States Space Force



Testimony Before the
House Appropriations
Subcommittee on Military Construction,
Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies

Quality of Life in the Military

Witness Statement of
CMSSF John F. Bentivegna
Chief Master Sergeant of the Space Force

April 8, 2025

Quality of Life in the Military

April 8, 2025

Chairman Carter, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, and distinguished members of this Subcommittee, thank you for your unwavering commitment to the well-being of our Guardians and their families. Your dedication to their quality of life and service is crucial to the success of the Space Force and directly contributes to our ability to attract and retain the very best, ensuring our nation maintains joint lethality. I deeply appreciate the provisions provided by Congress, particularly the pay raises for our junior enlisted personnel, expanded access to critical medical care, and strengthened support systems for spouses. These initiatives are tangible investments in the overall readiness and resilience of our force, reflecting our promise to those who serve.

While grateful for this progress on quality-of-life initiatives, the Space Force also recognizes that ensuring the well-being of our Guardians is not only the right thing to do but also essential to our ability to adapt and maintain *Space Superiority* in a rapidly evolving and increasingly contested domain. This demands a fundamental shift in how we train, equip, and develop Guardians, honing their character and commitment to meet 21st-century challenges. Space Superiority, essential for Joint Force success, requires maintaining control of space, allowing our forces to operate freely while denying adversaries the same. This necessitates robust *Space Control* capabilities, ranging from reversible to non-reversible effects, utilizing both kinetic and non-kinetic means across all segments of our space architecture to contest and control the domain.

These evolving requirements are driven by the escalating and very real threats posed by nations like China and Russia, who are actively developing space-based capabilities designed to challenge U.S. space dominance. China's expanding satellite network and development of

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counterspace weapons, alongside Russia's pursuit of an on-orbit nuclear anti-satellite weapon, pose serious risks. Both nations view space as a critical warfighting domain and aim to disrupt U.S. access and undermine its military superiority. The Space Force remains dedicated to deterring and defeating these threats to protect US space control. It is with unwavering courage that our Guardians, *the invisible front line* of this nation, stand ready to deter and, if necessary, defeat these threats.

However, ensuring our Guardians are equipped to confront these evolving challenges demands that we provide them with a service experience commensurate with their dedication and the critical nature of their mission. To truly unleash the potential of our Guardians, we must provide them with a service experience worthy of their dedication and sacrifice. That's why my office is committed to elevating *The Guardian Experience* across three key initiatives: *Elevate the Journey*, *Cultivate the Warfighter*, and *Create the Future*. These initiatives are not merely aspirational; they represent a concrete plan to invest in the well-being, development, and legacy of every Guardian, whether they serve in uniform or as part of our exceptional civilian workforce.

Our Guardians face evolving threats and require the highest caliber training. The Vosler Academy, our sole enlisted training institution, is crucial. Investing in modernized infrastructure, support contracts, and academic partnerships is essential to provide our Guardians with the quality training they deserve.

Simultaneously, the Space Force Personnel Management Act is key to transforming our personnel system. This act enables flexible career paths, integration of part-time expertise, and

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prioritization of critical competencies – all vital for developing Guardians who can outmaneuver our adversaries.

We are fully committed to implementing this act by FY28, creating a 21st-century talent management system that attracts and retains the best talent. This requires developing new policies and procedures, and close coordination with the Air Force Reserve for a smooth transition.

Already, we've seen significant progress. The first round of Selection Boards has concluded, identifying over 250 highly qualified Air Force Reserve professionals for transfer into full-time Space Force roles. This process, along with the planned transfer of part-time personnel beginning in FY26, will be crucial in building the foundation of our new personnel system. We are committed to finding innovative solutions that address immediate needs while paving the way for long-term sustainability. Our priority is to ensure a seamless transition that prioritizes our Guardians and their families while equipping the Space Force to meet future challenges.

The value our Guardians bring to the Nation, our Joint Force, and our Partners and Allies cannot be overstated. That's why we are grateful to Congress for your interest in understanding how our service members are compensated and cared for, including looking at quality-of-life issues beyond compensation, such as housing, childcare access and cost, and military spouse unemployment.

It is vital to recognize that the majority of our Space Force Guardians are “employed-in-place”. According to the Office of People Analytics 2023 Status of Forces Survey of Active Duty Member (2023 SFS-A), Guardians are less likely to respond that they are currently deployed and

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more likely to indicate they have not been deployed in the past 5 years. Unlike their counterparts in other Services who primarily deploy downrange, our Guardians primarily provide critical, war-winning space effects from their power projection platforms. This creates a unique challenge: they must simultaneously execute their mission and manage the responsibilities of family and home life. While their dedication is unwavering, the lack of respite and constant juggling act can take a toll, impacting morale, retention, and ultimately, readiness.

Quality of life programs are essential force multipliers. Access to affordable childcare, spousal employment opportunities, quality education, and reliable healthcare are not just about comfort and convenience; they are fundamental to a Guardian's ability to focus on the mission. When our Guardians are free from worry about their families' well-being, they can better dedicate themselves to protecting our nation's interests in space. Supporting our Guardians means supporting their families, and that is an investment in the very foundation of our Space Force's strength. It also reflects our profound Connection to these families and our understanding of their vital role in our collective success.

To ensure the U.S. Space Force continues to thrive, Congressional support for our Guardians and their families is paramount. This means championing competitive pay and compensation, bolstering critical support programs and resources, and providing world-class training and education opportunities that cultivate the world's finest space warfighters. Investing in the future of the Space Force through innovation will cement the service's legacy for generations to come. By working together, we can build a Space Force where every Guardian is empowered to thrive and reach their full potential in service to our nation.

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Our Guardians are entrusted with protecting our nation's interests in an increasingly complex and contested space domain. Their dedication ensures our nation, and our allies can thrive. As we move into the fifth year of the Space Force, with the urgency of *Securing Our Nation's Interests In, From, and To Space* clearer than ever, the decisions we make today will determine our success for decades to come. We must prioritize the needs of our Guardians and provide the resources they require to keep our space domain secure and accessible. We look forward to collaborating with Congress to enact the FY26 appropriations and ensure the U.S. Space Force has the tools and support needed to build a future where space power underpins national prosperity and security.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay, thank you very much, Chief, and we'll now begin questions. These have a rough five minute time period on them. We'll have some slack we can cut, but I'm more talking to my folks up here than you, but we're trying to find out some stuff. I'm going to start off.

September of 2023, GAO report on unaccompanied housing was a wake-up call. It detailed barracks and dormitories with unacceptable health, safety, and privacy concerns. That report included 31 recommendations that included both OSD and service level recommendations.

How far along are each of your services in terms of addressing the GAO recommendations? Do you have an estimate of the cost and timeline needed to fully implement all GAO recommendations? Are there any policy changes that would help alleviate capacity shortages? For instance, would allowing single E-5s in the Army and Marines to move out of the barracks help?

The response to barracks challenges does not necessarily require one size fits all approach across each installation. What is the appropriate mix of barracks refurbishment versus new construction? Finally, what role should public/private partnerships and leases play? A lot of questions. Who wants to start?

Sergeant Major WEIMER. Chairman, I'll jump on that one. There is a lot there, but it's a great question, and you've given us an opportunity truly—to truly let the committee know where we are.

So, we took the findings of the GAO report, and in conjunction with last year's NDAA, and really we had to do some work to truly see ourselves holistically. So, our conditions index, we've been able to scrub our entire inventory, and the Army has obviously a very large inventory of barracks.

So, we can truly—we can truly tell you now which ones have that below 70 percent index. We're trying to make sure we stretch every dollar to the furthest extent available.

We know where we are with budgets. So, trying unique authorities, like the repair to replace that we're utilizing actually at Cavazos to—I don't want to say get creative, but to truly figure out how to get our barracks in better condition, if not full MILCON replacement, because that's the hardest of all the solutions. That's an example—that's an example of one.

To your E-5 question, and I'll pass to my teammates, we already made this decision last year in Europe for E-6s. E-6s are authorized out of the barracks in Europe to increase barracks bedspaces, but there are issues with that. Downpayments for housing off base in Europe are incredibly high.

We had to be careful we weren't putting our single E-6s in a different financial predicament. Then lastly, young E-5s that want to live in the barracks are great leaders in the barracks. It's good for them, and it's also great for the privates in the barracks. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Master Chief Petty Officer HONEA. Mr. Chairman, also in the Navy we did a comprehensive review of all of our installations, and all the buildings that we're using for our barracks right now, and our condition index score, we're not good. About 15 percent are considered to be in good condition. About 60 percent were considered

to be acceptable, and the remaining 25 percent are unacceptable condition.

We need a lot of work to bring all of that back up to speed, and then beginning with—as I—as I—as I’ve said before to this committee in the past, we already operate in a deficit. We have considered for many years ships to be considered acceptable government quarters for our most junior enlisted sailors that are assigned on board a ship. To remove them off the ship and into a barracks room, we’re going to need even more beds.

We do have a comprehensive plan, and a timeline on building the necessary unaccompanied housing. The fastest path to that will not be through military construction. The fastest path through that is an expansion of our PPV programs, and the pilots that we currently operate within San Diego and within the Norfolk region.

As I said earlier in my opening testimony—opening statement, we’re going to increase that capacity by about another 12,000 beds in those two fleet concentration areas, and that will probably solve the majority of our housing problems in those areas for sailors assigned to those ships.

But we need to be able to expand on that in our other home ports—other fleet concentration areas, whether it’s in the Pacific Northwest, or in the great state of Florida, down there in Mayport, Florida.

I’m looking for more ability to be able to expand on those barracks programs, and then do it just as you said for the E-5s. We’re looking at that across the board. Where could we move people out into town, and afford them housing allowance, and it’d be that E-4 and above—or E-4 over four years, wherever we think that it’s most appropriate. We got a long road to go. There’s still a lot of work to do.

The biggest barrier to that is having a dependable budget, you know, that we can—we can begin construction with on time, as well as everything that we need for modernization and sustainment dollars to go into those buildings.

I mean, as I said in my opening statement since 2013 we have not had a dependable budget to—for the maintenance, modernization, and sustainment of those buildings, and those buildings are in really bad repair because of that. Thank you, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. I’d like to say that first off, I think I can say without hesitation everyone on this dais is an appropriator, and we don’t like CRs. We know you don’t like them, and we don’t like them. We do all the work, and then the work doesn’t get done. They just pass all the work we’ve done.

It’s one of those frustrating things you do, because the best work is done by the Appropriations Committee in Congress, and we’re the only people that get things done, and then they throw us out like the trash—I’m sorry, I’m preaching now.

Sergeant Major RUIZ. I appreciate the opportunity. The GA report really spawned the buildup of Barracks 2030. This is—we were on our way there anyway as the commandant came in with a very focused approach to human beings and getting after the infrastructure.

So, the GA report, although it focused on a few barracks, we said no, we need to inspect every place that every Marine puts their head down to try to get some rest, and we did that.

The reports are not good, and so, the commandant put his money where his mouth is, and he got after the refurbishing of barracks. We do need help, as Chief Flosi stated, the amount of buildings that I need to knock down, it's an expensive nature there to do. Sometimes more expensive than building new.

So while we can, we refurbish, and get after what we were able to do quickly in delivering the impact to the Marines immediately, and they see that, and they want to stay, because they see effort, right? They may not see a brand new building in their time in the service, but at least they see that, hey, at least my buddy is getting a decent barracks.

For us, it's expensive to move sergeants around town, absolutely. Especially around places like, I don't know, California or overseas, so we are very careful with that, but I think what I'll say in addition to that, Chairman, is that for the Corps, the barracks is a place where we continue to develop the warrior ethos of a Marine.

So, it's critical that I have two Marines per room, and I know they hate me when I say that, but I need them to be two per room, and I need the NCO down the line to ensure that they're there to check on them, to take care of them, that they're not alone. It's part of the transformation process, sir.

Chief Master Sergeant FLOSI. Thank you, Chairman. Your Air Force has invested more than a billion dollars over the facility sustainment, restorization [sic] and modernization of our dorms specifically, and thankfully we've started in a little bit better place with our dorms on average.

We have a dorm master plan that has looked at all of our facilities across the entire enterprise, and we do not have any of our dorms in failing condition today across the Air Force. We're continuing to invest in the dorms.

We do have Airmen dorm leaders, assigned active duty NCOs assigned to each of our barracks around the—around the Air Force. We also—we also have had success with the MILCON appropriation on our dorms specifically. So, we've got projects programmed in across the FYDP at several of our installations to the tune of several hundred million dollars.

What we're trying to do, much like my Marine counterpart here, we're trying to balance excess infrastructure in locations where we have excess infrastructure that we need to get rid of, so we can get it off our denominator, and invest appropriately in the locations where we have capacity issues.

So, we look for your support there. We've done—we've done the analysis, and while it is expensive to demolish, we know it's about a ten to one return on investment.

So over time, it was a really good use of taxpayer dollars to get rid of excess infrastructure, and consolidate and focus our resources on the infrastructure. We really need to take care of our Airmen, especially at that early stage in their careers. No huge concerns there, sir, on dorms for the Air Force, but we're continuing to focus and invest to make sure it stays that way.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, I like the fact you're looking at things that we can demolish so we don't have to take care of them. We'll visit more about that.

Chief Master Sergeant FLOSI. Sounds good. Thank you, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. Chief.

Chief Master Sergeant BENTIVENGA. Mr. Chairman, thank you so much. We have a much smaller footprint than the Army and the other services on the Space Force side, with the dormitories on Space Force installations. When we looked at all the dormitory conditions, like Chief Flosi said, across the Department of the Air Force, we don't have any dormitories in failing conditions.

In fact, the dormitories in Space Force installations are 81 percent which are acceptable condition, which are actually pretty good when you think about it, but the thing for us is, consistent funding that allows us to maintain where we are, and also to gain traction.

Chief Flosi mentioned the dormitory master plan. I believe it was early 2022 when the department issued the department master plan. It was estimated about \$280 million for Space Force dormitories to be risen to the 85 or above level on the building condition index, but continuous resolutions and our inability to do the planning and the funding to keep those contracts on target, on time, is always a challenge. We don't want to lose any momentum that we have with the conditions of the dormitories where our young men and women are living today.

Moving forward, as I said in my opening statement, in order for the service to grow and develop to be able to execute space superiority for the nation, we're going to have to grow end strength, which is going to mean an increase in our junior enlisted individuals who will be living in the dorms—right now, E-1 through E-4 within the Department of the Air Force.

We're going to look at the lessons learned from our counterparts across the other services. Is it traditional military construction? Is it a combination of partnerships downtown? How do we get after that to make sure that we can meet the demand of the nation, but also provide quality housing for our most junior, most vulnerable men and women who join the service?

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. I will now yield to Ms. Wasserman Schultz.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to come back to your unaccompanied housing focus as well, but first I want to focus on the privatized military family housing, because I continue to see unacceptable reports of inadequate, unsafe housing conditions provided by privatized housing providers.

To highlight just one of the latest examples, Balfour Beatty is being sued by military families, again. They've had two instances in which they have paid multi-million dollar settlements.

It continues to—I mean, there's not a word—frustrate is not a strong enough word, but the fact that these contracts were so complex that it made it impossible for us supposedly to unwind them, and to disconnect these companies who are grossly irresponsible, and could care less about the occupants of the housing for which they are required to take care of doesn't bode well in my opinion for the future of oversight and care of the servicemembers who live in unaccompanied housing either.

So, it really chaps me when I hear you all talking about, well, the solution to the unaccompanied housing crisis that you have is to go in the direction of more privatized housing.

Sure, when they're brand-spanking-new, and they don't have any problems, it sounds great, but I want to make sure that it—I don't think that you should go forward with that privatized housing concept, but if you go forward with it, then you have to make sure that these are contracts that can be unwound easily, and the companies can be fired and disconnected from the abuse that Balfour Beatty and others have been engaged in.

So that having been said, this lawsuit even claims that Balfour Beatty officials blocked Navy personnel from inspecting houses in some cases, and that's just the latest example of that oversight of those privatized housing providers by the military services needs to continue to be strengthened.

So over the last several years, our subcommittee has consistently provided an additional \$10 million per year through the Family Housing Operations and Maintenance Accounts for each service for the purpose of housing oversight.

There wasn't that layer there, and each branch of the service has acknowledged that they dropped the ball, and completely were hands off for many, many years about overseeing the companies that are supposed to be responsible for taking care of these—of the housing that they've built, and that they then care for.

So, it's clear that we continue to need that funding to be used for oversight purposes, and quickly, I'd like each of you to say what plans you have for the use of the funds that were available in FY-25 in the CR, and for FY-26, presuming that—and hopefully that it will continue. Sergeant Major Weimer.

Sergeant Major WEIMER. Ranking Member, thank you for that, and I, like you, have similar concerns when we—when we talked privatized—potential privatized barracks solutions. I just wanted to acknowledge that up front.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you.

Sergeant Major WEIMER. 25 years in the privatized housing, we have to take those lessons learned. We have to utilize those for any new ventures. Specifically on the Army side, that money we've been using for third party inspections. I'm happy to actually report right now, CONUS, we are a hundred percent complete on the privatized third party inspections.

We're now 82 percent complete OCONUS, and so we still have some work to do the rest of the year for OCONUS. We're predicting to be done by 2026 on that, and we'll continue to use that money.

Ironically, now we're inspecting third party inspections of our government owned housing. As a matter of fact, my wife was informed Monday that my house is getting inspected Thursday. No—yeah, Wednesday or Thursday, and that they need three hours, and she had to schedule a block of time. So, that—I don't see that stopping. I think that accountability will continue to be important.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Is there a layer of onsite military oversight? Someone that when the company isn't calling them back, when they're not able to get in touch with someone, do you have a military layer of responsiveness?

Sergeant Major WEIMER. Yes. IMCOM for us, in the Army, is that belly button, if you will, at every garrison across the nation. The hundred percent inspection work orders amendment, that's the latest for the accountability there, and I'm happy to report now that actual people that live in those houses are sending in their own pictures of the work before the work is done. So, there is—there is tenant involvement in this to add another layer of accountability.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you very much. Master Chief.

Master Chief Petty Officer HONEA. Ranking member, I would start by saying I really do appreciate the three years that I've worked with you, and the relationship—

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you.

Master Chief Petty Officer HONEA [continuing]. We've had. You've always been a very honest and upfront broker with me, and I appreciate it. But more importantly is that you've always made sure you put money, you know, where you say that your priorities are.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you.

Master Chief Petty Officer HONEA. Also, you get after things, and so, with this oversight, which was largely due to your efforts, you know, we were able to hire an additional 200 employees across the Navy, first in installation command to provide that type of oversight at the regional level and across our installations, and then also 50 of those employees are hired by our Naval facilities and engineering command to provide that type of oversight, and we were also able to then complete all of our third party inspections of all of our PPV housing this year, and able to report that the majority of them fall into a favorable condition, but that's about 50 percent, and a good 47 percent, and poor, and then a couple percent—excuse me, in fair, and then a couple percent in poor.

So, we'll continue to provide that type of oversight and those inspections to hopefully improve our conditions with our PPV partners. I am a proponent of renegotiating all those contracts based off lessons that we've learned. I think our business partner would do better if we could find a way to renegotiate those contracts.

I know the government would be better served, and more importantly our families, and service members that reside in those housing would all be better served, much as we have done with our privatized unaccompanied housing projects. We took those lessons learned, you know, when we negotiated those contracts, and how we provide that oversight to ensure that there's good occupancy rates; that we are able to maintain the proper cash flow so that the partner has the solvency to maintain and to modernize those—excuse me—those investments as necessary. Thank you.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you. Let me just stress that the Chairman and I have been interchangeable over the last number of years, and we did all of those things together, and I appreciate his partnership.

Chief, do you have any information on the reports that the Navy was blocked from inspecting houses in some cases by Balfour Beatty?

Master Chief Petty Officer HONEA. I don't—I do not have any information about any specific allegations. I do know that both the

installation commander and their teams did go through all the housing down there at Key West. Our commander of Naval Installations Command has also visited and inspected many of those homes. We did a full inventory of all those homes, and determined a certain portion of them to be uninhabitable. Balfour Beatty paid for those members to be moved and placed in other homes or temporary housing, as necessary.

But I don't have any other information about—maybe there were some more specific allegations that—

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Could you—

Master Chief Petty Officer HONEA [continuing]. I am not aware of.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Could you look into that specific allegation for me?

Master Chief Petty Officer HONEA. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you. I will hold my applause for Balfour Beatty for the moment.

Master Chief Petty Officer HONEA. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. The—yes, if we can continue, Sergeant Major.

Sergeant Major RUIZ. Yes, ma'am. Similar, very similar to Sergeant Major of the Army and MCPON, Ranking Member, we also use that funding to hire oversight folks. So a little—118, I think, is the number.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Who are on site?

Sergeant Major RUIZ. Who are on site, ma'am.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Okay.

Sergeant Major RUIZ. We would hire them and then get after their training. So right after their training, and in addition to the third-party inspections also completed, looking to provide a report to my chain of command here, hopefully, this month. I hope that that is—that will be available.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. For those that have those positions in place, have any of you had those positions subject to the civilian or military hiring freeze thus far?

Master Chief Petty Officer HONEA. No, ma'am.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. No?

Sergeant Major RUIZ. No, ma'am.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Okay.

Chief Master Sergeant FLOSI. Ma'am.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Chief.

Chief Master Sergeant FLOSI. For our department, that—I don't believe that is a categorical exemption. But we haven't seen any negative impact from the hiring freeze to report to you today.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. But some have been frozen?

Chief Master Sergeant FLOSI. Yes, ma'am. If we have a vacant position, it is not exempt from the hiring freeze.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Okay.

Chief Master Sergeant BENTIVENGA. I don't know if there is any—but I am not 100 percent sure that we have currently vacant positions that we are trying to hire. I can take that for the record, but I don't know if we have any that would be affected by the hiring freeze.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. But only the openings, not people who are currently serving as far—okay.

Then just with your indulgence, Mr. Chairman, I think we will probably only have one round, and I do want to ask about sexual assault because we can't address quality of life without discussing that scourge. The services have all made an effort to address the issue, and we know that a lot more progress needs to be made.

The 2023 DoD Annual Report on Sexual Assault found a decrease in the number of sexual assault reports of 5 percent across services from 2022. The 2023 DoD Workplace and Gender Relations Report estimates 29,000 service members experienced unwanted sexual conduct in 2023. That represented a decrease from the last report in 2021, which included an 8.4 percent drop for women in the active duty force.

But there was one outside estimate done by the Costs of War Project at Brown University that estimated the real prevalence of assaults was over 73,000 in 2023. That is a pretty major discrepancy. The number of reported assaults combined with the DoD prevalence data suggest a reporting rate of about one in four service members who reported their assault to DoD officials.

I asked you all last year whether changes in the number of reported sexual assaults reflect a true change in the number of assaults, or whether those changes represent a—changes in service members' trust in the system and comfort level with reporting assaults. So if you can each tell me what steps you and your service have taken since last year to improve your insight into the sexual assault statistics collected, and what more needs to be done so that we can know that there is trust in the system of reporting and that we reduce the actual sexual assaults.

Sergeant Major WEIMER. Thank you, Ranking Member, for that. Quickly—and I appreciate the discussion in—we had in your office—

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Yes, thank you.

Sergeant Major WEIMER [continuing]. About this subject. Frankly, it is a little better, but it is not good enough. As a matter of fact, I think this is one of those forever things, much like suicide, that we will battle forever—

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Right.

Sergeant Major WEIMER [continuing]. Unfortunately, but it is worth it.

So our team has taken a deep dive into the Costs of War Brown survey. Our Workplace and Gender Relations Survey, that is an every two-year survey. There is some pretty consistent reporting there over time. I don't want to debate the methodology behind the Brown, but we are deep diving that and—after our discussion.

Right now we do see some differences in how they are comparing data, but that is like statistics. We are doing a deeper dive on that because, again, to your point, if there is some there there [sic], we need to know about it.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Right.

Sergeant Major WEIMER. So that is our commitment.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you.

Sergeant Major WEIMER. Based off that.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you.

Master Chief.

Master Chief Petty Officer HONEA. Ranking Member, I would also like to thank you for your efforts in this space. Yourself and the Chairman have provided us the necessary appropriations to hire our integrated primary prevention workforce which has been those folks that are on the ground helping us better understand and solve some of our more complex issues in this space.

I would echo everything that Sergeant Major of the Army had to say in regards to the Brown report, and I would encourage any member that would look to have a greater understanding of this problem to have a briefing from our DoD SAPRO. I had a really, really great conversation with him about all the data and the analytics behind that data to give me a lot better trust and confidence in all the things that we are doing at the DoD level as across our—as well as across our Navy service.

So in the service we really focus on character development to make sure that we are building better people, better leaders, and better teams. Then through that we create the right climates and cultures with which we don't have those behaviors across that culture of harm that allow for those kind of bad actors to exist with inside our commands.

The DoD helps us with the Defense Equal Opportunity Climate Surveys that ask all the right questions of our service members to get a better understanding of the trust, the connections, and the protective factors with—inside every command at every installation.

When we recognize that there are problems, the DoD sends a team out to look into those—at those installations, with an on-site installation evaluation to determine where we have problems in the services and need to solve what some of those problems might be. Primarily we are doing that, as I said, through leadership or through the integrated primary prevention workforce.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you.

Sergeant Major.

Sergeant Major RUIZ. Ranking Member, thank you for that. This is—I think it was this time last year I came to see you, and you challenged me, and I took that personally, and I am here to tell you that I concur. It is not good enough still in 2024.

We really got after this in very different ways, I think. Using data, to your point, in our commanders course, in the way that we teach our command senior enlisted leaders before they take command, understanding the data in the command that they are stepping into and what they can do with the resources available, and the prevention folks that we have hired to get after, in their own way, in their own location, a base, a station throughout the force.

This is why my initial opening comments about Marine Corps Total Fitness is so important to me, because it is about culture. It is about developing and strengthening those protective factors that we need to inject into our young people. Just because they graduate boot camp doesn't mean that they are done. We must continue to get after the development of the force.

So I look forward to keep working with you. In 2024 we did some symposiums, forums, summits. We have not stopped getting after this issue, ma'am, and we won't.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you.

Chief.

Chief Master Sergeant FLOSI. Ranking Member, thank you for the question.

We continue to focus on this, and much like my colleagues, we are unsatisfied with any report of sexual assault or harassment in our service. It is counter to our culture and what we expect of all Airmen in the profession of arms.

We have worked really hard, and we discussed this with you last year about prevention is way better than response. We want to get to the left of this problem. So we have—we established contracts across the Air Force and late last year in 2024 to modernize our prevention response training. It is updated based off of peer-reviewed research on current policies, protocols, and strategies tailored to the different leadership levels that exist across the workforce so we can identify concerning behaviors or emerging problems before it turns into a crisis.

We have worked on our training and expanding our course evaluation measures across the enterprise, including, kind of like Sergeant Major mentioned, not just in basic training or our session pipelines, independent of how you joined the Air Force, but through our professional military education (PME) for both officer and enlisted. So across the entire spectrum we are launching out that new training through our PME spectrum through 2025.

We are also focused on cyber harassment and technology facilitated sexual assault and harassment, a relatively emerging concern. But we want to ensure we have got that addressed in our training, as well. So we are really focused on the prevention aspects of this.

We too have the integrated and primary prevention workforce effort underway. We have got over 1,000 people assigned to our installations across the Air Force already specifically focused on integrated resilience, primary prevention, sexual assault response. We are on track by fiscal year 2027 to fill 100 percent of those billets across the Air Force as we grow out that requirement that came about from the Independent Review Commission.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you very much.

Chief Master Sergeant FLOSI. We are continuing to focus on it, ma'am. We appreciate your continued advocacy, as well.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you so much.

Chief Master Sergeant BENTIVENGA. Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, thank you for the question, and we spoke about this last week when we had the chance to talk.

You know, a lot of the initiatives that Chief Flosi talked about are Department of the Air Force initiatives that include both the Air Force and the Space Force. To the integrated primary prevention policy workforce, I think we are over 80 percent staffed right now, and we are working towards that. But, of course, those professionals that are able to do that, the market is really tight to be able to get the right people. I think that was a lot of the discussion is making sure that we have the right individuals with the right training who can help lead the service out of this scourge which is sexual assault. I think we all can agree, right, this has no place

in our society. Most importantly, has no place in the one percent of men and women who serve their nation to do that.

We have made a lot of strides, you know, from a Space Force perspective, and we talked about this last week. You know, for the Workplace and Gender Relations Survey, 2023 was the first time that the Space Force was separately broken out. So we did get some data from that.

One of the things that was kind of heartening that I think is a good sign was that the percentage of individuals who have faith in their local leadership, who understand—that feel that they are confident that they can talk to someone and say, you know, I am being harassed, or I was assaulted, or they feel safe at the workplace was above the average across the services. But that was just one data point.

You know, we look forward to other workforce surveys to make sure that we are trending in the right direction, but it is about making sure that this is not just a training challenge, this is a leadership responsibility. Most of us, we said that, you know, this kind of training is integrated at all levels, echelons of development. But particularly at the leadership level, whether it be squadron commanders courses, senior leader courses—excuse me—to understand that they are responsible for the culture in which they allow and which they create within their organizations.

I think, beyond just training, saying that we have checked the box and we have training that we are getting after it, it is holding these leaders at every echelon accountable for the culture and the climate that they are creating to make sure our service members feel safe and are safe.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will yield back so that we don't have a mutiny. [Laughter.]

Thank you.

Mr. CARTER. Mr. Rutherford.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First, I want to thank all of you here this afternoon for your partnership, your responsiveness, your openness with me and my office. Thank you all for that. It has been interesting meeting with all of you.

Chief Master Sergeant Bentivenga, I want to ask about STARCOM. Space Training and Readiness Command exists, I understand, to prepare combat-ready space forces through the deliberate development, education, and training of space professionals; develop that space warfighting doctrine, the tactics, techniques and procedures; and the tested evaluation of your capabilities.

Now, I understand that in 2024 Space Launch Delta 45 actually set the pace for space, as you all say, and was actually the world's busiest spaceport with 93 launches. That is amazing. So can you speak a little bit to the strategic importance of STARCOM, that fact that we just mentioned, and relocating STARCOM's headquarters to Florida and the quality of life investments that Space Force needs to make investments in to make sure that we not only get those professionals in, but then we retain them as well?

Chief Master Sergeant BENTIVENGA. Yes. Thank you, Congressman, I appreciate it.

Yes, 93 launches out of the 45th Space Launch Delta, and this year we are going to break 100. That is what we are going to do. This adds to my opening comments about just how busy the space domain has become, you know, when you talk about the number of launches out of the east coast range that we have there.

But STARCOM, Space Training and Readiness Command, you know, as a strategic initiative, moving it to Patrick, you know, one of only three field commands that we have, and responsible for not only basic military training and assessments for officers, but the technical training, the development, the exercises, the simulation, the modeling, the doctrine is extremely important to the service, especially a little over five years into our journey.

So partnering and having a basing decision to send it to Patrick Space Force Base and kind of join the space community that is in Florida is extremely strategic and important for us. There is a huge modeling and simulation community that is there, University of Central Florida. Also the National Training and Simulation Association is in the area. But in addition to that we have the Joint Services warfighting and training community there, as well. The Air Force Agency for Modeling and Simulation is there. The Naval Air Warfare Center for Training Systems Division is there, and Army Futures Command also has their synthetic training environment, all located within an area.

So our decision and—you know, to kind of put it down there is because of the importance of training and developing future Guardians for the fight and for what the nation demands of us is going to take us to leverage the relationships not only with the other departments, with academia, but also with the local community. You know, especially when you talk about right outside within Florida, Space Coast Florida, as well, but very amenable and want to make sure they embrace the men and women who are coming down there.

The ADVON team that is there right now, part of Delta 10, is about 57 personnel. But this summer, as we start to make some moves, we are hoping to expand to about 144 personnel to stand a flag-up, if you will. But in a few years we are hoping to have almost 500 personnel, professionals that are there building a foundation for STARCOM as we need it.

The other importance of this decision and move is to allow Space Training and Readiness Command to start to invest in the talent, especially on the civilian side, now that they know they have a location where they can move their families to, they can start to build a relationship with the Space Force, but also build a relationship with their community. That is why that move is extremely important because, to your point, in order for us to attract and retain the talent that the nation has to offer, we have to offer them world-class training and prepare them for the high-end fight. That is the job of STARCOM, and we are excited about the move to Florida this year.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Listen, I will tell you, you mentioned the synergy that that all creates, what is going on in central Florida. I know the ranking member is very well on that, too—very well aware of that, too. It is an amazing opportunity, and look forward to that.

Master Chief Petty Officer Honea, if I could talk to you, we talked a little bit about some of the TRICARE issues. On January 1 of 2025, TRICARE implemented its new regional contracts. This kind of goes back to the contract issue that the ranking member brought up about making sure we have good contracts. This one is known as T5, and it is with—Humana Military is the contractor for the eastern region, and Triwest Healthcare Alliance for the western region.

In northeast Florida, where we have both—you mentioned Mayport Naval Base, and we also have Naval Air Station Jacksonville, which is the Fleet Readiness Center Southeast. So we have a lot of use for TRICARE in Jacksonville. That contract, as I said, began on January 21. Our family members there in Jacksonville deserve to have these providers, outside providers, available. But when I see providers not being paid by Defense Health Agency (DHA), myself and Congressman Bean sent a joint letter to DHA, you know, trying to get to the bottom of what is going on with these payments. When we have got providers—one is, I think, \$100,000 upside down with DHA—we potentially could lose some of these providers that our men and women need.

So can you talk a little bit about how that can affect the readiness?

Also, how can we improve TRICARE's relationship with these investors or providers?

How do we write better contracts so we can force these guys to pay their bills on time?

Master Chief Petty Officer HONEA. Congressman Rutherford, I certainly could not speak to the contract negotiation that was assigned by the Defense Health Agency and their leadership. But I can speak to, exactly as you are just describing, what those effects are to our people that are utilizing those services. Just as you described, as well as I described in my opening statement, that I have found many places where TRICARE is a low bill payer. So we are having difficulty attracting new TRICARE beneficiaries—excuse me, providers—for our beneficiaries, as well as I have taken a number of complaints from those providers in that they are not being reimbursed on time.

Defense Health Agency, to their credit, you know, have worked diligently with me, with their contract to have those bills paid as quickly as possible.

But as we are continuing through this transformation we are finding more and more places that were challenged with healthcare providers, and that is not just something that is unique to us with—inside the military service. That is—everybody in our country is challenged with that, the difference being is that your sailors, your soldiers, Airmen, Marines, Guardians, and their families, we don't choose where we get assigned.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Right.

Master Chief Petty Officer HONEA. We are going to get orders for the Jacksonville area, and we are going to depend on the military health system or the extended health network outside our fence lines to see to our health care needs. When that can't happen, that is going to have detrimental effects to our family and to our family readiness, and possibly even to our military readiness—

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Yes, exactly.

Master Chief Petty Officer HONEA [continuing]. Especially if we end up having to spend military readiness dollars toward making that account whole and seeing to those benefits which are challenges that we are faced with today, sir.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Thank you very much. I would love to be able to tell you what DHS-DHA's response is, but we haven't heard back from them yet.

I yield back. I see my time is up.

Mr. CARTER. Mr. Bishop.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you very much, Chairman Carter, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz. Let me thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing.

A warm welcome to each of our esteemed witnesses, and I express my gratitude for your service to our nation. Your testimonies are invaluable for the decision-making that we have to do in safeguarding the welfare of our soldiers and their families and our national security. Although a question may be directed to one of you, I welcome input from all of you with respect to the questions that I ask if you would like to comment.

Last year Congress worked with the Quality of Life Panel to approve and authorize a well-deserved pay increase for the servicemen, specifically the junior service members. But it seems that we failed to adequately review the resources that the service members use for essential services such as childcare and food programs. The pay increase moved these service members into higher pay bands, specifically for childcare, and it made them ineligible for SNAP or WIC programs, essentially canceling out the good intentions of the pay increase.

Sergeant Major Ruiz, how are you tracking throughout your respective service the second and third-order effects of the pay raise, considering that the service is provided based on household income? I am most interested in child care and food assistance programs.

Sergeant Major RUIZ. Congressman, thank you for that question.

So April 1 was the first time that young Devil Dogs got a little extra on their paycheck, and greatly appreciate that. They appreciate you for pushing that so hard.

What I would say is that we are watching it closely. Initially, via the numbers, the data tells us that without any change, maybe another spousal—different kind of employment or they get promoted again today, they would not climb no more than one bracket up towards the child care fees. That is what I have so far, sir. But as I watch this closely, I will come back to you to see if those unintended consequences are more severe than climbing up one more.

I would imagine that for E6s and above, that the pay raise for them, just their annual increase, would likely jump them a little more because the pay increase is a little more substantial. So—but I will keep an eye on that, sir, and then I will give it to my teammates to see if anyone else has anything else.

Mr. BISHOP. Yes, sir.

Chief Master Sergeant FLOSI. Thank you, Congressman. I would like to also add we have the ability at the installation level to adjust those fees if there is a need. So while we are not terribly con-

cerned with the potential to increase one bracket, it looks like it is a small number per month, under \$50 per family. So it should not completely negate a pay increase. But if a family member, a service member and their family demonstrates a financial need through their chain of command, the local installation level command can adjust those fees. They have that authority to offset any financial crisis that may exist in some acute situation locally.

Mr. BISHOP. Yes, we worry about the stigma or the reluctance of a member to actually approach the command with that.

Let me shift gears for a moment. I address this to, first, Sergeant Major Weimer.

In your testimony last year you stated that “not receiving predictable Federal funding and pay because of continuing resolutions exacerbates ongoing issues”. Add on top of this the uncertainty within the Federal workforce that often places organizations that provide critical care for our service members and their families [sic]. What is the impact on care funding or services in support of our military families and their families in light of the CR and the Federal workforce cuts?

Do you anticipate—or how are you working to mitigate the additional burden on service members and their families because of a workforce drawdown?

Are there any barracks or housing, child care centers, or other projects that provide specific care to our families, or that will be placed on hold or delayed due to a CR, the CR?

Each of you can address that, if you can.

Sergeant Major WEIMER. Congressman, thank you for that, and it is good to see you, and sorry we couldn't get our schedules to marry up here in the last couple of weeks.

So first off, I definitely have to say thank you for the—the 12-month CR is a little bit new territory for us, but we are grateful for some of the new start reprogramming, the—some of the above-threshold authority. But it is new territory for us. I don't know exactly how it is going to affect everything. We are not firing up star clusters right now on current projects. As far as some of the quality of life piece on the employee side, we are we are happy to report that our NAF employees have all been granted exceptions, and so we are hiring CDC employees. We have covered most of our medical folks. We do have some folks in our holistic health and fitness that we are sharing all our lessons learned with our Marine Corps teammates. We do have some freeze on some of our nutritionists and physical therapists, and so we are kind of in a hold. But we have been able to work well with OSD right now on the exceptions to get those people in there.

I would say, first and foremost, anything that affects quality of life has been one of the things we have been asking for a waiver for first. Our Director of Public Works, DPW, as you have heard us talk about it numerous times, we are short quite a few people there, and that is currently frozen. So that is another one that we are trying to understand how that affects our infrastructure and quality of life.

Mr. BISHOP. Sir.

Master Chief Petty Officer HONEA. Congressman Bishop, similarly, as the sergeant major of the Army stated, the majority of our

quality of life employees are non-appropriated fund employees, and we are not having any issues with hiring or losing any of those employees, and it is not going to have any effect on any of those programs.

Now, the loss of fiscal year 2025 budget and CR, that did have a lot of effects on us. That is going to be—you know, we are not putting shovels in the ground to build new barracks, we are not putting shovels in the ground to build new CDCs, all those things that, as Chairman Carter mentioned at the beginning, that you all did the hard work for in appropriations and sending us that money, we are not getting any of that work done this year.

Hopefully we will find good money in 2026 to get after all those projects.

Sergeant Major RUIZ. Congressman, for the Corps I think I will start with six years ago Commandant Berger started the division of Force Design 2030. So six years ago we started the process of getting really light already, and getting after the platforms and things and the formations that we think are going to be needed for the future fight, and so we—that included our civilian infrastructure. So we are going to watch it closely.

Yes, it affects—although I was able to hire a few, a little over 200 barracks managers, I won't be able to hire additional ones any time soon, and that is critical to maintaining the barracks that I have been able to refurbish. The ones that are hanging on by a thin thread, I won't have that so a Marine is instead in place, getting after the maintenance of a barracks instead of doing what they were assigned to do.

I think in the recruiting and the accession pipeline, I would be concerned if the civilians that are assisting in the MEPS, in the processing of a young civilian into a Marine or any service members, if they are not there I am afraid that it would slow it down, the throughput, and the momentum that we gained in the last couple of years will be greatly reduced. So hopefully we get after those exceptions there.

Chief Master Sergeant FLOSI. Thank you, Congressman. This year—I will echo the sergeant major of the Army. We are thankful for a year-long CR, I guess, only to a government shutdown. So it is not a great option, but it is better than shutting down. So we are thankful that we have got that process in place. But it is not ideal for stability and planning, especially in our major defense acquisition programs, which I know aren't the major topic here.

But as the CR relates to 2025 across the Air Force, that is where we saw the biggest—we have got a \$3 billion top line disconnect that we have to close based off of the CR compared to the President's budget, and that—a large part of that is in research, development, test, and evaluation. We have got some military personnel (MILPERS) concerns that we are working very hard to protect, particularly in recruiting and accession pipelines. We believe—and we are on track today to meet our recruiting goals for fiscal year 2025, and we are going to protect that at nearly all costs.

There is the potential that it could have some negative effects on some of our rotational forces, permanent change of station and things like that. But we have got to protect our ability to access the best Americans that we—

Mr. BISHOP. The CR compromises that?

Chief Master Sergeant FLOSI. The CR puts at risk a percentage of the MILPERS budget that we have to close. It doesn't specifically help us in any of those areas. So it then comes to the Defense Department to mitigate—

Mr. BISHOP. If it doesn't help, does it hurt?

Chief Master Sergeant FLOSI. It is—CRs are unhelpful, sir, in general. [Laughter.]

Mr. BISHOP. Do they hurt or they help?

Chief Master Sergeant FLOSI. We are working hard to protect those foundational parts of building our pipeline.

Mr. BISHOP. Yes, sir.

Chief Master Sergeant FLOSI. We have—we are very thankful for our congressional plus-up we got in the previous fiscal year to robust and grow our recruiting pipeline to the tune of nearly 500 new recruiters across the Air Force, and what we don't want to lose is that momentum. So today we have got the most—we have got the largest delayed enlistment program. Basically, they are young Americans that are waiting to come into the Air Force. So we put them into this thing called the Delayed Entry Program (DEP). Our DEP numbers are as big as they have been in over a decade. We do not want to lose momentum there. It is critical to our ability to execute the national defense strategy.

Mr. BISHOP. You are very diplomatic.

Yes, sir.

Chief Master Sergeant FLOSI. I get paid to execute the decisions you make.

Chief Master Sergeant BENTIVENGA. Congressman, thanks for the question. As I said in my opening comment, unfortunately, living under a CR is, you know—over 51 percent of the time as the service has been in existence, we have been under a CR.

But specifically to your question, in 2025, especially when it comes to quality of life, like, there were improvements supposed to be made at the Peterson—one of the Peterson child development centers, one at Patrick. In 2025 we are looking for money to start design phase, put money against that. We are also supposed to start doing design work on dorm improvements at Buckley Space Force Base.

As we are working through the reprogramming for the budget for 2025, you know, these are all things that could be put at risk. This is why the stability of funding is so important to the planning phase to execute, especially when it comes to quality of life initiatives, to make sure we stay on time, on target, to deliver that quality of life to our service members.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you.

With that I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CARTER. Mr. Guest.

Mr. GUEST. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Gentlemen, thank you first for your service; thank you for joining us today for this important oversight hearing.

Master Chief Honea, Sergeant Major Ruiz, I am proud to represent the Meridian Naval Air Station. Sergeant Major Ruiz, I understand that you have recently visited the Meridian Naval Air Station, that the base—it has both a Navy and Marine mission.

Last year in the fiscal year 2025 budget hearing I raised the fact that there was an important barrack repair project there on the facility, and proud to say that, based upon calling attention to that, the project has been moved up into the fiscal year 2026 budget cycle. Planning is already underway for that.

So my question is not just for the project there at the Meridian Naval Air Station, but for all of our military installations. How do we ensure that the throughput of students at those facilities is not adversely impacted during times of major repairs, during times of renovation, particularly where we have facilities where things such as temporary housing, modular structure, the renovation of other buildings are not either able to take place or not able to take place easily?

I just wanted to get from both of you your thoughts on, again, making sure that we are not throttling the throughput of students during these times of major renovations or repairs.

Sergeant Major RUIZ. Congressman, yes, thank you for that. I did visit down there, and I absolutely loved it, and I loved it because it doesn't—I am just never—I guess I am just tired. I am not going to be surprised anymore of what Marines can do with so little, really. They just really get after it.

Although this is a Navy project, we are working very close with our shipmates to ensure that those buildings get refurbished. What I would hope, like we have in other places, is that we have the ability today to not just stop the entire building from being lived on, but wing by wing we are able to work by refurbishing room by room, and therefore reducing the stress on the Marines, moving them to an even worse place while the entire barracks gets rebuilt. I have seen it done in Camp Lejeune, I have seen other places where the modular structures come into play, and we move Marines there while we do the entire building.

So I will work closely with our Navy shipmates here to ensure that hopefully we are able to do that so we don't lose track and momentum on those young folks who we desperately need in the fleet Marine forces today. Those gaps are real, and we are not any less busier than we ever have been before. So the faster I can get into my formations, the better we can get after warfighting.

Mr. GUEST. Master Chief.

Master Chief Petty Officer HONEA. Congressman Guest, so we use data and analytics to help us solve our recruiting problems. We will continue to use data and analytics and mitigations to make sure we are getting all those people as we recruit through recruit training command, and then pushed on through the rest of their accession training.

So Naval Education and Training Command has used data and analytics to understand what that throughput needs to be, where we need to increase capacity in those schoolhouses, and increase capacity in their living accommodations, anything necessary so that we do not end up with a bottleneck. Wherever they find problems, we come up with mitigation strategies. Such as Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps was explaining, if we need to we will move over into other facilities, we will take over permanent party housing, if necessary, and move permanent party personnel to another location where we have to make sure that we accommodate our ac-

cession training and we don't end up with a bottleneck. You know, back to Sergeant Major's point, so we get them back out to the fleet as quickly as we can.

Mr. GUEST. Yes, sir. Last question for you, Sergeant Major. The Marine Corps has the Barrack 2030 initiative. One, I just want to ask if you can just generally talk about that initiative, and then also—and a little bit more in-depth—talk about how the Marine Corps is working with Navy leadership to improve housing that may not be necessarily on a Marine Corps installation, but where Marines are being housed at Navy installations.

So I will ask you if you wouldn't mind answering that question, and then once I have that answer, Mr. Chairman, I will yield back.

Sergeant Major RUIZ. Congressman, thank you for that. Barracks 2030 is the commandant's vision. Although it is labeled "barracks," sir, it is about infrastructure, and it is about—I think what the GA report did for us is we were able to start from a place of data that I know exactly where in the globe I need to put the funding that we get from you and use it effectively and more efficiently.

So, because we know exactly our problem areas and we can more intelligently put it to work in—anywhere that Marines live, we work hand in hand with our Army buddies or—it doesn't matter because the senior enlisted leader and the commander of those spaces, they are responsible. So they get after ensuring that the overall well-being of those service members under their command—it does not matter what uniform they wear, because from that it produces a better version of that soldier, Airman, whatever, you have it, because all of us are in one team, sir.

Mr. CARTER. Ms. Escobar.

Ms. ESCOBAR. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman and Madam Ranking Member, for this hearing.

Gentlemen, thank you so much for your service. Thanks for the time you took last week to visit with me and others. I have the—have had the incredible privilege of serving on the House Armed Services Committee, and serving on that committee's quality of life panel. Many of you came before us last year to talk about quality of life, and I am privileged to be on this committee and this subcommittee to be able to take all of those lessons learned and apply them on the MILCON side.

I also want to say I have the incredible privilege of representing Fort Bliss, which is one of our nation's premier military installations. Working with leadership there over my three—now my fourth—term in Congress has been the highlight of my service. So I am grateful to all of you for your leadership, as well and everything that you do to help inform our decisions.

I have been really alarmed by the mass firings, deep cuts to personnel, but also the year-long CR, which has a direct impact on our nation's military, on leadership's ability to plan ahead, on—the impact it has on our contractors who depend on their ability to plan for the future and to have some stability. I really hope that Congress understands the negative impact on our military every time there is a CR. So I just wanted to get that off my chest. Thank you for allowing me.

I am going to focus on the Army. So Sergeant Major Weimer, you and I had a great conversation. We—as we talk about our MILCON

obligations, and the backlog, and the incredible need that leaders like you relay to us, we have to figure out better ways to stretch the dollar and be more efficient with the funding that we provide.

There was a mention a few minutes ago about data. Data is so important, and I can tell you some of the data that I have seen locally. When we look at MILCON investments at Fort Bliss and we compare them to non-MILCON investments, but regular investments, either via the university for housing and compare that to military housing or local government's investment in health care building hospitals versus what the Federal side spends on building hospitals, there is a real opportunity for us to find more efficiency.

The data I have seen demonstrates that we are spending up to five times more money through Federal spending on similar infrastructure projects than what local governments are spending. So there is great opportunity for us to do more and to learn from that and to be innovative.

Sergeant Major, you and I talked specifically about integrating intergovernmental service agreements for major military construction, scaling up privatized barracks construction, land lease for industry to facilitate construction of non-military facilities like child care development centers or administrative office buildings. We also know on Fort Bliss really cool, innovative projects like 3D printed barracks—we really have a great opportunity here.

Sergeant Major, can you speak to the utility of implementing more creative mechanisms to meet our military construction needs, especially at mobilization force generation installations like Fort Bliss?

Sergeant Major WEIMER. Yes, Congresswoman, let me look at that clock real quick. There is a lot there. Thank you for the meeting we had. It was fantastic. I really do appreciate your energy and others' energy when it comes to helping us find creative solutions during things like CR—there, I said it, I can get it out of the way—but also where we are with our MILCON and MILCON reform that we really do need some assistance with.

Like any good organization, we have to look internally ourselves first, right? We can't just immediately ask for legislation assistance, although there is some space there where we could use some help. But we also have to look at, like, our own force protection. We have added some crazy force protection measures that are a bit legacy, in my opinion, and others before we closed off our installations. But we are still paying for those additional costs.

Some of our construction costs increased 50 percent. Every state is a little bit different. I don't really want to talk labor laws in agreements, but that is a factor in this also. We can't even get construction workers onto the installations because of their Federal records, and so they are continually changing the construction workers, and so you have delays. I could go on and on.

But the—but I guess I would like to say creative solutions are fantastic, and we are never going to stop working with you and anyone else that is willing to help us and the Corps of Engineers in that space. But really, a lot of those are Band-Aids in—I think, to true MILCON reform. So I would love to work with you on this in the future.

Ms. ESCOBAR. Count on it. That will be a priority for me. It is a priority for me. Not just Army, but across service lines, because as we see budget constraints going forward and we compare those constraints to the needs and the demands, the people who pay the price for our inability to be creative and thoughtful and strategic in terms of our reforms and our creative approaches, it is those families who end up living in sub-par conditions or are active duty service members who have to deal with the inadequate responses.

So I have—when I spoke with each and every one of you, I mentioned that as a priority. That is something I am—my team and I are really going to dig into. I really appreciate your collaboration. Again, I appreciate your time today and your service to our nation. I yield back.

Mr. CARTER. Ms. Bice.

Mrs. BICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, gentlemen, for being with us this afternoon.

I keep hearing the phrase from my military friends, “on time and on target. Well, my time is only five minutes, so if you could keep your answers fairly short, that would be really helpful to be respectful of my colleagues who still have questions they would like to ask.

Master Chief, I want to start with you. My colleague and I—Chrissy Houlahan—worked to extend parental leave for our service members, and we realized that sometimes it is a challenge for our service members to be able to take that leave within a one-year timeframe. We are looking to extend that to a two-year timeframe. Could you talk a little bit about the benefit that your service members could have by extending that time, and how it would be easier for you to manage the workflow?

Master Chief Petty Officer HONEA. Congresswoman, I appreciate the question, but I really appreciate your willingness to engage into this conversation, because I do believe that if we could expand that to two years or have some conversation, we could figure out how to get there. It would be extremely beneficial. It is very challenging for someone to execute parental leave on top of their normal leave that they accrue through a year, all with—inside that one year.

Mrs. BICE. So that flexibility would be helpful to you.

Master Chief Petty Officer HONEA. It would be extremely helpful. There you go. I will be succinct. Thank you.

Mrs. BICE. Thank you.

Does everyone agree with that, that the two-year timeframe would be helpful to being able to manage that workflow? I see a lot of heads nodding. Thank you for that.

I want to say Chief Master Flosi, thank you for the phone call. We had a great conversation. We talked a lot about infrastructure. One of the things that you alerted me to was that you have a lot of buildings that are currently vacant—1,200, to be exact, is that correct?

Chief Master Sergeant FLOSI. Yes, Congresswoman, that is correct.

Mrs. BICE. My understanding is that the DoD demolition budget is \$75 million for all of the branches. Is that correct?

Chief Master Sergeant FLOSI. Ma’am, that sounds accurate.

Mrs. BICE. Do all of the branches have—maybe not Space Force, since they are fairly new, but do all of you have buildings that are currently vacant that you would like to have as part of a demolition project, but cannot because the funding is not there?

Sergeant Major WEIMER. We do—

Mrs. BICE. Sergeant Major.

Sergeant Major WEIMER. We do, Congresswoman.

Sergeant Major RUIZ. Yes, ma'am.

Mrs. BICE. Yes. I think that we need to highlight that because what happens is—it was mentioned earlier—there is a 10-to-1 return on investment for demolishing these buildings. It is taking, I believe, resources away from your branches to be able to upkeep these facilities so that you can actually perform your missions. I want to encourage our folks that we are—when we are looking at our appropriations package to potentially increase that so that we can raze some of these buildings, take the workload off of your plates, and allow us to continue to really focus on the mission at hand.

Let me pivot slightly. Chief Master Sergeant Flosi and/or Master Chief Honea, you talked a little bit about child care, and that is something that I know I have been interested in. I had the opportunity to do a bipartisan sort of swap with my colleague, Sara Jacobs, from San Diego. There were two things that really were eye-opening to me in visiting her district, and that is it is expensive to live in San Diego if you are a service member and there was virtually no child care opportunities for those service members that are living on base.

Can you talk a little bit about—you talked—you mentioned in your testimony that the—you had the highest number of, you know, sort of individuals that are using child care services on naval installations currently. We need to continue to work at that. But is there something different that you have done to get those numbers up?

Then if Chief Master Flosi wants to expand on that.

Master Chief Petty Officer HONEA. Congresswoman, yes.

One of the things that we have done to really draw down on our wait list besides building the facilities and staffing them, is that we really are encouraging the use of fee assistance and allowing our service members to find adequate child care in the community so that we are not continually fighting with the local community for the same staffing. That has quickly alleviated a lot of our wait list, and it has helped us solve this problem much quicker.

Mrs. BICE. Perfect. Chief Master—

Chief Master Sergeant FLOSI. Thank you, ma'am.

Similar in the Air Force, we have, first of all, improved staffing, which is really one of our constraints. Sometimes it is not a capacity problem with infrastructure, it is staffing. We have gone from 72 percent to 86 percent staffed across the Air Force in the last 3 fiscal years, and due in no small part to some of the reimbursement incentives that we are able to offer.

Now all employees—it used to be direct care only, but we have a 100 percent reimbursement rate for child care for a dependent of one of our employees in child care facilities. So that is great. I think we are implementing that across all services now.

The community-based child care fee assistance, we have got 7.8 thousand children enrolled in those community-based fee assistance, which is a great force multiplier for us, and it is win-win for our local communities, where we can help with the local economy by supporting the local economies in which our Airmen live and work, and it also—that fee assistance to the tune for the Air Force is around \$33 million last year. So providing that incentive provides our Airmen the ability to seek quality care that is equivalent to on base when we do have constraints with our child development centers (CDC). It has been really helpful.

We have over 400 homes in the family child care program, and our Air Force offsets the fees and certification process for service members' families to get certified to watch children in their own home. So another win-win with spousal employment——

Mrs. BICE. Yes.

Chief Master Sergeant FLOSI [continuing]. As well as child care for your own family, primary care provider keeping their family in. It helps with our 24/7 mission for our Airmen that work off-duty hours.

Mrs. BICE. Thank you for that. I appreciate your succinct comments.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield.

Chief Master Sergeant FLOSI. Thanks, ma'am.

Mr. CARTER. Thank you, Mrs. Bice, a good demonstration of how this should have been run.

Mrs. BICE. Thank you. [Laughter.]

Mr. CARTER. Mr. Levin.

Mr. LEVIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to everyone.

I particularly want to thank our Marines and sailors. I have the great honor to represent Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton. I have visited, and I am very grateful for all the leadership on base. There is a lot of progress being made with limited resources, but still far too many of the barracks are run down, they need a lot of help, and we want to do all we can to help as part of the Barracks 2030 initiative. You certainly have my commitment to do that for as long as I have the honor to serve, to do everything we can for—they don't call it quality of life, they say "operational necessity, which I think is right. Call it readiness, call it, you know, whatever we need to get the job done to make sure that people have a clean and safe place to live.

I wanted to ask about rising costs in the context of the Barracks 2030 initiative, specifically things like construction costs. Sergeant Major Ruiz, thank you for the time that you spent with me the other day. To what extent, you know, as the construction costs have gone up, does that change the approach of the Marine Corps?

Do you, you know, have to focus on, you know, only implementing part of Barracks 2030, as opposed to the original plan?

Can you comment more on the impact of construction costs?

Sergeant Major RUIZ. Sir, thank you for your time earlier in the week. Absolutely.

I think what I will say is that we labeled it Barracks 2030 because we were in a hurry, right, at the beginning of our commandant's tenure to get after getting our infrastructure correct. Now, as the budgets develop, we—it may slip, right? So although

this was never to be a one-fit-up issue—we can get things up and running in one fit-up—it is a multiple-year, multiple fit-up endeavor. The Marines that are serving today may not likely ever see a brand new building go up in the first contract of their service.

So, to the credit of our commandant, even through these budget conversations he continues to tell the leadership that we will find the money, and we will invest into the operational need of getting after the responsibility we have to house the Marines in a manner that is deserving their excellence, sir.

Mr. LEVIN. Thank you, Sergeant Major. I was told, as I mentioned to you, just on Camp Pendleton over 120 buildings, roughly half of them need to be completely redone or torn down altogether at a cost of over \$1.2 billion. This is for one base.

So a question for any of you: Have any of you done any sort of analysis on the impact—I am going to use the T word—of tariffs on construction costs as it pertains to your plans?

No? Nobody? Nobody.

Sergeant Major WEIMER. I would say the Corps of Engineers, I know, has been paying attention to this. I mean, I won't speak for them, but I will say we are taking a look at this. It does affect every one of our projects in the sense of the availability of product—of equipment for the projects.

Mr. LEVIN. What sorts of stuff do you import that might be more expensive as you look at the portfolio of projects? Is it materials? Is it—just to put a—

Sergeant Major WEIMER. It is a little bit of everything, Congressman. A past one we had, prior to the T word, was solar panels. There were only so many places that we were able to purchase solar panels, and so we had to request an exception or that project was just going to sit and languish and not be completed, and you can imagine a project that has been a multi-year project and we are waiting on solar panels to finish it, close it, and occupy it.

So, I mean, that is one from the past that I am aware of. I don't think we have the analysis for current effects based off tariffs, but I know the Corps is paying attention closely.

Mr. LEVIN. Very good, and hopefully, you are conducting that analysis. I really hope that, as you develop it, that you share it with us. You know, our hope is to be as helpful to you as possible, but we need you to be transparent with us as we seek to help.

The cuts—or the other thing I want to mention, a couple of my colleagues talked about this. So the same question for Sergeant Major Ruiz is, you know, this budget cut, how does that impact the Marine Corps ability just to implement the barracks improvement plans that you have on the books?

What additional resources might you need?

Sergeant Major RUIZ. Yes, sir. As I stated earlier, we began six years ago on a very huge endeavor to transform the Marine Corps. So we got really light. What I would offer now is that it is not just—should the budgets develop in maybe a downward trend, it won't be just barracks and infrastructure, it will be the inability to pay for bonuses, and retention may turn, may be affected because we have incredibly talented Marines in our formations that are needed to stay for the next fight. If they see—they may see that, hey, I have waited my turn to get a bonus because I did what I

was supposed to do, and now I am here as an E5, getting ready to recover a bonus and stay, and it is not available to them. They may decide to walk away.

So although our retention numbers—even this year we are already 100 percent and climbing for the goal of the year. I am not looking to break that momentum, Congressman, and I am looking to have that available in the MILPERS.

Mr. LEVIN. Thank you. I am over time, but I just want to sincerely thank all of you for the work that you are doing. I think all of us on this subcommittee are here to help you in every single way that we can.

So with that I will yield back. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CARTER. Mr. Franklin.

Mr. FRANKLIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you all, gentlemen, for your time here today. I really appreciate the work that you do, you all do, on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of young men and women that are—that put their faith in their leadership, their chain of command to take care of them, and you all do that magnificently.

For the sake of time, I do want to dive a little bit into retention and recruitment. I brought this up in previous hearings in past years. The Army and the Marines—both of our sergeant majors addressed it, so I will—just for the sake of time, I will limit to you two.

But Sergeant Major Ruiz, the Marine Corps, it looks like everything is going very well from what you were just sharing there, but you exceeded your 2024 goals in retention, which, as we know, retention is just as important as bringing them in. If we can't keep them, then we are going to have problems down the line. Then so far, through fiscal year 2025, you are at 98 percent of first-term retention and 108 in subsequent. So it sounds like you have got everything going well. If there is more to that, I would love to come back and hear what still may concern you.

But Sergeant Major Weimer, I want to dive a little bit more into your testimony. You had shared that you had a goal for fiscal year 2024 of 55,000. You all finished the year at 55,150, so you squeaked that one over the goal line, which sounds good. But, you know, on closer look you also shared that the retention was 52,289 for fiscal year 2024. I am not sure what the goal was, but the goal for 2025 is 54,800. So I don't know if you were short of the mark on the retention.

But, you know, there was a Military.com article last month—and I understand it is the press and, trust me, there is a lot of things that the press doesn't always get right, and I see it day to day, but I want to share a little of that and just kind of get your comment on it. The article was titled, "The Army is Losing One Quarter of Soldiers in the First Two Years of Enlistment", so pretty big drop-off after we get them in the door.

They further unpack that, and there is conversation about the pool of eligible recruits out there. We get that. We have had these conversations here before. Only 23 percent of 17 to 24-year-olds are eligible to be—to serve in our military. Only eight percent are eligible for a clean enlistment. That scares the heck out of me, that 92

percent of kids in America couldn't serve in the military, even if they wanted to.

But within the Army last year waivers doubled from 8,400 in 2022 to 17,900 last year, so more than double the waivers. Most of those were medical waivers. I would be interested to hear your thoughts on that. Were these fitness standards? Was it obesity? Are there other underlying conditions? I do—I know that there is a greater ability to find out a recruit's medical history now coming in that we may not have had before if they had lied to you before that you weren't going to find out until it manifested.

But concerning to me, you know, last year there were 1,045 that were recruited that were brought in with misdemeanor waivers but, worse than that, 401 with felony convictions, which was 4 times the amount from 2022. I do appreciate that none of those were for sexual violence. But one question. I am curious what kind of convicted felons are we allowing in, and how do we—and how do you explain that to moms and dads whose sons and daughters are going off to know they are going to be sharing the bunks with convicted felons? That is kind of not what we promise in the recruiting commercials.

But how do we make the argument that we are not lowering standards if we barely squeak by the goal, and we see the number of people who don't meet—haven't traditionally met the standards, or they are bringing in criminals?

So I will stop there and give you a chance to unpack that a little bit for me.

Sergeant Major WEIMER. Thank you. Thank you, Congressman, for that. There is a lot there. I will try to touch on a little bit of all of it.

We met our goal last year. We absolutely did. Future Soldier Prep was an important part of that. But not everybody that goes to Future Soldier Prep passes Future Soldier Prep. I think it is important to understand the standard hasn't changed. Future Soldier Prep gives our sons and daughters—I have to be careful how I say that, it is our sons and daughters—an opportunity to potentially serve. Because based off of—blame COVID, blame something—they just didn't have the propensity that we have had in the past. I don't want to be too accusative there to our sons and daughters, but that has been incredibly successful. But they don't all make it out of Future Soldier Prep. But we do invest in them and then send them home.

To the felony comment—because I want to make sure I don't run out of time on that one—I will take that one for the record.

Mr. FRANKLIN. Okay.

Sergeant Major WEIMER. Because that one is new to me. But Military.com—

Mr. FRANKLIN. Just reporting what was—

Sergeant Major WEIMER [continuing]. Is not new to me.

Mr. FRANKLIN [continuing]. What was in the article.

Sergeant Major WEIMER. That—

Mr. FRANKLIN. But that is what they said. Basically, your felony—

Sergeant Major WEIMER. Yes.

Mr. FRANKLIN [continuing]. It was quadruple what—

Sergeant Major WEIMER. I will take that one, sir.

Mr. FRANKLIN [continuing]. It had been two years before.

Sergeant Major WEIMER. I will take that one. That one stings a little more than the rest of that, because I agree with you, especially with a daughter that will be commissioned here in two years.

This year's mission, just as U.S. Army Recruiting Command says, we are crushing this year. We raised it to 61,000, and we are exceeding where we were last year on goal to surpass our recruiting mission of 61, with potentially one of the largest—delayed entry, just like my Air Force teammate down here—one of the largest delayed entries we have seen in decades. So recruiting is going really well right now.

I will finish with retention. Retention is not about contracts. For us in the Army we met our retention goal of over 114 percent last year. We don't set 100 percent of retention as a goal for us. We set a very specific mission, and then evaluate ourselves. Not all soldiers are going to make it through their first term. That is just statistically factual, decades of data. And—

Mr. FRANKLIN. I have been to captain's mast enough with young sailors to know that, too, so—

Sergeant Major WEIMER. Yes, and it is okay, and all—it is not all by the—it is not always UCMJ that gets young troopers, either. Sometimes it is just the lifestyle in the military is just not for them, and we help them transition out.

But I will say the first and second-year comments in that article, the statistics are no different than anything we have seen in the past.

Mr. FRANKLIN. Okay.

Sergeant Major WEIMER. So it is not a Future Soldier Prep new data point seeing first-time soldiers fail at a higher rate.

Mr. FRANKLIN. All right, I appreciate that, and for all of you, if—as we see these retention or recruitment numbers going up, let's do make sure that if there have been places like high school education or other things where we have made concessions in the past, we know historically that doesn't work well in the long run. I would love to see us tighten those standards back up again.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. CARTER. Mr. Alford, you are batting clean-up.

Mr. ALFORD. All right, let's do it. Thank you. Everyone ready for lunch? All right. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I appreciate that and our distinguished witnesses for being here.

As representatives of our military senior enlisted ranks, you have a direct pulse on the everyday experiences of our service members and their families, the challenges they face, and the sacrifices they make. We have a duty to ensure that those who defend our great nation have a quality of life that reflects the values of their service, from housing conditions to child care. We must identify where we are failing and take action to fix it. We cannot underserve those who have sacrificed and continue to sacrifice for us.

Missouri's 4th congressional district is home to two great bases, Whiteman Air Force Base and Fort Leonard Wood, two critical DoD installations that embody the heart of our military readiness and resilience. I have heard firsthand from service members about the

difficulties they face, and I want to make sure that we try to get to some answers on how to fix things.

As a former member of the Armed Services Committee, I also sit on the quality of life panel under the direction of General Bacon, and we made significant gains in the 2025 NDAA, and a big increase in pay for lower-level enlisted, a restoration of basic allowance for housing. We were instrumental in getting \$144 million for new AIT barracks at Fort Leonard Wood, better child care access, and more mental health support.

My first question to Sergeant Major Weimer, you mentioned the Army Future Soldier Prep course. It has been a success in channeling—in getting more recruits into Fort Leonard Wood, in particular. We are having five new companies. Talk about the level of success in particular for this program, why it is important.

Sergeant Major WEIMER. Thank you for that, Congressman. By the way, Fort Leonard Wood, they call it Fort Lost in the Woods, but I don't think that gives it—it is not a fair——

Mr. ALFORD. We are trying to get away from that, sir.

Sergeant Major WEIMER. Yes, it is a gem.

Mr. ALFORD. Yes.

Sergeant Major WEIMER. Every time I go there I understand why people just keep retiring there and becoming members of the community. So thank you for that.

Future Soldier Prep has been instrumental. There are currently—I think it is 33,500-ish sons and daughters that have gone through Future Soldier Prep, and every time I go down there, if you haven't had an opportunity to go visit the—either Fort Jackson or down at Benning, please do. We are meeting these young kids where they are. For many of them, they just want an opportunity to meet the standard.

It is a little—it will tug on your heartstrings. I will just tell you that.

Mr. ALFORD. Well, there is a nasty rumor going around that this program could end. Have you heard any talk about that at the Pentagon or anywhere else?

Sergeant Major WEIMER. No. In the Army, this program—we may throttle the program. Like, we need to use the program more at times and then there are times we may not, and so you may see the Army, as we continue to meet our recruiting goals, exceed our recruiting goals, you may see us turn it up or turn it down a little——

Mr. ALFORD. Right.

Sergeant Major WEIMER [continuing]. Bit based off that requirement.

Mr. ALFORD. Thank you.

Chief Master Sergeant Ruiz, thank you for coming to my office. I had a great conversation with you in particular about mental health issues. Would you repeat some of the challenges that the Marine Corps is facing now when it comes to mental health?

Sergeant Major RUIZ. How do you like that, Jim? Chief Master Sergeant. [Laughter.]

Congressman, thank you for that excellent discussion on the ability for a young service member today who does exactly what we tell them to do, which is you are having an issue, seek help. Because

the medical providers may not be in the volume that we need in—at different places around the Corps, around our bases and stations, they must go out in town. Out in town, it is—we need TRICARE, to the previous conversations about TRICARE, sir. If they are not available, then it just exacerbates the problem. Now I am waiting, if I am that young person, 45 days to 60 days to finally get the one appointment that I need down the line. You did exactly what we told you to do, which was go get help, right?

I can't solve that problem, sir. I am looking for you to help us bring attention to that. I love that everyone is tracking and pushing for that. What I can control is what is inside my formations, and that is why Marine Corps Total Fitness, for us, is—it is a way to get after the resiliency of our force, strengthening their soul.

So thank you for allowing me to do that, sir.

Mr. ALFORD. Well, thank you, and with my 25 seconds left I would like to thank your wife for being here today. Spouses are so important. Family is so important to service.

Also thank you, ma'am, for being here today. God bless you all. Thank you for being here.

With that I yield back.

Mr. CARTER. Thank you. I am sorry we went long, but, quite honestly, not too long. I really like to hear from you guys, and so I am kind of lax on you. Now, when I get the big boys in here, I will keep them on the level. But you guys tell the stories that make us actually realize what is going on. So thank you for what you have done for us. You are the people that keep—your branch of the military going. God bless you for doing it, and we wish you the best.

With that I will adjourn.

[Whereupon, at 12:43 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

PAIRS CASE 2025-C-0274

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, VETERANS AFFAIRS, AND
RELATED AGENCIES

QUALITY OF LIFE HEARING

QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD

CONGRESSMAN VALADAO*Military PCS (Permanent Change of Station) and Government Credit Card Reimbursements*

When a servicemember gets travel orders they can either use military movers or hire movers themselves and be reimbursed. Many members chose to do the latter (because military movers have a bad reputation). While there is certainty that servicemembers will eventually get reimbursed, I've heard several stories and seen a lot of chatter on some of the servicemembers blogs talking about having to take out loans, borrow money from family, or carry a credit card balance to cover moving/travel expenses until they can get paid back. Servicemembers carry these balances on their GTC's (Government Travel Cards), which they are required to have and are responsible for paying on time to maintain their credit scores.

Question 1: I know all branches are working to improve the process for PCS (Permanent Change of Station) and TDY (Temporary Duty Travel). I've heard from some individuals in the Navy that it can take 6-8 months for a travel reimbursement for moving costs, lodging, meals, transportation, and other incidental expenses totaling thousands of dollars, which servicemembers are responsible for covering in the meantime.

Why does it take so long to get PCS and TDY reimbursements out and is there a way we can modernize the current system, so we aren't asking our servicemembers to front thousands of dollars for months on end? Can we provide servicemembers with more transparency into this process?

RESPONSE: With the exceptions of classified, Reserve, and non-appropriated funds travel, all TDY payments are processed through the Defense Travel System (DTS) while PCS payment are processed in the Reserve Travel System (RTS). When a traveler completes their travel, they are required to file a voucher within five working days (DoD FMR, Vol 9, Ch 8). The voucher is then routed to an Approving Official, and, upon approval an EFT payment is deposited in the travelers account within three business days.

In CY2024, the average time for Air and Space Force service members to be paid PCS travel entitlements varied from 5.13 days (May) to 13.05 days (Sep) depending on the volume of travel

performed in a month. At no point did the average exceed SAF/FM's goal of less than 15 days. When delays occur, they are typically driven by the omission of receipts and other supporting documents, which pushes the voucher back to the base-level comptroller office and traveler to make corrections.

SAF/FMI is currently working on a new PCS system to replace the current one. The new system is intended to be an end-to-end DAF enterprise solution. The solution will automatically load member entitlements from the orders and allow them to view/validate. After the members travel is complete, they will be able to go into the system and select the entitlements they would like to file a claim for. The system will reduce processing time by reducing the number of personnel interacting with the documents, implement system audits/flags and process payments.

The DAF uses the Defense Travel System (DTS) and the Reserve Travel System (RTS) for making Temporary Duty travel payments. The timeliness of an approved voucher is less than 4 days. A travel voucher must be initiated from the traveler, DOD FMR Volume 9 states a traveler must submit a travel voucher within 5 days of return from TDY. If there are any corrections needed for the voucher a finance technician will work with the member for resolution.

Financial Literacy

The financial well-being of our young enlisted servicemembers is a pivotal aspect of their overall quality of life and operational readiness. The DOD is already required to provide comprehensive financial literacy training to all members of the U.S. Armed Forces. While we are happy to see that military pay overall has increased, rising economic costs highlight the continued need for strong financial literacy to ensure our servicemembers and their families have financial freedom.

Question 2: Financial literacy is a crucial skill for civilians and servicemembers alike, and one that I am particularly focused on enhancing for my rural community. I am interested in what metrics you are using to evaluate the effectiveness of your current programs and how they are tailored to address the unique financial challenges faced by military personnel, especially for young enlisted servicemembers managing benefits and salaries for the first time.

RESPONSE: The Personal Financial Readiness (PFR) program, a mandatory component of Common Military Training, encompasses a series of 10 financial training sessions mandated by Congress. These sessions are strategically scheduled at various life and career stages, referred to as "touchpoints," to ensure that service members develop their financial knowledge progressively through targeted training.

From June 2023 to May 2024, nearly 20,000 newly enlisted Airmen and Guardians completed the First Duty Station Personal Finance Course. This course received high ratings for training quality, relevance, and impact. Evaluation results revealed that participants answered 67% of financial knowledge questions correctly after completing the course. To further support their financial literacy, additional learning touchpoints are provided throughout their careers.

The Department of the Air Force has enlisted an independent evaluation team from the University of Georgia to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the training's efficacy and processes to further evaluate the effectiveness of the PFR program. As part of this evaluation, specific metrics have been established to align with the program's intended outcomes. For instance, tailored financial knowledge questions have been developed to measure mastery of the curriculum, and an industry proven three-item financial skills scale will be utilized to evaluate each member's financial ability.

Staffing at Military Bases

The Navy noted in their testimony that many of their Child Development Centers (CDCs) are already in competition for staff with childcare facilities operation in the local communities and are unable to reach full capacity due to staff shortages. This issue is exacerbated in rural areas with smaller communities to hire from. Funding has been provided over the past few Appropriations cycles to build new CDCs, but if we can't appropriately staff them then they aren't much use.

The Army noted a similar issue, but they highlighted a robust "child Care Fee Assistance Program" that subsidizes the cost of community childcare for approximately 10,000 children per day for families with limited access to installation childcare.

Question 3: All of your testimonies noted significant challenges in hiring a civilian workforce to meet the needs for our bases, including staff for Child Development Centers. In your opinion, what are some of the barriers that keep the military from being competitive in the civilian job market?

RESPONSE: DAF childcare continues to grapple with similar competitive market challenges to that of other DoD jobs, including competitive wages, proximity to the installation, and industry hiring incentives and benefits. However, the DAF has made significant progress improving staffing levels, currently achieving 87%, by effectively utilizing hiring authorities, offering employee childcare fee discounts, and implementing recruitment and retention incentives. Ongoing investment and support for these efforts are essential to sustaining and expanding a high-quality workforce, as well as providing quality and affordable childcare services for our families.

CONGRESSWOMAN STEPHANIE BICE

Basic Need Allowance

The Basic Needs Allowance (BNA) was established to address food insecurity among junior enlisted members and their families. However, according to reports from three services, only 77 service members have benefited from this initiative.

Question 4 :

A. What is the number of service members identified as eligible for BNA?

RESPONSE: There are currently 47 DAF receiving BNA as of January 2025.

B. How many service members have applied for the BNA?

RESPONSE: 516 applications have been reviewed and adjudicated since the program's implementation.

C. What are the potential reasons for the low uptake of this benefit?

RESPONSE: A member may be deemed ineligible for BNA because the Gross Household Income (GHI) does not fall below 150% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines (FPG) for the size and location of the household. To be certified for BNA, the member must meet eligibility requirements in both the current and preceding calendar year. Members will be deemed "automatically ineligible" if their current year annualized GHI is greater than 150% of the FPG for the preceding calendar year.

D. How many service members are currently receiving SNAP benefits? Effective May 3, 2024, SNAP benefits are no longer included in the GHI calculation.

RESPONSE: The Air Force and Space Force do not have the ability to track current SNAP recipients. SNAP is a state-run program, and each state has its own way of managing and collecting data."

E. What methods are used to inform service members about the availability of the BNA benefit?

RESPONSE: Per Department of Defense Instruction 1341.15, *Basic Needs Allowance*, November 15, 2022, Services are required to screen active-duty Service members annually for BNA eligibility; however, AFPC screens all DAF members for BNA eligibility each month. The screening occurs by reviewing service member's Base Pay, BAH, location, Marital Status, Number of Dependents, and Prior Year Gross Household Income, this is compared to the Federal Poverty Guidelines. Those whose GHI and household size place them below 150 percent of FPG for their geographical location are notified they may be eligible for BNA via Total Force Notification. Members are given application and submission instructions within the notification. Members are also able to review the MyFSS BNA Knowledge Article on the program itself, requirements, and application submission instructions.

Members are screened each month and notified of the potential eligibility via Total Force Notification. Members are given application and submission instructions within the notification. Members are also able to review the MyFSS BNA Knowledge Article on the program itself, requirements, and application submission instructions.

F. Does each branch have a designated point of contact to assist with Basic Needs Allowance applications? Who is trained to assess eligibility for the BNA?

RESPONSE: Yes, the DAF's point of contact is the Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC) Business Processing Officer (BPO) who is the final approval authority. AFPC/DPS has been trained on adjudicating and reviewing BNA applications. Once adjudicated, DPS refers applications to DPP (the BPO) for concurrence on the approval or denial of the application.

G. Is the Basic Needs Allowance achieving its intended purpose?

RESPONSE: Yes, BNA is a calculated approach to ensuring families most in need are provided additional financial support from the government, as determined in validation of the member's GHI compared to 150% of the FPG. The FY25 NDAA drove adjustments to the calculation from 150% of FPG to 200% FPG. Currently the Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) for BNA, DoDI1341.15, is being updated to reflect the new FY25 NDAA provision. This DoDI update is anticipated to be complete no later than summer 2025. Once the DoDI is updated, DAF will begin assessing members at the 200% FPG threshold. However, this update will coincide with the FY25 NDAA mandate to provide a 10% bonus to Service Members in the grade of E-1 through E-4 (effective 1 April 2025), in addition to the overall military pay increase of 4.5% (effective January 2025). While the increase to 200% FPG may initially project additional members to be eligible for BNA, they may be rendered ineligible with this additional increase in junior enlisted pay upon calculation of the member's new GHI.

ADA Upgrades

I helped to author Sec. 2813 of the FY22 NDAA which prohibits private housing contractors from charging out-of-pocket expenses to a servicemember for ADA upgrades to accommodate a disabled member of the household in an MPH housing unit.

Question 5: Since that time, has your service experienced any challenges with contractor compliance with this provision?

RESPONSE: Military housing privatization initiative (MHPI) owners are required to follow the Fair Housing Act and the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements along with state and local laws (if applicable). Since Section 2813 of the FY22 NDAA, our service has observed one instance where an MHPI owner and a resident negotiated an agreement for an ADA upgrade exceeding the existing accommodations. While the home met ADA requirements, the resident desired a walk-in shower despite the presence of a tub with grab bars and a removable seat.

Altus Force Protection

Ensuring force protection is critical on all military bases to safeguard military personnel and their families. At Altus AFB, enhancing the front gate is a top priority to bolster force protection measures. I feel This effort is crucial for improving the quality of life by demonstrating appreciation for those who already make significant sacrifices to feel safe on the military installation.

Question 6: This is a major priority for the installation and AETC. Can you describe how the Department of the Air Force is prioritizing this needed security upgrade? Could you provide an update on the expected timeline for funding this project?

RESPONSE: The project is a valid requirement but was not in the DAF's FYDP (FY25-29). A planning charette has been completed for the project. Design for the project has not been funded. The project will be considered for future years as design is initiated and progresses.

Currently, access to Altus Air Force Base is through two Entry Control Points: The Main Gate and the South Gate. The Main Gate processes the bulk of POV traffic operating 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. The South Gate has limited hours of operation and processes all commercial vehicles and some Private Owned Vehicle traffic. The Visitor Control Center is located at the South Gate and processes all visitors to Altus Air Force Base.

A South gate project at Altus AFB was funded in DAF's FY24 Unspecified Minor Military Construction (UMMC) program. The Add/Alter South Gate project for \$8.3M will alter the south entry control point for handling commercial vehicle traffic and inspections and visitors to meet current antiterrorism/force protection standards and support new traffic flows for operations 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. This project will greatly upgrade the base's security. (

Sky Warden at Will Rogers

With the introduction of the OA-1K Sky Warden, the personnel count at Will Rogers Air National Guard Base is set to rise in the coming years.

Question 7: What infrastructure improvements will be needed at Will Rogers to enhance the quality of life and readiness of those supporting this new program?

RESPONSE: There are no specific Quality of Life (QoL) projects on the books due to the OA-1K. Will Rogers has several operational projects for the mission beddown that that will enhance readiness and will improve overall quality of work life for the personnel assigned to Will Rogers ANGB. The following facility improvements/additions will be required to support the arrival of the OA-1K Sky Warden mission at Will Rogers ANGB. These projects consist of: Munitions Storage Area (MSA) and Unit Facility to support the activation of a Munitions Squadron, including roads and utilities for both; Munitions Equipment Operating Location (EOL); MSA Suspect Vehicle Holding Area; MSA Trailer Maintenance Facility; Simulator Facility to house 3x Weapon System Trainers (WST) and 3x Cockpit Familiarization Trainers (CFTs); Tie downs for new/increased amount of aircraft; Airfield Arm/Disarm Pad; Flight Training Unit (FTU) Squadron Facility; Aircraft Refueling Vehicle parking area; Mission Rehearsal Team (MRT) Support Facility; Contract Logistic Support (CLS) Maintenance Administrative Support Facility; CLS Parts Storage Facility; Aircraft Operations Support/Aircrew Flight Equipment (AFE) Facility.

Sexual Assault Response Personnel Hiring

The National Defense Authorization Act for FY22 provided critical support for service members who have endured sexual assault including the hiring of additional professionals in the sexual assault response workforce, such as victim advocates and sexual assault response coordinators. These professionals are to enhance training and give victims greater independence from the military command structure to better assist in their recovery.

Question 8:

A. Can you tell me how many positions have been created in your service branch?

RESPONSE: The DAF added 288 Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Victim Advocates (SAPR VAs). The DAF secured another 70 positions that were legacy positions to increase support at the operational and tactical levels.

B. How many collateral duty billets for active and reserve members have been civilianized?

RESPONSE: The DAF did not have collateral duty billets. All SAPR collateral duty (Volunteer Victim Advocates/VVAs) were additional duties to the Airman/Guardian's primary duty.

C. How many collateral duty Sexual Assault Response Coordinators (SARCs) are still collateral duties for service members?

RESPONSE: DAF had two collateral duty Sexual Assault Response Coordinators (as of Dec 2024).

D. How many more SAPR personnel do you plan to hire?

RESPONSE: DAF intends to fill the 358 positions that have been created before 30 September 2027 when the future state Sexual Assault Response Workforce Model (SARWM) has been fully implemented.

E. Have you encountered any roadblocks to hiring these positions?

RESPONSE: There have been several challenges identified for hiring these positions. The challenges include:

1. General confusion within the Air Force, now resolved, between the Sexual Assault Response Workforce (SARW) and Integrated Primary Prevention Workforce (IPPW) and the applicable Direct Hiring Authorities (DHA);
2. Our understanding of the ability to utilize SARW DHA at OCONUS locations, which we now know does indeed apply OCONUS;
3. Lack of qualified candidates who possess required competencies; and 4. Competing for candidates with IPPW and Sister Services, resulting in limited candidate supply (i.e., IPPW has higher grades and no 365 days, SARW has on-call, 24/7 response capability requirements)

RANKING MEMBER WASSERMAN SCHULTZ**Sexual Assault**

According to DOD's FY22 Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military, issued in April last year, there were more than 8,942 reports of sexual assaults involving servicemembers during the 2022 fiscal year, a slight increase over the 8,866 in 2021, which was itself an increase over 2020. While the initiatives from the independent review commission to ensure justice are important, it is essential the Air Force gets ahead of the problem and has effective prevention efforts as well.

Question 9: How is the Air Force analyzing the degree to which increases are due to increased reporting or increases in the number of sexual assaults?

RESPONSE: The difference between the estimated prevalence of sexual assault (i.e., the survey-estimated number of personnel experiencing a sexual assault incident in a year) and the number of sexual assaults reported (the number of personnel making an Unrestricted or Restricted Sexual Assault Report) is a critical metric for evaluating efforts around sexual assault prevention and response. To that end, the DAF leverages the congressionally mandated Workplace Experiences Survey of Military Members (WESM) conducted biennially by the DoD Office of People Analytics. This confidential survey provides important data on the estimated prevalence of sexual assault and other mission-degrading behaviors, which are then compared against reported incidents. DAF data for 2023 indicated that the number of estimated incidents in the DAF decreased from 2021 while reports increased. In sum, we saw DAF victims/survivors coming forward at a greater rate in 2023 to make a report and obtain assistance.

Mental Health

The New York Times has been running a series of articles related to blast exposures, and there is concern about the potential link between repeated exposure to low level blasts and traumatic brain injury or mental health issues. It is vital we protect our servicemembers from harm, and we should be ever evolving as we learn more about this link.

Question 10:

A. How is the Air Force protecting servicemembers from over exposure to these low-level blasts? Is this something Air Force is paying attention to?

RESPONSE: The Department of the Air Force (DAF) recognizes the critical role that brain health has in maximizing operational readiness and has been paying close attention to blast overpressure. DAF efforts have been in alignment with and nested within DoD efforts. As part of the DoD-wide push to monitor the brain health of Airmen across their entire career, all Initial Military Training locations now conduct Cognitive Baseline Assessments for accessions. DAF has also been actively engaged since October 2022 within the DoD Force Safety and Occupational Health framework to help develop DoD

guidance for blast overpressure, to include supervisor hazard reduction tools, exposure collection protocols, and a joint hazard documentation process.

B. What kind of research is Air Force doing in this area?

Across the DoD, a tremendous amount of research is being done to support blast overpressure hazard reduction. The DoD Blast Injury Research Coordinating Office (BIRCO) tracks current research for all blast injury, including blast overpressure. DAF is currently supporting a blast-related research project developing an apparatus to simulate the complex “waves” of pressure from a blast event and techniques to conduct laboratory testing of how different cells and tissues respond. This work is sponsored in part by Michigan State University and by the Air Force Research Laboratory ().

DAF contributes to DoD blast summits and research symposia to ensure research findings and best practices are implemented, as appropriate. For example, in December 2024 the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USUHS) hosted a USUHS Brain Health Symposium, which included blast overpressure research to share the current state of research being conducted by USUHS scientists and their DoD, Federal, and academic partners. DAF SG was represented at the symposium.

Reproductive Healthcare

It is great news that DOD announced its updated IVF policy on March 8th removing the marriage requirement and the categorical ban on the use of donor gametes, which will allow more servicemembers to utilize this benefit.

Question 11:

A. What is the status of implementing this new policy?

RESPONSE: The amended policy for the provision of assisted reproductive services for the benefit of seriously or severely ill or injured active duty Service members (ADSMs) was effective March 8, 2024, and has been fully implemented by the Defense Health Agency via updates to the TRICARE Operations Manual, Chapter 17, Section 3. .

B. How is the Air Force informing servicemembers of these expanded benefits?

RESPONSE: Air Force and DHA medical personnel and their leadership were made aware to educate patients who may qualify. Additionally, DHA's [tricare.mil](https://tricare.mil/CoveredServices/IsItCovered/AssistedReproductiveServices) website provides information for ADSMs seeking to use this benefit – see <https://tricare.mil/CoveredServices/IsItCovered/AssistedReproductiveServices>.

C. How many more servicemembers will be able to access these benefits?

RESPONSE: More Service members will be able to access these benefits, however, Air Force does not have any specific data regarding the increase. To be eligible for this

benefit, members are still required to have incurred a serious or severe illness or injury while on active duty (Category II or III) leading to an inability to procreate without the use of assisted reproductive technology (ART) services. The amended policy ensures qualifying ADSMs can utilize the extended benefit to realize their family planning goals, regardless of marital status, sexual orientation, or their need to utilize donor gametes. ART services may also be provided to a qualifying ADSM's spouse, unmarried partner, or a surrogate mother, for the benefit of the member who is seeking to become a parent, provided the third-party person is enrolled in TRICARE. o

Child Development Centers (CDCs)

This Subcommittee continues to prioritize the construction of Child Development Centers (CDCs). The recently enacted fiscal year 2024 bill provided \$336 million for CDCs, which includes funding to construct six new CDCs and for planning and design to advance future construction projects.

There has been some progress in the staffing levels at CDCs over the last year thanks to the additional steps that have been taken to incentivize hiring and retention of CDC workers. There is still work to be done though, especially while DOD is competing in an economy with a tight overall labor market with a shortage of childcare workers.

Question 12:

- A. How is the Air Force working to ensure that families not only have childcare available, but accessible childcare available? Solutions which involve servicemembers and their families spending hours of their days in commutes to and from childcare and work are not tenable solutions.**

RESPONSE: When accessible on-installation childcare is unavailable or there is a long waitlist, fee assistance can be provided to eligible military families to offset the cost of community-based childcare through the Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood (MCCYN) program. Families can select a community-based provider based on their commuting pattern and childcare needs. Enhanced referral services also provide customized childcare searches for eligible community-based childcare providers that take into consideration the parents' work and home addresses, commuting patterns, transportation route to and from work, hours of care needed, ages of the children, and provider's eligibility for the fee assistance program when additional support is needed. In FY24, 7.8K DAF children were supported with \$33.2M in community-based childcare fee assistance.

- B. Are there additional steps that need to be taken to improve staffing levels? And beyond staffing, are there other challenges the Air Force is facing in providing adequate CDC spaces for military families?**

RESPONSE: A DAF-wide initiative was deployed in 2024 to recognize child and youth professionals. The "Year of Child & Youth Program (CYP) Heroes In Action" campaign

was a yearlong initiative celebrating CYP professionals for their dedication and impact to the overall DAF mission, while also honoring our children, youth, and families. This campaign, along with the childcare fee discounts and recruitment and retention incentives leveraged by the installations, contributed to improved staffing levels and are currently at 87%. Continued investment in our providers, facilities and programs is essential to grow the availability of quality and affordable childcare services for our families and ensure the health of child and youth services.

C. What is the current status of universal pre-k at Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) schools serving Air Force families?

RESPONSE: In school year 2024-2025, DODEA schools at eleven Air Force bases offered universal pre-k. Enrollment in universal pre-k was 4,053 as of FYQ1, which was 84% of the projected numbers across all DoDEA schools.

D. What effect do you anticipate universal pre-k will have on the deficit of CDC spaces?

RESPONSE: Depending on the location, there is now an increased need for part-time or “wrap-around” care for those attending universal pre-k and in need before and after school care, which continues to drive a demand for CDC spaces.

E. What effect do you anticipate universal pre-k at DODEA schools will have on future CDC MILCON needs?

RESPONSE: Universal pre-k at DoDEA schools effects a singular age group within the CDC. Preschool classrooms in DAF CDCs are multi-aged from 3-5 years. DAF is moving forward with planned CDC MILCON projects, which will not only expand child care spaces but also renovate or replace aged facilities.

PFAS

In the recently passed fiscal year 2024 bill, the Committee provided \$489 million for the Department of Defense Base Closure Account. The Committee specifically provided an additional \$50 million above the request for PFAS remediation to increase the pace of cleanup at previously closed military installations affected by these contaminants. There are other important priorities for BRAC funding, however it is concerning that budget requests continue to not request dedicated funding for PFAS contamination. In fact, the fiscal year 2025 BRAC funding request overall is smaller than what has been provided in each final bill provided by congress going back all the way back to fiscal year 2021.

Question 13:

A. Provide an update on the transition from AFFF [A-triple-F] firefighting foam. Is the Air Force still on track to meet the NDAA requirements to phase out the use of AFFF?

RESPONSE: DAF is currently on track to meet the deadline of 1 Oct 2025 to transition from AFFF foam, in accordance with Sec 322 of the NDAA for FY2020 and the one-year waiver requested by the Secretary of Defense.

Facilities - Outside the Contiguous United States (OCONUS), AFFF removal is complete in DAF facilities. The Air Force awarded the OCONUS ERES-2 contract to remove AFFF from OCONUS installations in Sep 2023. All AFFF in OCONUS installations has been removed and disposed of by incineration as of Aug 2024. Final contract was \$5M for OCONUS, 152 systems in facilities, 137k gallons AFFF and waste disposed. In the contiguous United States (CONUS), AFFF removal in DAF facilities is underway. In Sep 2024, contract was awarded for 6 geographical task orders totaling \$15M to remove AFFF in Air Force, Space Force, Air National Guard (ANG), and Air Force Reserve facilities. Site visits are underway to inspect the AFFF systems by the contractor. Removal of the AFFF, AFFF tank, and concentrate piping will begin around March 2025. The Air Force expects completion of removal and disposal of AFFF around October 2025, with final reports expected Dec 2025.

Note: In Dec 2022, per SAF/IEE direction, all foam systems in facilities were “locked out” in Dept of Air Force facilities. All foam systems are confirmed locked out as of Mar 2023 and foam is isolated at the storage tank for removal.

Vehicles - DAF met the initial requirement of no longer procuring AFFF as of 1 October 2024. As of 28 Jan 2025, The DAF is 89.6% complete with removal of AFFF from non-tactical assets (NTAs) with 1,085 of 1,211 Fire and Emergency Service assets (CONUS 809 of 895: OCONUS 276 of 316). US Air Force (USAF) is 724 of 751, US Space Force (USSF) is 52 of 60, AF Reserve Command (AFRC) is 50 of 50 and Air National Guard (ANG) is 259 of 350. Current estimation of completion of removal of AFFF from all NTAs is July 2025, ahead of the 1 October 2025 extension.

B. How are Preliminary Assessments and Site Inspections are progressing and how will the extra resources the Committee provided for fiscal year 2024 assist efforts to address these contaminants, and what additional resources will be required moving forward to fully address PFAS moving forward?

RESPONSE:

Environmental Restoration Account (ERA): Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) Preliminary Assessments and Site Inspections (PA/SI) are complete. The Air Force received an additional \$5M in FY24 for PFAS which was used to award a PFAS off-base response at JBMDL-Lakehurst, PFAS Interim Remedial Action (IRA) and operations at Joint Base Cape Cod, and multiple Remedial Investigation (RI) efforts at locations to include, Grand Forks Air Force Base, Homestead Air Force Base, Wake Island Airfield, Grissom Air Reserve Base, and Youngstown-Warren Air Reserve Station.

Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC): All PFAS PA/SI are complete. Of the \$50M provided by the committee AF BRAC received \$23M and allocated the resources to address the new EPA's drinking water standards (Maximum Contamination Levels), initiate PFAS feasibility studies at former Reese AFB and former Wurtsmith AFB, and fund two interim removal actions at former Wurtsmith AFB.

SPACE FORCE

Sexual Assault

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Question 14: How is the Space Force analyzing the degree to which increases are due to increased reporting or increases in the number of sexual assaults?

RESPONSE: The difference between the estimated prevalence of sexual assault (i.e., the survey-estimated number of personnel experiencing a sexual assault incident in a year) and the number of sexual assaults reported (the number of personnel making an Unrestricted or Restricted Sexual Assault Report) is a critical metric for evaluating efforts around sexual assault prevention and response. To that end, the DAF leverages the congressionally mandated Workplace Experiences Survey of Military Members (WESM) conducted biennially by the DoD Office of People Analytics. This confidential survey provides important data on the estimated prevalence of sexual assault and other mission-degrading behaviors, which are then compared against reported incidents. DAF data for 2023 indicated that the number of estimated incidents in the DAF decreased from 2021 while reports increased. In sum, we saw DAF victims/survivors coming forward at a greater rate in 2023 to make a report and obtain assistance.

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A. How is the Space Force working to ensure that families not only have childcare available, but accessible childcare available? Solutions which involve servicemembers and their families spending hours of their days in commutes to and from childcare and work are not tenable solutions.

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CONGRESSMAN BISHOP

Food Insecurity

Last year, the RAND National Defense Research Institute revealed that 25.8% of active-duty members faced food insecurity. Furthermore, Forbes published an article noting that U.S. Military and Veterans experience double the national average for food insecurity. Instances of service members encountering food shortages are frequently highlighted in news stories and social media. However, many military personnel hesitate to seek assistance due to pride, stigma, and concerns about appearing weak or dependent.

Question 17: What actions are being implemented to address these challenges? How are you collaborating with external partners to combat food security issues, and what are your projections for the future of this holistic approach?

RESPONSE: The DAF is conducting a Food System Transformation to provide 1) Current State Baseline, 2) a Data Informed Vision of an Integrated Food System, and 3) a Strategy Implementation and Roadmap; to target these issues. Results are expected in the first quarter of CY26, with investigative visits to 6 different DAF installations occurring this summer.

The DAF also implements and connects Airmen, Guardians, and their families to programs that improve food insecurity.

- The DAF-led Personal Financial Readiness (PFR) education program and certified financial counselors stationed at all DAF installations help coach, guide, and train Airmen, Guardians, and their families in achieving financial resilience and preparedness.
- DAF is rebranding the PFR program to improve accessibility. This initiative incorporates available resources from the Military Leaders Economic Security Toolkit into pre-command courses and three DAF digital media applications. To date, more than 23,000 unique users have engaged with the PFR app content, leading to nearly 90,000 connections to additional PFR resources through these applications.
- M&FRCs, alongside command teams, actively refer members in need to various resources and programs, including the Air Force Aid Society, USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and other community support services. The DAF is also collaborating with partners to explore opportunities for seamless transitions from programs like WIC into M&FRCs.

Basic Needs Allowance

The Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 budget request includes a proposal to raise the income eligibility threshold for the Basic Needs Allowance (BNA) from 150% to 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. According to the Military Times, only 77 military families across the Air Force, Army, and Navy received the Basic Needs Allowance in 2023. This figure represents approximately 1% of almost 6,000 service members deemed potentially eligible for the program.

Question 18: Given the limited participation in the BNA program among eligible military families, could you provide insights into the expected impact of this expansion on the number of families benefiting from the program?

RESPONSE: We anticipate the number of eligible military families will grow, but undetermined by how many. Currently the Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) for BNA, DoDI1341.15, is being updated to reflect the new FY25 NDAA provision to increase the calculation of FPG threshold from 150% to 200%. This DoDI update is anticipated to be complete no later than Summer 2025. Once the DoDI is updated, DAF will begin assessing members at the new 200% FPG threshold. However, this update will coincide with the FY25 NDAA mandate to provide a 10% increase to Service Members in the grade of E-1 through E-4 (effective 1 April 2025), in addition to the overall military pay increase of 4.5% (effective January 2025). While the increase to 200% FPG may initially project additional members to be eligible for BNA, they may be rendered ineligible with this additional increase in junior enlisted pay upon calculation of the member's new GHI. In our initial assessment in April 2024, it was assessed that 1800 additional DAF members would be eligible to apply for BNA, under the 200% FPG threshold. However, with the FY25 NDAA direction for additional 10% pay raise for E-1 through E-4, it is now unknown how many members will be eligible/ineligible, based on updated member GHI.

Stress & Burnout among Troops

The FY 2025 budget request will reduce total DoD end-strength by 5,700 personnel, notably in the Army (-1,700) and Navy (-5,000). The annual Navy survey revealed that more than one-third of sailors reported severe or extreme levels of stress in 2023, marking an increase from previous years. Similarly, Army air defense units are reportedly stretched thin, leading to burnout. I am concerned about the impact of these reductions on the workload and stress levels of remaining personnel. This situation could worsen stress levels, potentially discouraging potential recruits.

Question 19: What specific measures are being implemented to address this trend and support service members experiencing stress?

RESPONSE: The DAF is tracking that stress is a large and growing problem among Airmen and Guardians through trend analysis in Defense Organizational Climate Surveys (DEOCS). We are closely monitoring trends to better target resilience activities for high-risk groups moving into CY25. Additionally, DAF/A1Z created the Operational Stress Education Program to develop a series of tiered stress education modules to reduce stress casualties within the DAF by focusing on the stressors and stress response skills aligned to the AFFORGEN cycles. The courses address the most common stressors experienced within these contexts including combat but also focusing on the workplace and home settings to give our service members the knowledge, skills, and abilities to identify, manage, and use their stress to increase overall readiness, combat effectiveness, and resiliency within the force.

CONGRESSWOMAN LEEAccess to Child Care

In Nevada and across the country, ensuring access to reliable childcare for military members has become a major challenge. On top of excessive wait times, the need for child care during irregular hours and lengthy commutes to remote work locations, like Creech AFB, have driven home the importance of flexible childcare options. Yet there are still installations today with significant child care challenges that have not established an in-home DOD Family Child Care program on their installation. This program not only meets irregular childcare needs, but it is an avenue to provide spousal employment opportunities. If it is not implemented consistently DOD-wide with a streamlined certification transfer process for providers, this seems like a missed opportunity to meet those two critical needs.

Question 20: How are the services incorporating the Family Child Care program into their overall childcare strategy and what have they done to ensure it is available to all military families, no matter where service members move? (Note: this program is called Child Development Homes in the Navy)

RESPONSE: The Family Child Care (FCC) Program is a vital component of the Department of the Air Force (DAF) delivery system of childcare. DAF relies on the FCC program to expand childcare capacity and support nontraditional and specialized childcare options for military families. The Department has worked diligently to devise a tailored suite of comprehensive solutions to increase the number of FCC providers and address the complex and diverse childcare needs of the military families we serve. A Certified FCC Provider Transfer Program was implemented to facilitate portability between installations and a monetary incentive offered if the provider's home is certified within 90 days of arrival at their new installation. Additionally, the DAF provides financial incentives to offset provider costs for professional accreditation/certification and state licensure fees as well as increasing provider hourly and subsidized pay rates. Targeted FCC provider recruitment and retention incentives are used to retain and increase the number of FCC providers and include a one-time payment for initial certification and annual renewals; federal holiday pay; and incentives for offering nontraditional childcare. Our inventory of FCC providers has grown from 381 in Sep 22 to 435 providers at 67 installations in Sep 24.

Access to Medical Care

Nevada military families remain very concerned about their lack of access to quality healthcare. They describe long wait times for primary and specialty care, as well as medical treatment facilities not being staffed to handle the workload. Access to medical care has a direct impact on readiness—particularly at Creech AFB, where, due to their undersized clinic, many members must travel 50 miles, one way, for medical care. Over the span of an average year, this adds up to an estimated 140,000 duty hours Creech Airman weren't available to accomplish their primary mission.

Question 21: Now that Defense Health Agency is responsible for military medical facilities, what input is the Air Force able to provide to ensure mission impacting infrastructure shortfalls, like those at Creech AFB, are addressed? How is the Air Force partnering with the Defense Health Agency?

RESPONSE: Specific to infrastructure shortfalls, the DHA-Facilities Enterprise (DHA-FE) assumed responsibility for all Air Force Medical Services' (AFMS) military treatment facilities (MTF) in October 2020. Since that time, the AFMS Headquarters Staff Health Facilities Plans & Programs Directorate has maintained frequent and open communications with key leadership in DHA-FE.

DHA officials are examining MTFs across the military medical system, to determine their scope of services, which could include closing some facilities or downgrading some hospitals to clinics. The DHA is also considering if there is an adequate Tricare network, supporting beneficiaries. These evaluations will be shared with the Services, including the DAF and approved by DOD leadership.

The AFMS HQ staff also receives feedback and mission shortfall requirements from DAF Major Command and Field Commands in order to proactively anticipate mission changes that require base level infrastructure investments or modifications. DHA-FE and the AFMS Facilities Team have standing meetings to ensure they share a common understanding of any issues or concerns that arise. This level of engagement is expected to continue and, as such, the Air Force can continue to advise and support MTF teams through its connections and communications with DHA-FE. In addition, every MTF has an assigned DHA-FE Sustainment, Restoration, and Modernization (SRM) Portfolio Manager. The SRM Portfolio Manager is the MTF's direct advocate within the DHA-FE organization and can wield the greatest leverage for getting facility issues repaired, facilities altered, and new facilities built.

DAF also engages routinely with DHA on enhancing healthcare services to meet DAF needs:

DAF has partnered with DHA Virtual Medical Center (VMC) through their program Virtually Integrated Patient Readiness and Remote (VIPRR) Care Clinic. Through this program, DAF has authorized telehealth visits for the Periodic Health Assessment (PHA) for locations experiencing difficulties with manning or high operational tempos. This service permits service members to utilize a telephone rather than drive long distances to complete a medical readiness requirement. This frees up clinical staff to see other patient types and greatly improves access to care, particularly in the primary care setting. Currently, the DAF is partnered with VIPRR for support to 20 DAF Medical Groups with > 160K service members (Airmen and Guardians located around the globe). This includes Nellis AFB and Creech AFB as current recipients of this temporary service.

Air Force Medical Service is piloting a Virtual Operational Medical Cell (VOMC) program that consists of properly trained, equipped, and resourced medical staff who are solely dedicated to the completion of PHAs. Non-fly PHA virtual encounters are the focus. The two-year Pilot has

reported increases in access-to-care for face-to-face appointments, more comprehensive PHAs than VIPRR PHAs.

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