

**HEARING TO CONTINUE TO RECEIVE TESTI-
MONY ON THE ACTIVE, GUARD, RESERVE,
AND CIVILIAN PERSONNEL PROGRAMS IN
REVIEW OF THE DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION
REQUEST FOR FISCAL YEAR 2014 AND THE
FUTURE YEARS DEFENSE PROGRAM**

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 24, 2013

U.S. SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:10 a.m. in room SR-222, Russell Senate Office Building, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Committee members present: Senators Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Ayotte, and Graham.

Majority staff members present: Jonathan D. Clark, counsel; Gabriella E. Fahrer, counsel; Gerald J. Leeling, general counsel.

Minority staff members present: Steven M. Barney, minority counsel; and Allen M. Edwards, professional staff member.

Staff assistant present: Jennifer R. Knowles.

Committee members' assistants present: Kathryn Parker, assistant to Senator Gillibrand; Brad Bowman, assistant to Senator Ayotte; Craig Abele, assistant to Senator Graham; and Charles Prosch, assistant to Senator Blunt.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND,
CHAIRMAN**

Senator GILLIBRAND. The subcommittee meets today to receive testimony from the Military Services on military and civilian personnel programs contained in the Administration's national defense authorization request for fiscal year 2014 and the Future Years Defense Program.

With us today are the senior leaders responsible for military and civilian personnel matters in each of the Services. In addition to discussing their plans and programs for fiscal year 2014, we will also look forward to hearing about specific budget items relevant to our subcommittee's oversight responsibilities.

Your statements and testimony today are extremely important as we prepare to mark up the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014, and to find a way ahead with respect to the

Budget Control Act and the effects that sequestration is having on our Nation's military.

Our witnesses today are the Honorable Thomas R. Lamont, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs; the Honorable Juan M. Garcia III, Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Manpower and Reserve Affairs; the Honorable Daniel B. Ginsberg, Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Manpower and Reserve Affairs; Lieutenant General Howard B. Bromberg, Deputy Chief of Staff, G-1, U.S. Army; Vice Admiral Scott R. Van Buskirk, Chief of Naval Personnel, U.S. Navy; Lieutenant General Robert E. Milstead, Jr., Deputy Commandant for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, U.S. Marine Corps; and Lieutenant General Darrell D. Jones, Deputy Chief of Staff for Manpower, Personnel and Services in the U.S. Air Force.

As I stated at our oversight hearing last week, there is no greater responsibility for Congress and military leaders than to support our courageous and dedicated servicemembers, their families, and the civilian employees who are a vital component of the military team. For more than a decade, Congress has ensured that our military personnel receive a pay raise that meets or exceeds the increase in private sector wages. We have also been able to substantially enhance health care benefits, though I would like to see us expand the benefit further to include coverage for autism therapy for all TRICARE beneficiaries.

However, this subcommittee faces a very clear challenge this year as we address the need to control the increasing costs of personnel programs. I am deeply committed and concerned about the rising costs of health care for both our active duty and retirees, and I believe we need to consider all other options before breaking faith with our servicemembers on this.

This challenge is made more difficult by the significant budgetary and programmatic pressures imposed by sequestration under the Budget Control Act. As the result of sequestration, the Department has told us that it already has taken extraordinary measures to cope with the across-the-board cuts of nearly eight percent. The President's budget request for fiscal year 2014 does not account for any sequester of funding for that fiscal year, which, if it remains in effect, would reduce the Department's budget by yet another \$52 billion, further affecting morale and military readiness.

While military personnel pay accounts are exempt from sequestration, the funding to pay for DOD civilian employees, family support programs, health care claims, training, among other things, are not. I am particularly concerned about the effects that possible furloughs are already having on the morale of DOD's 800,000 civilian employees who are an integral component to the military's total force in crucial fields, such as cyber security and health care. I worry that breaking our commitment to our civilian workforce in this way will have devastating effects, not only on the morale, but the future propensity to continue their civil service, but on the critical services and support programs for servicemembers and their families, including DOD schools, child care centers, and access to health care.

Because of the tenuous budget environment, difficult choices had to be made by the President, DOD leadership, and the Services.

And the subcommittee intends to carefully examine each of them as we begin consideration of the annual defense bill.

As you know by now, I am deeply committed to addressing the scourge of sexual assault of our men and women in uniform. At the hearing with OSD, I also discussed several other personnel issues that are important to me as we begin this budget cycle, in particular, hazing, DOD's proposed health care fee increases, and the provision of benefits to same sex partners.

The Army and Marine Corps continue to draw down their forces. The Army requested fiscal year 2014 active duty end strength of 520,000. That is 32,000 below the fiscal year 2013 authorized level. Moreover, we know that the Army will finish this fiscal year with 530,000 soldiers, primarily because of success in reducing the backlog of its wounded soldiers processing out of the military and back into civilian life, which is a good story.

Finally, I and the rest of Congress remain extremely troubled about the number of servicemembers who are committing suicide, both active duty and Reserve component members. Another facet to this issue that was brought to our attention at last week's hearing is the military dependent suicides, and whether the Services are tracking or even at this point whether they have the capability of tracking those tragic deaths.

I look forward to hearing about each of these issues from the service perspective. We want to hear in your views what you believe your Service is doing well, what challenges remain, and how Congress can help so that we can best provide for our servicemembers, civilians, retirees, and families.

Now I would like to give the floor to Senator Graham.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR LINDSEY GRAHAM

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you, Madam Chairman. It has been a pleasure working with you on the subcommittee. This is, I think, the best one to have because we are in charge of the men and women who serve and their families. This is really a wonderful opportunity to make sure that Congress listens and we get it right.

Two areas: the sustainability of health care costs. They are just unsustainable. We are going to have to do something about TRICARE. We are going to have to make it more sustainable for those who are on it and for the military's budget. Second, sequestration seems to me one of the most ill-conceived ideas in a place that is known for ill-conceived ideas. That is what pretty impressive. We can maybe top the list here.

I want to know—the chairman of the Joint Chiefs said that sequestration was affecting morale, and it is detrimental to morale. So could you please focus on that? Tell us from a military personnel/family point of view what are we doing to our men and women in uniform and their families under sequestration.

Thank you all for your service.

Senator GILLIBRAND. In the interest of time, I will be calling only on the assistant Secretaries to provide oral statements. I ask that each of you keep your oral statements to three to five minutes in length. Your complete prepared statements will be included in the record. Following the opening statements, we will limit our questions to seven minutes per round.

I am going to call on our witnesses by Service, starting with the Army. Mr. Lamont?

STATEMENT OF HON. THOMAS R. LAMONT, ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE ARMY FOR MANPOWER AND RESERVE AFFAIRS

Mr. LAMONT. Thank you. Chairman Gillibrand, Senator Graham, distinguished members of this committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am honored to represent the 1.1 million men and women serving in the U.S. Army in uniform, and our more than 260,000 army civilians.

This combat season force has performed superbly over more than a decade of war and now faces the difficult task of reducing strength during this time of fiscal constraint. We will do this in a careful and deliberate manner, ensuring the future of the All-Volunteer Force while maintaining the best army in the world.

Our challenge is to ensure that we balance the congressional mandate, which I quote, "to fulfill the current and future operational requirements of combat and commands," with the need to maintain our All-Volunteer Force. We recognize our greatest moral obligation is to ensure that our Nation's sons and daughters are fully prepared and trained when called on to risk their lives for the defense of freedom, and then to ensure the service and capabilities exist to care for these brave Americans.

As we manage constrained resources, we look to ensure that soldier-focused programs, such as recruiting, compensation, educational opportunities, SHARP, suicide prevention, and transition assistance are balanced with the requirement to train and equip our Army to ensure its success on today's complex battlefields. We must ensure that however large the Army may be, we maintain its readiness, even as we sustain the All-Volunteer Force.

To ensure a force of the highest quality soldiers, the Army must likewise balance recruitment, retention, promotions, voluntary and involuntary separations, and natural losses. To assist our soldiers and civilians who will transition to employment in the private sector, we must equip them with the skills and knowledge to continue their professional growth. We must continue to keep faith with the soldiers and family members who sacrificed so much for our country.

We continue to work with the Veterans Administration to streamline the disability system and improve coordination for health care, compensation, and benefits for our medically-separated and retired soldiers. The Army must also maintain its focus on assisting our soldiers and family members struggling with depression, substance abuse, and other health of the force issues.

The American soldier is the centerpiece of everything we do in the Army. Our efforts must remain focused on the preservation of our most precious resource: our people. I can assure you that ever your Army will continue to meet the Nation's needs whenever and wherever it is called to serve.

Chairman Gillibrand, Senator Graham, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for your support, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared joint statement of Mr. Thomas and Lieutenant General Bromberg follows:]

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you.
Secretary Garcia?

STATEMENT OF HON. JUAN M. GARCIA III, ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE NAVY FOR MANPOWER AND RESERVE AFFAIRS

Mr. GARCIA. Thank you, Chairwoman Gillibrand, Senator Graham, distinguished members of the committee. Thank you for this opportunity to speak about the Department of the Navy's personnel programs, about the sailors, the marines, and the civilians who comprise the Department of the Navy.

There have been several significant and successful changes in our Department in personnel policies and programs since we last testified before this subcommittee. In accordance with the January 24, 2013 Secretary of Defense memorandum entitled "Elimination of the 1994 Direct Ground Combat Definition Assignment Rule," we will submit the Navy-Marine Corps implementation plans next month to the Secretary of Defense. These plans will provide details on how we intend to move forward with our expansion of opportunities for females to serve in previously closed MOSs, ground combat units, and those positions closed due to privacy and birthing restrictions.

We have made great strides by opening positions on submarines and assigning women to previously closed ground combat units at the battalion level. We continue to offer the opportunity for female lieutenants to volunteer for training at the Marine Corps Infantry Officer Course immediately following graduation from the Basic School. We are committed to providing women with the same opportunities as their male counterparts while maintaining the highest levels of combat readiness and capitalizing upon every opportunity to enhance our war fighting capabilities.

The Department of the Navy is supporting ongoing efforts by the Department of Defense to review and extend benefits, including compensation benefits, to same sex domestic partners of servicemembers. Many benefits are currently available to same sex domestic partners by designation of servicemembers. At the direction of the President, the Department of Defense established a Joint Benefits Review Working Group, comprised of representatives from each of the Services. The JBR's mission is to conduct a careful and deliberative review of the benefits currently provided to the families of servicemembers.

The working group has identified 22 additional family well-being, child and youth programs, family support, travel and transportation, survivor and death benefits that can be lawfully provided to the same sex domestic partners of servicemembers and their families through changes to DOD policies and regulations. On February 11, then Secretary of Defense Panetta directed the extension of those benefits to same sex domestic partners and their children once the servicemembers and their same sex partners sign declarations attesting to the existence of a committed relationship.

Implementation of these benefit changes require substantial policy revision, training, and technical upgrades. The Department of

the Navy will extend the 22 additional family member and dependent benefits to eligible partners of the servicemembers no later than October 1 of this year, subject to approval by the Secretary of Defense. Meanwhile, the Department will continue to comply with existing law and will review the extension of military benefits in conjunction with OSD and other Services should a change in law occur.

In addition to ensuring our manpower and personnel policies meet our country's security requirements, it is my honor and privilege to represent and advocate for the more than 800,000 sailors, marines, and civilian teammates who are always prepared to respond to whatever our Nation needs. Vice Admiral Van Buskirk and Lieutenant General Milstead will have the opportunity to address their respective Services' personnel plans in detail, but I would like to touch on some common challenges the Department faces as a whole.

After more than a decade of war and given the challenges in the broader economy, we must honor our commitment to veterans and wounded warriors by taking concrete steps to facilitate their transition to civilian life. A key achievement over the last year is the progress made with regard to transition support and reintegration. In fiscal year 2012, the Department of the Navy hired 10,867 veterans into civilian positions. Fifty-nine percent of those were new hires. Of these, nearly one-quarter were disabled veterans and one in 10 was a wounded warrior.

The Department of the Navy has just over 200,000 U.S. direct hire civilians as of December. Veterans, including wounded warriors and disabled veterans, comprise a majority of our civilian workforce. Civilians operate across a broad spectrum of 558 occupations to include world class scientists and researchers who develop and procure cost—cutting-edge weapons and equipment. More than half of the civilian workforce is made up of technical professionals, such as engineers, logisticians, mathematicians, scientists, acquisition specialists, and members of the medical community.

Because of the combination of sequestration and the fiscal year 2013 continuing resolution, Navy commands have been operating under an across-the-board civilian hiring freeze to reduce spending, primarily in the O&M accounts, since January. Fortunately, the Marine Corps has been able to avoid so drastic a measure. Sustained execution of a hiring freeze simply hampers the Navy's ability to recruit a skilled and talented workforce capable of executing this mission. Critical gaps created by ongoing vacancies affect the Navy's readiness and could negatively impact execution for many months to come.

Our Department level sexual assault prevention strategy since 2009 has had three main components, each of which has shown progress during fiscal year 2012 and 2013. And I know we will have a chance to address those.

From suicide reduction to sexual assault prevention and response, the Department of the Navy's 21st Century Sailor and Marine Initiative is addressing head on the critical and urgent issues facing our sailors, marines, and their families. As part of our aggressive drug demand reduction efforts, we have expanded our drug testing panel to include synthetics, like spice. We have also

ended discount subsidies on the sale of tobacco products in our Navy and Marine Corps exchanges, while providing no cost tobacco cessation products for those trying to quit, and improve education and training programs to steer potential new consumers away from starting.

In short, the 21st Century Initiative is providing the tools needed to face challenges through a variety of programs aimed at fostering a healthy lifestyle both on and off duty. We continue to—we are committed to continuing these efforts to ensure a safety, healthy, resilient, and ready force.

I wish to thank the committee members for your continued and unwavering support to the Navy, Marine Corps, and the men and women who are sailors and marines, who serve bravely in Afghanistan, spend months at sea apart from their families, guard embassies throughout the world, conduct humanitarian assistance missions whenever and wherever needed, and perform countless other missions under often unimaginably demanding conditions and circumstances.

We look forward to your questions. Thank you.

[The prepared joint statement of Mr. Garcia, Admiral Van Buskirk, and Lieutenant General Milstead follows:]

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you.
Secretary Ginsberg?

STATEMENT OF HON. DANIEL B. GINSBERG, ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE FOR MANPOWER AND RESERVE AFFAIRS

Mr. GINSBERG. Chairwoman Gillibrand, Ranking Member Graham, and members of the subcommittee, Lieutenant General Jones and I would like to thank you for the honor and opportunity to testify today on behalf of more than 700,000 Active Guard and Reserve civilian airmen who make up the most capable air space and cyber space force the world has ever known. We know that you and the members of this subcommittee are keenly interested in the well-being and support of our airmen. We must start by thanking you for all that you have done and continue to do on their behalf.

As the Nation draws down its efforts in the CENTCOM AOR and prepares to support a strategic shift to the Asia-Pacific, the Air Force finds itself at a critical juncture. The Air Force faces continual demands on its people and all its specialized capabilities, while dealing with new fiscal realities. Our airmen have met every challenge and are poised to respond to these new challenges in the future.

The strictures of sequestration have forced the Air Force to face tough choices, like a furlough of civilians and standing down of some of our combat coded flying squadrons. At the direction of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Air Force is protecting funding for war time operations, wounded warrior programs, and, to the extent feasible, programs mostly closely associated with this new defense strategy, as well, of course, as family programs.

The Air Force remains committed to providing cost-effective medical care, services, and programs to maintain balanced, healthy, and resilient airmen and families. Initiatives implemented by our airmen and family readiness centers, such as transition assistance,

wounded warrior, yellow ribbon, and suicide prevention programs, have made considerable progress.

This past year, we confronted the problem of sexual assault and unprofessional relationships of basic military training, and we have strengthened our sexual assault prevention efforts with new initiatives, like an Air Force-wide health and wellness inspection and the establishment of a special victim's counsel program. The Air Force remains steadfast in our commitment to prevent incidents of sexual assault, provide victim care where assault has occurred, and hold those who commit such acts accountable.

Looking ahead, the Air Force will continue to balance competing defense needs among the size of our force structure, today's readiness and modernization in the future. The Air Force is committed to carrying out our National defense mission while dealing with the disruption of sequestration.

As I have said before, it is both an honor and a privilege to represent and advocate on behalf of our Nation's airmen as we search for better and smarter ways to approach and solve our Nation's security challenges. Thank you for your continued commitment and overwhelming support to our total force airmen, civilians, and families. I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared joint statement of Mr. Ginsberg and Lieutenant General Jones follows:]

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you all for your statements. We have also received a statement for the record from the National Guard Association of the United States. Without objection, it will be included in the record.

[The information referred to follows:]

Senator GILLIBRAND. I am going to talk about just a couple of issues in my seven minutes. I want to go through sexual assault, hazing, suicide. I have enormous respect for the men and women who serve in the military, and that is why I am absolutely committed to ending violent crime, sexual assault, and rape among those in uniform.

The new DOD health related behavior survey of the active duty military personnel was released this week, and I was disturbed by the findings that more than one in five women on active duty in the armed services reported experiencing unwarranted sexual contact by a fellow servicemember. The rate for men was 3.3 percent. Those rates are absolutely unacceptable, and the men and women who serve in our armed services are the military's most precious resource, as you said, Secretary Lamont. And clearly the system is failing to protect them from the worst kinds of violence.

Now, as you may know, I am working on legislation that will remove the initial disposition authority from commanding officers and put them in the hands of experienced military prosecutors. Over the past few months, we have been examining this change, and one of the concerns that has been voiced is that it will disrupt the good order and discipline of the unit.

In your opinion, what precisely about this change would disrupt good order and discipline? What other recommendations do you have for dealing with this crisis and actually getting results? You can start, Secretary Lamont.

Mr. LAMONT. One thing that detracts from the dignity and respect of a soldier, and we have carefully considered it., and we are very much aware of our most recent challenges in this regard.

Voice: Excuse me. Is your microphone on?

Mr. LAMONT. Sorry. While I have not seen your proposed legislation, I am aware of bits and pieces of it. And I will leave for General Bromberg the concerns that you made reference to with regard to good order and discipline.

Senator GILLIBRAND. General Bromberg?

General BROMBERG. Yes, Senator. Certainly we are just as concerned as you are obviously, and it is just not good enough the progress we are making. We need to continue to make progress. And certainly we want to look at all options on how we can improve as we go forward.

I think the team approach we put into effect, we are in the third year of our campaign plan. This year, we are focusing on achieving cultural change, and I think cultural change is key to our success as we move forward. We need to continue to push that at every level across the Services.

But the teaming approach we have added over—almost 829 full-time victim advocates and sexual assault response coordinators. They are all trained. They are all nationally certified. They have 80 hours of training. We have also added over 9,000 collateral duty part-time victim advocates and sexual assault coordinators. We have added 20 special prosecutors, 30 additional lab technicians, 10 additional headquarters, what is called special highly qualified experts, to help with this process to enable the commanders to more fully understand the program, and increased training of all our CID agents with another additional 80 hours of special investigating procedures.

So we think this team approach that we have put together is an alternative to go forward, to include paralegals, victim liaisons from the local judge advocate office as well. So achieving cultural change, including the approach of training, as well as prosecution and putting this larger team together is an alternative we certainly are pushing forward on.

Senator GILLIBRAND. And how much time do you think those changes will take to start getting the numbers down, because obviously the difference between the 2008 report and the '11 report was in the wrong direction. Now, obviously that might just be a difference in feeling comfortable reporting, so we do not know why the change increased the number. But how long do you think you will see results, tangible results, see numbers coming down, see reporting going up?

General BROMBERG. I think it is always difficult to put a time on cultural change. But we have seen an increase in our own internal surveys that we are looking at right now and balancing those with other reports we are seeing to make sure we are looking at the right data.

We have seen an increase in the propensity to report. Our last survey showed a 28 percent propensity report. Our most recent survey shows a 42 percent propensity report for females. Now, I am not saying that is—

Senator GILLIBRAND. What is that report called?

General BROMBERG. It is an internal operational troop survey that we have done internal to the Army.

Senator GILLIBRAND. You said “propensity report?”

General BROMBERG. Propensity. The propensity of a female to report that she has been either harassed or assaulted. We have to go back and really dig in the numbers, so I caution on the numbers. We are not claiming that as a victory, but certainly it is—it may be a leading indicator.

And so we want to continue to do that. We want to continue to watch those leading indicators. A slight increase for males as well.

Mr. LAMONT. Well, I do want to point out, though, that the actual assaults reported did drop this year. Of course, nowhere where we want it to be, but I would like to believe it is an indication that some of these programs, and particularly with regard to the investigators and the special prosecutors will be having an effect.

Senator GILLIBRAND. How did the numbers drop? You mean between '08 and '11, or in your own internal numbers?

General BROMBERG. Our internal numbers. That is one of our challenges when we look at the surveys, Senator, is we have to make sure we are all looking at the same data on the surveys. And I have not seen the reports you are referring to in detail yet, so as we peel those numbers back, then we will be able to tell the differences, because the numbers could be totally different for the different surveys.

Senator GILLIBRAND. I would like you to furnish all your internal tracking so that we have the benefit of that.

Admiral Van Buskirk? Secretary Garcia? General Milstead?

Mr. GARCIA. If I could start, Senator.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Go ahead.

Mr. GARCIA. The Department of the Navy leadership shares your belief these numbers are unacceptable, and we appreciate the approach you have taken with your proposed legislation and letting us—sharing it with us and letting us offer input.

We concur that the court martial process as we know it has evolved since World War II. The introduction of specialized prosecutors, defense counsel, a robust appeals process, has changed. And that is why we are working at the Secretary of Defense's direction to revisit and reform the convening authority process as it exists now.

But know that we are not waiting on that process, and we are not living with these numbers. As we had a chance to visit the other day, you know that we have hired additional full-time sexual assault response coordinators and advocates and coordinators, fleet-wide training programs. Every sailor and marine in the Department of the Navy has received training this year. Bystander intervention, live trainings are taking place, every fleet concentration center.

Special training for our JAGs and NCIS agents ensuring they are armed with the optimal prosecution and investigative tools available. You know about our expedited transfer policy. You know about the elevation of the sexual assault initial disposition authority. More than that, we are seeking to, as my Army colleagues referenced earlier, to change the command culture where events like this could take place. We know, for example, that there is an unde-

niable correlation all too often between incidents of assault and alcohol use, and that is why we are in the process of introducing across the Navy and across the Marine Corps, at every command, the use of alcohol detection devices, which is a new step that we have never gone to before, to educate our personnel and our force on the responsible use.

The numbers—I am aware of the study you cited earlier. I echo the concerns voiced earlier that the numbers are challenging, and we are digging into that. Within those numbers, for example, an increase in unrestricted reports versus restricted reports is a trend we want to see. An increase in personnel being willing to report events on the lower end of the USC of unwanted sexual contact spectrum is positive if they are experiencing an atmosphere where they feel more comfortable coming forward.

We have got our teeth into this, and we are committed to this, Senator.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you. My time has expired, so, Air Force, you can submit your answer for the record.

[The information referred to follows:]

[SUBCOMMITTEE INSERT]

Senator GILLIBRAND. But if we have a second round, that will be my first question. Thank you.

Secretary GRAHAM. I mean, Senator Graham.

Senator GRAHAM. Oh, thank you.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Mr. Secretary. [Laughter.]

Sorry, Senator Graham.

Senator GRAHAM. Does it pay more and you get a plane? I will take it. [Laughter.]

Senator GILLIBRAND. More than that.

Senator GRAHAM. The country has enough problems without making me secretary of anything. [Laughter.]

TRICARE, from the Army, Navy, and Air Force's perspective at the Secretary level in like 30 seconds or a minute, tell me about the sustainability of TRICARE.

Mr. LAMONT. Our health care costs are rising out of sight, as you can imagine. We would support the Secretary of Defense's efforts to increase minimally our fees where necessary.

Senator GRAHAM. They really have not been adjusted since 1995, have they?

Mr. LAMONT. No. And while we do have COLAs and our other benefits have gone up for our servicemembers, our TRICARE fees and costs to them have remained flat. I think we are really going to have to address that in the future.

Senator GRAHAM. Secretary Garcia.

Mr. GARCIA. Senator, the numbers speak for themselves. Our medical health system as a whole has gone from a \$19 billion enterprise in 2006 to a \$49 billion—

Senator GRAHAM. Nineteen to \$49 billion.

Mr. GARCIA. That is right.

Senator GRAHAM. Wow.

Mr. GARCIA. Like you, we know how critical this benefit is to our personnel, but it has to be sustainable. And we are willing and in support of the efforts to enact sensible and reasonable adjustments to do so.

Senator GRAHAM. Air Force.

Mr. GINSBERG. Senator, obviously, you know, sustaining an All-Volunteer Force is the Department's most critical priority, and medical readiness, and the medical care we provide for our airmen, all of our servicemembers, is obviously vital.

That said, of course, the trend in health care costs is certainly rising, and in sort of the flat where the declining budgetary environment, that means that there is additional pressure on other areas of our budget, including force structure, modernization, and readiness. So, you know, if we do not address those larger issues and make sure we strike that right balance. You know, the continual formula for the Air Force is continually shrinking to become a smaller force, a less ready force. So again, we have to make sure we take care of our people, but then do it in a sustainable fashion.

Senator GRAHAM. So the glide path for the budget is pretty much not growing very fast, but health care costs are. So eventually that is not good news for the budget, and we have got to make it more sustainable.

From an Army perspective in about one minute, tell us what sequestration is doing on the personnel side, even though pay is exempt from sequestration. From a morale point of view and a readiness point of view, on the personnel side, including families and civilians, how is this playing out in the Army?

General BROMBERG. Yes, Senator, if I could, first of all, as I am sure you are aware, we have had to curtail training in about 80 percent of the force, focusing on Afghanistan forces, those next deployers, as well as those in Korea.

Additionally, we have curtailed for the first time six combat training center rotations at our National training center. I do not recall a time we have ever done that before. We have cut our flight training hours by 37,000 hours. That takes about 500 aviators out of the force. That will take us a couple of years to recover that. And aviation is one of our most used assets in Afghanistan.

Senator GRAHAM. If you do not fly a lot, it is dangerous, right?

General BROMBERG. Yes, sir, very much so. And so that is going to be significant for us. We have had to cancel some courses this year, leader development courses. We have had to defer maintenance, both the depots and also down to the units. We have also, as you know, we have had to release over 3,000 temporary employees, and additionally, we had to reduce the Reserve component and medical readiness. We have had to cut that budget as well.

For the families as far as morale, those civilian cutbacks have then translated into reduced services on installations, so everything you can think about that services a family on a post-camper station is going to see less hours, less availability. And that, of course, creates great angst in the force.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay. The Navy.

Admiral VAN BUSKIRK. Senator, I would like to focus on the—you asked specifically about the morale, and I think from the great part of our jobs and being in the personnel business, you mentioned, is about the people. And I get a chance to actually go visit all of our home ports and actually hold town halls and all hands call our people.

I would say that the morale is good, yet what is cropping up more and more recently is uncertainty in terms of as they listen to the debates that are being carried among the Services and here in Washington, DC, they are watching very closely how they can be impacted in terms of the budget.

Senator GRAHAM. Are families beginning to feel it?

Admiral VAN BUSKIRK. Yes. Well, they are questioning are services going to be available. And so we are reassuring them that, yes, the services are going to be there. The counseling services, our family and readiness services are going to be there. Our critical components of our 21st century sailor and marine are going to still be there.

However, while we are able to do the services, there is a mortgaging the future because we may not be able to do repairs to the facilities that they are operating in and modernize at the same time. So we are foregoing some of our future perhaps enhancements at the bias towards providing the services on a day-to-day basis.

So a little bit of the uncertainty I think is creeping in there with what is next. You mentioned health care, is health care still going to be there for them? And so it is important for us to go out, talk to them, hear their concerns, and address them straightforwardly to let them know what is going on.

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you.

Admiral VAN BUSKIRK. But overall, I think the morale still remains good, but there is some uncertainty there.

Senator GRAHAM. The Marines.

General MILSTEAD. Thank you, Senator. The United States Marine Corps, 61 percent of our budget goes to the military personnel account. And of that 61 percent, only approximately about four percent is discretionary. So a large chunk of our money goes for people. I will echo the uncertainty.

But we have been able to, with the authorities that we have had, the commandant has been able to shift monies around in '13. We have been able to do that. But 2014 and out—

Senator GRAHAM. If we do this over 10 years, will it be devastating?

General MILSTEAD. Yes. I would say that the Marine Corps is going to have to make some hard decisions. You mentioned that the personnel account is protected. It is protected this year, but the President may not choose—that is a policy decision. He could unprotect it.

But regardless of whether it is protected or not next year, we cannot afford to have the other, you know, 39 percent or so go to our readiness, as the Admiral pointed out, in our O&M accounts. The Marine Corps will be forced to do some things, some draconian things, and they may have to do with industry.

Senator GRAHAM. And—

General JONES. Sir, many of our civilian employees are also military spouses. As we cut—as furlough would hit the civilian spouses, it will hit the joint income of the family. But you have to remember, morale is also part of the mission. We have very proud airmen, and we are very proud of what they do every day, and as we take down flying hours by 203,000 flying hours across the Air

Force, as sustainment modernization and restoration accounts are hit significantly under sequestration, all of that begins to eat away at the comfort level of their ability to do the mission.

And our airmen and their families feel the uncertainty of what is going forward in the future because of sequestration as it impacts them personally as a family and professionally as a mission.

Senator GRAHAM. One final thought. It is one thing to be inconvenienced and not have the nicer stuff. People, I think, understand that they are sacrificing their lives in military. But one thing I think would destroy morale is to believe that your spouse is not well equipped and well trained.

Voice: Senator, is your microphone on?

Senator GRAHAM. Yes, sorry. I said the one thing that will hurt family morale more than anything, they can live without conveniences. They are a tough lot. But if they believe that their loved ones are not well trained and well equipped, we are going to destroy the family.

Thank you.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Senator Blumenthal?

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you, Madam Chairman. I would like to pursue a line of questioning that Senator Gillibrand began. And I am pleased to be working with her on some of these sexual assault initiatives, and thank her for her leadership.

To come back to the question that she raised, and I am not sure it was answered, General Bromberg, if prosecutorial decisions were removed from the commanding officer either for sexual assault or more broadly, would that pose an insuperable obstacle to the good order and discipline of the military?

General BROMBERG. Senator, it could. It could very well. And that is what we have to look at. We have to look at the authorities and responsibilities of the commander, not just in this area, but across the whole spectrum of what we ask commanders to do from the company level, at the captain level, all the way through the general office level, particularly in a deployed environment where you expect officers to maintain good order and discipline in combat operations as well as when people are in garrison. And, of course, this problem spans both deployment situations as well as at the home station.

I think we have to look at the fundamental reasons why we want Uniform Code of Military Justice and the authority with our commanders in the field. So I think there is a real potential. We have to discuss it, and we have to understand the full range of impacts of those kinds of—

Senator BLUMENTHAL. But you are willing to discuss it, because if there were certain kinds of crimes, and these are really predatory crimes, violence often, that kind of decision as to whether to commence a criminal prosecution in some instances might well be at least lodged in some independent authority.

General BROMBERG. I think right now today, Senator, with the special teams we have put together advising the commander, it gives the commander that capability in the first place. So I would like to start to have that discussion.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. And those special teams include a victim's advocate or a survivor's advocate?

General BROMBERG. They include the special prosecutors, the highly qualified experts, the additional training of the criminal investigation units—

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Because I know that the Air Force, and maybe I can ask you, General Jones, when I received a briefing from General Welsh, he described the victim's advocate program that the Air Force was implementing. And I wonder if you could describe for us perhaps some of the most recent lessons learned, some of the experience, and your evaluation of it.

General JONES. Sir, I would be happy to. We started with 60 legal experts who we trained to be special victim's counsels to give the victims a voice in this process, because the process can be intimidating. The process can be daunting. And many victims will tell us that they are revictimized as they go through the system.

When we appointed 60 attorneys to specifically focus as special victim's counsels, the number of cases they took quickly ramped up to over 250 cases. And I say "over 250" because literally every day we go back to look at the numbers. They are continuing to increase. It is empowering the victims to feel that they can go through with the process.

In speaking with national experts that everyone recognizes, individuals such as Anne Munch and David Lisak are real experts in this area. They will tell us that one of the benchmarks that you should look at is how many people did not follow through with the allegations once they were sexually assaulted, that did not see things through to the end.

You can argue that the number of people who report sexual assaults may go up if you have a good program and people feel comfortable reporting. There is evidence that if people do not feel like there is trust in the system, the numbers will go down. So the experts will tell us the number of people who will not follow through is something we should look at.

The fact that we have instituted this special victims counsel within the Air Force, the fact that our chief of staff called in every operational level commander, every wing commander, to specifically look them in the eye and tell them that we are going to get after sexual assault in the Air Force. We had 790 sexual assaults in the Air Force last year. One is too many. We have got to be able to go make sure that the individuals are protected, that the individuals, when they come forward with a crime, that we investigate the crime, we punish the perpetrators.

To the chairman's—

Senator BLUMENTHAL. We have at this point, and I apologize for interrupting you.

General JONES. No, that is okay.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. But we are all limited in terms of the amount of time we have. Do you have benchmarks or metrics that—and I know they may be very difficult to establish, show the success of this program, although it has been operating for a relatively short period of time.

Mr. GINSBERG. Senator, this program just started in January, and so—but it is something we are looking at very carefully. We get reports frequently from our judge advocate general, Lieutenant General Harding. And we are going to do some interim reports and

then sort of a more final report as this goes on. But the initial results, as General Jones says, is that this is making the victims very comfortable with what can be—

You know, they have already gone through what is a very—can be a life altering experience, and then they are going to go through this very fatiguing investigatory and prosecutorial process. And now to have somebody to help interpret this process, help be there with them, along with the full-time victim advocates that we are bringing on, and the sexual assault response coordinators. Sort of you have this whole sort of interdisciplinary team that is there to back up victims as they go through.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Have the other Services expressed interest or inquired about this program?

Mr. GINSBERG. Well, Senator, we certainly—we are certainly very open with the other Services about our program and how we are doing it. But I certainly do not want to characterize where they are.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. I want to express my appreciation for the good work that you are doing in this area, and suggest that perhaps the other Services might, as you generally do, learn from the experience of your colleagues in your brother and sister Services.

If I may ask, General Milstead, I know that there has been a plus up of the Marine Corps Guards and cyber command and Marine security Guards, special operations. As the Marine Corps draws down, are you concerned that the increase in personnel in these various commands could detract from or hollow out the strength of the other units?

General MILSTEAD. Senator, as you know, as we have incrementally downsized the Marine Corps, we have done it through a structure review. We have gone at this through a deliberate process of analysis.

We are currently on target for a 1,821 force, and that 1,821 force sufficiently fills the needs to keep the Marine security Guard. The extra 1,000 marines that has come out of late is additive to that. And the commandant has made it very clear that the cost of those personnel and the cost for their training, the O&M for those personnel and for those billets must be above and beyond what is in our budget piece.

As far as the cyber committee, that has an increased appetite, and we have been feeding it, and we will continue to do so in an analytical way. And that has been a part of the process. So as we downsize, you will not see a corresponding decrease in those two forces. They are manned for a specific mission, and they will be kept at that.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you. My time has expired, but I want to thank every one of you for your extraordinary service to our Nation in a difficult time. And I very much appreciate your being here today and your very excellent testimony. Thank you.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you, Senator.

Senator Ayotte.

Senator AYOTTE. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I would ask, first of all, Secretary Garcia and Admiral Van Buskirk, about the civilian furlough impact in the Navy. And, first

of all, you know, I am very proud of the work done at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, having visited there recently, and talked to them about the civilian furlough impact on the maintenance schedule for our fleet.

Obviously, I think this is a situation that ends up being penny-wise, pound foolish because we will get behind on the maintenance schedule, and will not be able to have our fleet ready obviously. And then it costs more in the end as we are looking forward to the maintenance costs here for our submarine fleet. So I just wanted to say I think it is critical that the hiring freeze be lifted or waivers approved, particularly for, you know, critical areas, like maintenance of our submarine program.

And, you know, recently it has been brought to my attention that the Navy has developed a plan that could allow the Navy as well as the Marine Corps, General Milstead, to use its funds within existing appropriations to avoid the civilian furloughs all together. Do you anticipate the Office of the Secretary of Defense will permit the Navy to move forward with this plan?

Mr. GARCIA. Senator, I appreciate the question, and I know you are aware that from the beginning of this process, the Navy's position has been that furlough is the last resort. We have developed daily plans to minimize—as you know, the number, as we speak, is 14—to bring that number as far down as possible. But there are tradeoffs, and this is a deliberative process across the Department of Defense. We are working with them every day, including as recently as a session with the comptroller and our Secretary of the Navy yesterday.

In the meantime, we have no alternative but to—our jobs are to manage our workforce such that if the furloughs do go forward, the impact on readiness, on long-term maintenance, is as minimal as possible, spreading those out where we can, trying to drive that number as far down as possible. Scott?

Admiral VAN BUSKIRK. I would just, Senator, like to add that I think you hit it on the mark. Our biggest concern lies in the maintenance areas because that is directly associated with our ability to maintain a fleet ready and ready to deploy.

Senator AYOTTE. Yeah. You get behind and, you know, on those issues.

Admiral VAN BUSKIRK. Yes, ma'am. And of course, we are very concerned about that. We are also concerned about it from the total force aspect. One of my contemporaries also mentioned here about the impact on morale. As this goes forward, it is one that we are concerned with because this hits just one specific area of our workforce. But still the burden of the work is going to be there and have to be picked up by the remaining civilians who are there, and uniformed service, and Active and Reserves. So we are watching it very carefully. And certainly as low as we can get in terms of the furlough days is the better for us to be able to manage.

From a personnel perspective, I represent as well training and education uniquely as chief of naval personnel. So we are just as concerned there in terms of the furlough days because we have many civilians who work in the training environment that are the instructors, that are—that work in our school houses. And so, therefore, we are concerned about potential impacts to the through-

put of our sailors who then have to go—will be manning the ships to fulfill—to backfill those who are leaving. So it concerns us in that area as well.

Senator AYOTTE. And I appreciate that it concerns—certainly concerns all of you. And my concern is that we know that certainly the Navy can avoid the civilian furloughs, has a way forward to do it. It is up to OSD right now.

And I understand what they are saying about looking total force, but, you know, we have got a situation where we are going to pay for this in the end. So I hope OSD actually goes forward with the plan that the Navy has put forward. So I will just—I will leave it with that.

I wanted to ask about the Army integrated disability evaluation system, or IDS. And, Secretary Lamont, in your prepared testimony, you said that fiscal year 2012 was the first full year in which the Army used the IDS system Army wide, and that it has eliminated many of the sequential and duplicative processes found in the respective Legacy systems.

Thank you for you doing that. I appreciate it. I applaud your efforts. But currently, what is the average time for a soldier to process through IDS?

Mr. LAMONT. We still exceed over 400 days in that.

Senator AYOTTE. And obviously, I think we can all agree that is totally unacceptable.

Mr. LAMONT. Yes, we do agree.

Senator AYOTTE. And I know that in your prepared remarks, you said that soldiers starting IDS today will complete the process in less than 295 days. Is that true?

Mr. LAMONT. That is certainly our goal, and we expect to be there by the end of this fiscal year.

Senator AYOTTE. But let me ask you this. Please, do not tell me you think that 295 days is acceptable either.

General BROMBERG. Two hundred and ninety-five is the duty goal, Senator, but what is most important is the care they get. Whatever we do, whether it is a complex case to a simple case, some will get through in 180 days, but they get the appropriate care with the appropriate compensation with appropriate benefits in the amount of time that we desire. That is our primary goal first.

Senator AYOTTE. But you are not setting the ultimate goal at 295 days, are you?

General BROMBERG. That is the DOD goal right now, and that is probably pretty reasonable for what the process—

Senator AYOTTE. That is where we are going to keep the goal.

General BROMBERG. Ma'am, it may change in the future, but we need to meet that goal first.

Senator AYOTTE. No, I want you to meet it, but do not tell me that that is where we are going to stop because I just do not think that is acceptable.

General BROMBERG. We will not stop there, but we will never shortchange the medical care that these folks need to get.

Senator AYOTTE. Well, I think we are certainly all in agreement on that.

General BROMBERG. It does take a while for complex cases.

Senator AYOTTE. Now, I have to say, certainly thank god you are all in a better—having been in a hearing the other day with Secretary Shinseki before the VA, I mean, at least it is better than what is happening in many of those cases there. But still, we still have a significant coordination issue obviously, as you know, with the VA that needs to be addressed. And it is really important because we just hear from too many people that are waiting too long.

Mr. LAMONT. Well, we have been very fortunate, frankly, because the Congress did give us the ability to increase the resources necessary for our health care workers and the people who are involved in this process. And through the years, we have now standardized our process. We understand where we are going, and our throughput is much, much better than it was before. And, in fact, we may have contributed, because of that unexpected success, to the VA's problem in that we have created a backlog for them that may not have been able to compensate for without those additional resources.

Senator AYOTTE. Well, at least you got a system online. They are finally getting their system online. I mean, it is taking too long for these things. So I know you had a comment, Secretary Ginsberg.

Mr. GINSBERG. Just to the discussion of the DOD standard. This is something, of course, of prime interest to our Secretaries of Defense and Deputy Secretary. And periodically they will get the Service Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, those responsible for personnel, and look up down the various stages of the integrated disability evaluation system and say is this reasonable? What can we do to improve it? And is this really a good metric that is in place. So a kind of critical concern to make sure that we are moving everybody thoroughly the process, and that the standards that are being set are reasonable.

Senator AYOTTE. Well, I thank you all very much for being here today and for your service. And this is a very important issue that I look forward to continuing to work with you on so that we can obviously get our servicemembers evaluated as quickly as possible. And I know that you are focused on making sure they get the care that they need in the interim. But we all share the same goal.

So I appreciate you leading in difficult times with sequestration, and I thank you for what you are doing.

Senator GILLIBRAND. We have time for another round, so if you would like to stay, you can have another seven minutes.

I would like to ask a little bit more about cyber. I appreciated Senator Blumenthal's focus on that. The fiscal year 2014 budget indicates a large investment in our military cyber capabilities. The Pentagon approved a major expansion of the U.S. cyber command, increased ranks from 900 to 4,900 personnel, or create the cyber warriors. And I understand you are going to fortify DOD's own networks, help guide executive offense attacks, protect critical infrastructure like power grids and power plants.

Senator Vitter and I have a bill called the Cyber Warrior Act, which provides a National Guard to serve a robust role in providing cyber experts to the Department. I understand that General Alexander is seeking thousands more cyber personnel, and that the Services do not have the adequate experts among your active duty.

What is each of your Services doing to recruit and retrain individuals with the skills needed for military cyber requirements? Do you need additional legislative authority to track these individuals to military Service? And is there is a better way to make use of our National Guard and Reserve to make use of cyber skills resident in our society? Why do we not start with the Air Force?

General JONES. Ma'am, we are looking—we have been doing cyber for a while in the Air Force, but we are looking at how we take that next step, how we retain and recruit these very specialized individuals. Many of them today are military. We can use recruiting bonuses. We can use continuation bonuses. But as you know, under sequestration, all bonuses will be getting severe scrutiny as we look to reduce the budget.

Right now we do not know of any special legislative authorities we would need at this point, although we are still evaluating that. But we just have to make sure we are not being caught up in the old way of thinking as we look down at what clearly is going to be a new form of warfare.

Mr. GINSBERG. And, ma'am, if I could just dovetail on General Jones' remarks and talk specifically about the role of the Air Reserve component, Guard and Reserve. As we go forward and figure out what are the requirements to step up to this new cyber command to take of Air Force based on Air Force requirements, as well as other requirements, we are going to make sure that we are looking at what is the portion of that mission that the Guard and Reserve can contribute to very carefully. This is certainly relevant. The Guard and Reserve could bring some very key contributions.

The expertise, you need a continuity of expertise in this mission area. And, you know, we do not move people in the Guard and Reserve at the same level, so you need somebody who just understands the details, understands the change in technology. That could very well be a mission that the Guard and Reserve take on more. And we have a process in the Air Force to really look at what are the Air Force mission requirements over long term, and then think mission area by mission area, what is the balance among the various components.

Admiral VAN BUSKIRK. Senator, I think nothing like that—as I look across this table, all of us who are sitting at this table, we are collectively working with OSD on this very issue, sharing our best practices, our lessons learned as we are trying to all, I think, work jointly towards attacking this issue, and collectively working towards what should be the incentives that we apply. What should be the makeup of the people that make up our cyber warriors, the seniority, the ratings, the ranks, the MOSs? And I think you should be encouraged by how well I think the Services are working towards providing this critical capability for our National defense.

And additionally, we are looking at all those things to see if there are legislative things that we do need, and that is what we all have been working on to make sure we do this together jointly so there is no fratricide between us as we go forward, or with the other agencies. Clearly, there are a lot of skill sets that are demanded from our people that could be—which would be in demand for other agencies to use. So to make sure we are working with the other agencies that are involved in the cyber area, that we attack

it jointly and look towards how we build the workforce, how we sustain it.

So I think, again, you should be encouraged by how well I think we are working towards this to solve those issues, look to see where there are seams.

General BROMBERG. Senator, yes. Very similar to my colleagues here, looking at everything in detail. But there is a definitely a place for the Reserve component, particularly when we look at the particular skillsets we need.

We are going to start by using our existing forces obviously and build from those capabilities. We have already started screening. It does not matter what you are doing today, but do you have the right skills and attributes that we would look for in cyber warfare?

We also believe there might be the need for legislation if we want to look at something along direct commissioning, going out into the civilian market and trying to pull people in. But of course with that will come dollars, and I think we will have to talk in the future about what kind of incentives because I think to maintain this talent and not have it transferred to the civilian sector back and forth, we will have to talk about compensation at some point. A very unique skill set. And from my time at the U.S. Strategic Command, a couple of years ago I saw the same thing happen as we started this off. So we would be very sensitive to that, and we will bring those proposals forward jointly, I believe.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you. That sounds wonderful. I really want to work with you on this and to develop the plan, and whatever support you need we want to make sure we get it for you because it is such an urgent issue.

Since I have a minute and a half left, I want to return back to hazing and suicides. Obviously the suicide rate is horrible. And suicide is not a military specific tragedy, but I would like to know, you know, what you are doing specifically to prevent suicides.

I have heard that for a lot of the members of the troops, there is still a stigma associated with seeking mental health services, and there is a fear that it could end a member's career. So what is being done specifically to encourage servicemembers to come forward? The increase in suicide among people who have never been deployed is especially troubling, so what are we doing for that particular group?

Now, with regard to hazing specifically, two of the recent suicides were New Yorkers, Private Danny Chen and Private Hamson McPherson. And they were both minorities serving in the military, and it has been suggested that the lack of diversity in the military played some role in the hazing that led to their suicides.

It is my understanding that hazing is not an enumerated offense in the UCMJ, leaving convening authorities with limited options for charging the perpetrators. Do you believe with that specifically we should change the UCMJ to make hazing a criminal offense? And just more broadly, what is your status reporting on hazing? What policy changes do you propose? And do you agree that increasing diversity will reduce instances of hazing based on individuals being different? What are your Services doing to increase diversity? Whoever wants to take it first.

General BROMBERG. Just in time, ma'am, very quickly, we have already changed our regulations as far as hazing. We have also modified the Uniform Code of Military Justice to include where that is chargeable, and that is with hazing. We will follow up with the details on that.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Okay.

General BROMBERG. Because it is a much more longer answer.

And as far as the stigma on suicide, ready and resilience campaign in the Army. And, again, we will take this for a follow-up. We will give you a full detail. That is now we are approaching it, building resiliency in individuals and engaging leadership.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you. Any other—

Mr. GARCIA. If I could start with the suicide challenge. If time permits, Admiral Van Buskirk and General Milstead can take you through the specifics of the programs. You will hear things about the de-stress line. You will hear about the effort to end the stigma of raising their hand. The fact that every marine or sailor who have spent 30 days or greater with boots on the ground will receive a mental health assessment without having to raise their hand. Everyone gets it.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Great.

Mr. GARCIA. We will do it again 120 days later. You will hear about the mobile training teams that are out in theater affirmatively seeking out our IAs and assessing their mental health. And they can get into those details.

But if I was to give an overarching departmental wide perspective on this challenge, it is this: perhaps the most vexing piece of this is that, as I suspect you are aware, 50 percent of our suicides—our worst tragedy—are nondeployers. Of those, 80 percent have never gone outside the proverbial wire. When we drill down on these tragedies, and we drill down on every one, what we find are all too often, as you alluded to earlier, non-military components that came together to cause this individual to take the most tragic action.

Personal finance, relationship issues, professional challenges, stress. And that is why we have enacted a series of programs from enhanced financial management for our junior enlisted personnel and their families to address each one of those. If time permits, I know the flag officer—

Senator GILLIBRAND. You can submit a full answer for the record.

[The information referred to follows:]

[SUBCOMMITTEE INSERT]

Senator GILLIBRAND. It is something I want to work with you on. I also want to offer whatever resources you need. Any any collaboration you need from the Senate on these issues I will provide because it such an urgent issue.

Mr. GARCIA. Great.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thanks.

General JONES. Ma'am, one of the things we have done which is innovative is we have started embedding our mental health providers in the primary care facilities, not in the mental health clinic, but down with the—where you go for sick call, so that if you go in to see a doctor and the doctor is questioning you about how things

are going, and he feels like there is a mental health issue here, he does not need to take you down the hall to mental. He walks you across the hall to a provider within that little office of six or seven providers so no one knows that you are going to see someone, where you can be evaluated to see if there is a mental health issue.

We, like all the other Services, have found in the Air Force specifically there is no causal relationship between deployment, so we have got to go after those things that do cause it. Relationships, financial problems, and legal problems are the top three things in the Air Force that cause it. And the numbers will continue to be a challenge for all us, but we cannot take our eye off the ball.

And we share your concern and your passion for this issue because it is just a tragedy we cannot afford to let happen in our Services.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you.

Senator Blumenthal?

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you. I would like to pursue a topic that a number of you raised in your written testimony, which is the transition assistance program, preparation for life after the military, which will be an increasingly important and prevalent challenge given the draw downs and the reduced numbers of active duty that are going to occur.

I assume that every one of the Services are at work on initiatives going forward, even beyond what you described in your testimony. So maybe I could ask each of the Services to expand on what you have given us in your testimony. And we can just—in whatever order.

Mr. GINSBERG. Senator, you know, this was a major priority of the President last year, and he launched into a veterans opportunity work, veterans employment initiative that basically really directed the Services to look at our transition assistance up and down. And that goes well beyond just redoing the TAP program, transition assistance program, which held a three-day seminar. It was fundamentally enhancing it, adding new career tracks.

And then helping servicemembers be more career ready earlier on, to help start thinking about the transition and what they are going to do next even if they might be in the Service for, you know, 20 years. But as they go along, to always just be ready so that if for some reason through force management actions they find themselves on a transition, they will be prepared and be able to move out.

So we have applied manpower to this. We have applied resources. But it is an entirely redone program, again, presidential directive that we will be rolling out in the months and years ahead here.

General MILSTEAD. For the Marine Corps, our effort to rebuild our TAP precedes the VOW Act. The commandant started that. That was one of the commandant's planning guidance. It was to fix TAP. It was broken terribly. It had not received any attention in 15 years.

And we are actually stepping out now with the new program. It has a common module where everybody goes through. There could be somebody that is, say, an officer or enlisted. They get the same common presentations that they need on VA, those sorts of things.

And then we bust them off into to use the analogy of whatever your window is. If you are going to college, you go down the college path. If you are going to get into an entrepreneurship, you are going to open up your own business, you go down that path. If you are going to do a vocation or do something like that, just be a truck driver, then you go down that path. And if you are going to college, then you go down that path, because you do not want to sit there—I do not need what you need, and you do not need what I need, and it is a waste of time. And we constrict it to one week because after a week, you lose them.

And then, we are putting it online, and we are having the reach back capability for those that do not listen, sit there, they text the whole time because, you know what? They are going to Costa Rica and surf for 6 months. And then when they come back and then they decide, oh, my gosh, what was it they said, they can come back online. They can reach back in. So this has the commandant—it is one of his top, top topics.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you.

Mr. GARCIA. The only thing I would add to that, Senator, is the TAP program, which we have known for the last decade and a half, is unrecognizable to this new regime. And I will just caveat that the General's insights into the individual, specifically tailored tracks by saying there is a baseline that every transitioning member will get before they go into those individuals chutes. And they will be signed off on having received their full VA benefit package review, their full Department of Labor series of benefits and programs available to them there. And each of them will be advised on how their specific military specialty, their MOS, their NEC, translates into civilian industry in the private sector.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you.

Admiral VAN BUSKIRK. One thing I would like to add is, and I think General Milstead pointed to this, is that by virtue of going after this jointly, we are also stimulating some great innovation on how to deliver these products. You mentioned reach back and application, apps, so that the information is not just available to the person for a short period of time. It is available for a long period of time and can be updated and made more current, and, I think, more of interest to our members who are transitioning so they will pay attention, and they will have the resource for a longer period of time.

General BROMBERG. Senator, as my colleagues have said, totally different program, mandatory, five days. Great program.

As far as the Army, we have increased counselors to over 400. This year we have almost 700 counselors worldwide to help soldiers. We have 25 forward locations to help the Reserve component as they demobilize or as they leave Service and Reserves. We also have 76 locations for the Active component. Virtual capabilities have now been added. Virtual job fairs are becoming very popular.

In addition, the Army has wrapped this up in a Soldier for Life program where we are engaging industry in the communities. Many, many partnerships. I meet quarterly with 25 global companies to talk about removing barriers to veterans, and that has shown us a lot of product and a lot of great initiatives.

Lastly, a great initiative with the American Pipefitters. We have started a pilot up at Fort Lewis, WA, where they have actually taken soldiers while on duty time have trained, and they will become journeymen with a job guarantee when they complete the course. So great initiatives going forward.

Mr. LAMONT. And just to follow up on that, it is the credentialing that we are really trying to help with with some new programs. If you are a truck driver, for instance, in the Army, you may be very well qualified to receive a commercial driver's license in the State of Connecticut. And without having to go through additional training or pass a test, or what's the equivalent? We are trying to make sure that in many of these occupations, we can have a direct transfer, whether you are an electrician—what are your qualifications you would have to have in the various states.

We have any number of occupations similar to that, as you say, the pipefitter situation. In Illinois, for instance, the Heroes to Heart has a program with the teamsters, is very much focused on the over the road driver.

But those credentialing programs are going to be very, very important in moving them very quickly into the private sector.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Well, I would like to thank each of you for your information on this point. I think I do not need to tell you because you know it better than I, that this area is really so critically important, not only to our present service men and women, but also to the veterans who are merging and have such contribution and skills to provide to our Nation. So thank you very much. And I would like to follow up individually with you afterward.

My time has expired. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you to each of you for your extraordinary service, your very, extremely helpful testimony. We look forward to writing this year's authorization bill with your assistance. And thank you again for all you have done.

[Whereupon, at 11:13 a.m., the subcommittee adjourned.]