

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY THE
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES**

RECORD VERSION



**STATEMENT OF
SENIOR ENLISTED ADVISOR TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF
STAFF**

DAVID L. ISOM, USN

**BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES SENATE
SECOND SESSION, 119TH CONGRESS
OVERSIGHT HEARING - QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE MILITARY
FEBRUARY 11, 2026**

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY THE
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES**

People - The Foundation of our Lethality

Chairman Tuberville, Ranking Member Warren, distinguished members of this subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak here today, and thank you for this committee's deep commitment to our joint warfighters – they are the foundation of our lethality, and it is an incredible honor to represent them as their SEAC.

I am deeply humbled to serve as the 6th Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and I am grateful for the men and women of the Joint Force who serve our Nation with quiet professionalism, courage, and integrity, at home and around the globe every day. I am equally thankful for the families whose love and support make their service possible.

We have the most lethal and most capable military on the planet, and it remains that way because of our people - all 2.8 million servicemembers and civilians of the Joint Force. They answered the call and volunteered to serve something bigger than themselves. As an American, I am deeply grateful for their service and sacrifice, and as a warfighter, I am incredibly honored to serve alongside them.

We are living in extraordinarily complex times, with over three years of war in Europe, a Middle East in crisis from Gaza to Tehran, instability in Africa, North Korea trying to expand its nuclear capabilities, China growing its military, transnational threats across the Southern Command area of responsibility, and much more. The multiple simultaneous issues we face today are driving our global risk score to an all-time high, but I am comforted by the fact that our incredible Joint Force stands ready. These brave men and women stand the watch every day, strong and getting stronger, as the

Department works to reestablish deterrence, rebuild our military, and achieve peace through strength.

As our Joint Force works tirelessly to ensure the safety and security of our Nation, we must also work tirelessly to ensure that they have our full support and that they have what they need to fight and win our Nation's wars when called upon. For the Petty Officer in the engine room, the Airman on the flight line, the Staff Sergeant on the keyboard, or the young Lance Corporal on the perimeter, this is the reality that they train for every single day. They know that the stakes are high, and they are ready to meet that challenge. Today I will talk about what they need from us to win and will reinforce Special Operations Truth #1: humans are more important than hardware.

The Realities of Service

The true strength of our military isn't just in our ships, tanks, or aircraft; it's in the unwavering spirit and the trusted hands of our enlisted force, who make up 82% of our uniformed servicemembers. Our strength lies in the Guardian who defends our critical networks from cyber-attacks; it's the Sergeant who leads a fire team with courage, commitment, and seasoned expertise; it's the Petty Officer who performs crucial maintenance on a complex system powering our ships at sea; and it's the National Guardsman who changes from civilian clothes and puts on the uniform to deploy with their unit, exponentially empowering the team as a force multiplier for the military.

As I travel the world and engage with our troops, I see their incredible talent firsthand, but I also hear their challenges. That is why I am laser-focused on Quality of Life and Quality of Service for our teammates. This isn't about making life easy; this is about

readiness. This is about removing distractions that would prevent our warriors from staying focused and lethal. A warrior distracted by issues at home can become a readiness problem. When a military couple is forced to choose between their careers and a 12 month-long waitlist for childcare, that's a readiness problem. When a young Marine is living in a barracks room with mold and broken plumbing, that's a readiness problem. When a family is paying more out-of-pocket for housing because BAH isn't keeping pace with the local housing market, that's a readiness problem. Taking care of our people isn't just good leadership, it's ensuring we have a ready Joint Force and it's a fundamental warfighting imperative.

Our Priorities

The Chairman and I have three priorities, and I believe they are critical to the success of our military.

First, we must have a Joint Force that is **properly armed**. We must have the right capabilities and capacity when needed to fight and win. For the soldier on the ground, this means having a modernized weapon system, personal protective equipment, and the tools that provide them with a decisive edge for defeating the enemy. For an air defender, this means having the right magazine depth to properly defend against incoming enemy missile or UAV threats. For maintainers, this means having the right spare parts, so they don't have to cannibalize aircraft in order to keep others flying. We are asking our people to be prepared to win the fights of the future; we shouldn't ask them to do it with weapons of the past.

Second, we must have a Joint Force that is **globally integrated**. Our enlisted leaders build trust at the tactical edge with units from the other services and with Allies and Partners, forging personal bonds that are unbreakable in combat. We must ensure they are integrated across all domains, with the interagency, with academia, with industry, and with Allies and Partners. Our State Partnership Program is a great example of this, where our National Guard NCOs build decades of trust and work across multiple domains to build winning combinations in ways our adversaries could never replicate.

Third, we must build a Joint Force that is **ready**. Being ready is about repetitions, and every day that means rounds down range, flight hours, sea time, and realistic, tough training to build muscle memory along with the confidence to act decisively under fire. This also includes being clear-eyed about the future fight and being candid with our Force and families. Ensuring units have the resources to train properly will also ensure we have a Joint Force that is ready to win when called upon.

Underpinning these priorities, is our most important asset: our **people**. We recruit Americas best, we train them to be subject matter experts in the Profession of Arms, and we maintain their skills throughout their military career. We retain this talent by taking care of our people and their families, and ensuring they know that their leaders have their backs.

Resource Instability

At times, the readiness of our Joint Force is at risk in part due to continuing resolutions and government shutdowns from a lapse in appropriations. When I visit our troops during a lapse or CR, I hear about training that was cancelled, maintenance that was

deferred, a PCS that was interrupted, or a childcare center project that was delayed. When funding for critical elements of service member, family, and unit readiness is uncertain, it erodes trust with our people. Recognizing that our people are our greatest asset in the military, I respectfully request your assistance in upholding our promise to take care of them and their families with persistent and predictable funding through a regular budget.

Conclusion

Chairman Tuberville, Ranking Member Warren, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, our people are our strategic advantage. We have the smartest, most capable, and dedicated Joint Force in history, and they are willing to pay the ultimate price to defend our Nation. They are fulfilling their end of the bargain through tough training, innovative thinking, long deployments, and they are ready to answer the Nation's call.

On their behalf I am asking that we uphold our end of the bargain by providing them with the stable and predictable funding they need to succeed. Provide them with the modern tools they need to win, the tough, realistic training to dominate the adversary, and the quality of life that honors their service and sacrifice. I ask that we continue to work together to ensure our Joint Force never enters a fair fight.

Thank you for your steadfast support of our troops and their families, and for your time today. I look forward to your questions.