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**PREPARED STATEMENT
OF
THE HONORABLE ANTHONY J. TATA
UNDER SECRETARY OF WAR FOR PERSONNEL AND READINESS**

REGARDING

THE FISCAL YEAR 2027 DEPARTMENT OF WAR PERSONNEL POSTURE

BEFORE

**THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL**

MAY 20, 2026

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Chairman Tuberville, Ranking Member Warren, and distinguished members of the Personnel Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today, along with my Personnel and Readiness (P&R) colleagues.

In his Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Budget Request, President Trump made clear his unwavering commitment to our men and women in uniform, their families, and Department of War (DoW) civilians. My colleagues and I have the privilege and distinct honor of delivering on this commitment and taking care of the military community.

Our focus in P&R is on optimizing personnel policies and programs in line with President Trump's priorities and Secretary Hegseth's guidance. The scope and scale of our portfolio is significant, and includes:

- More than one thousand Department of War Education Activity (DoWEA) schools, Child Development Centers, and School-Age Care and Youth Centers, serving more than 300,000 military-connected children;
- 724 hospitals and clinics, providing care to 9.5 million Military Health System (MHS) beneficiaries;
- 235 commissaries, serving 1.8 million households in 13 countries annually;
- 16 Military Service Academies, Senior Service Colleges, and Senior Military Colleges; and
- The readiness of all platforms and systems across the Department, as well as the preparedness of the more than 5 million Service members, military families, and federal civilians that make up the military community.

The P&R team is responsible for each of these no-fail missions, all of which are essential to building and maintaining a lethal fighting force. Congress is critical to our efforts, and we appreciate your collaboration, support, and contributions to the military community.

Restoring the Warrior Ethos

Over the past 16 months, the Department – under the leadership of Secretary Hegseth – has taken bold and decisive action to strengthen the force, pivoting away from the distractions of the past and returning to our core warfighting mission.

Our renewed focus on restoring the warrior ethos and rebuilding the military has led to historic recruiting successes. Thanks to the relentless focus of our leadership; deliberate

investments in our team, including the establishment of the Recruitment Task Force; and tireless work of our recruiters and Military Entrance Processing Station personnel, recruiting is currently trending 8% higher than it was at this time last year—a year in which we far surpassed our recruiting targets. In addition, thanks to the authorities granted by this Committee in the FY 2026 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), the Department has been able to significantly improve recruiter access to secondary schools, as well as clarify quality calculations for preparatory course graduates, ensuring that we can reach and train the next generation of American warfighters. Retention is also on track across the Military Services, proving that when we project strength and purpose, the best and brightest patriots will answer the call to serve – and continue serving – our great nation.

The Department has also acted with urgency and resolve to support the warriors negatively impacted by the COVID-19 vaccine mandate. As of April 2026, we have returned nearly 170 unjustly discharged Service members to our ranks. Recognizing the value these trained professionals bring to the force and the investment that the Department has made in each of them, we have extended the window for others to return until April 1, 2027, and have reduced the service obligation to two years. Likewise, the Department remains laser-focused on providing remedies to those individuals who do not wish to return to service and to ensuring that this never happens again. We have started to identify and automatically upgrade discharge characterizations; expedited the correction of military records; begun to repay previously collected bonus amounts; and sponsored a comprehensive, independent review of the COVID-19 vaccine mandate to identify lessons learned, offer recommendations, and enhance transparency and accountability. All these efforts are aimed at restoring honor and rebuilding trust with the affected community.

Investing in the All-Volunteer Force

First of all, I want to thank this Committee for delivering on our shared commitment to the men and women in uniform with the largest ever pay for junior enlisted Service members. Now, President Trump's FY 2027 Budget Request builds on this effort, solidifies our recruiting and retention gains, and continues our momentum. This budget supports a historic increase in end strength and funds pay raises for our troops, recognizing our Service members, further supporting recruiting and retention, and enhancing our operational capabilities.

As highlighted by the 14th Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation, our total military compensation package is highly competitive. This budget will enable the Department to remain competitive with the civilian labor market, and is key to recruiting and retaining a lethal and effective All-Volunteer Force.

Focus on Strategic Readiness

The Department invests in readiness to ensure that the Joint Force is ready to deter and, if called upon, prevail by achieving the nation's objectives against the most dangerous threats to Americans' interests. We are building a ready and lethal force, ready to fight tonight anywhere on the globe, while also building the capabilities and forces necessary to continue to dominate the future battlefield. We forge the most lethal force in the world not just by using the best technology but by developing the best trained and best prepared warfighters in the world. We are investing in training capabilities and education programs as the foundational pillars of our national security – ensuring the technical skills, leadership, force health, and operational acumen of our people are unparalleled.

It is clear to all of us that decades of deferred modernization and the decay of our industrial base have created risk to our ability to sustain and win a high-intensity fight. We are revitalizing our industrial capacity to ensure our troops have what they need to dominate any adversary, anytime, anywhere.

Establishing a Culture of Safety and Accountability

A ready, lethal force requires a culture of safety and accountability. To address concerning trends in aviation, we established the Aviation Mishap Task Force, integrating the Joint Safety Council and the Military Departments to identify joint and systemic risk factors, including the readiness degradation associated with repeated Continuing Resolutions (CRs), and deliver actionable policy recommendations. These recommendations will help to ensure that our warfighters have the predictable training, maintenance, and equipment needed to operate safely, effectively, and with lethal proficiency. We appreciate any efforts by the Committee to help us mitigate readiness and safety impacts created by budgetary uncertainty.

Revitalizing Professional Military Education (PME)

To prepare for large-scale combat operations in a rapidly changing global landscape, the Department of War remains committed to ensuring a renewed focus on accountability, meritocracy, and rigorous standards in our Professional Military Education (PME) and training programs. Our leaders must be prepared to fight and win our nation's wars.

On September 30, 2025, the Secretary directed a comprehensive review of all curricula and standards. Based on those assessments, and to rebuild the warrior ethos in PME, on February 6, 2026, he directed the discontinuation of all graduate-level PME, fellowships, and certificate programs at Harvard University. Subsequently, the Department discontinued legacy Senior Service College (SSC) fellowships at other institutions that were failing to deliver for our warfighters. We are now exploring new SSC fellowships at institutions that are aligned with the Department's priorities.

We have also established an SSC Task Force to evaluate our own military institutions and ensure that our faculty and curricula remain laser-focused on national security, strategy, high standards, history, and meritocracy.

These efforts will enable us to capitalize on this generational opportunity to revitalize our PME system, developing strategic thinkers required to deliver on our critical national security mission, now and in the future.

Building Project Patriot Pipeline

To meet our mission, the Department of War needs a highly skilled, highly adaptable workforce. Under the leadership of President Trump, we are committed to building the talent base required to support national security priorities like Golden Dome, shipbuilding, and homeland defense, and to strengthen the Defense Industrial Base.

The Department has established a new initiative – Project Patriot Pipeline – to unify dozens of disparate training and workforce development programs for Service members, military spouses, and federal civilians. Project Patriot Pipeline eliminates bureaucracy and inefficiency and realigns education and training with critical military and industrial base needs like cyber security, engineering, and aviation maintenance, so that we are prepared to fight and win our nation's wars.

It synchronizes vital programs like SkillBridge, Tuition Assistance, and Credentialing, enabling our warriors and civilians to focus on and acquire in-demand skills tied to real-world

needs, accelerating their careers in the Department, and helping them to secure meaningful employment in the Defense Industrial Base. Project Patriot Pipeline is also enabling our military spouses to access career coaching, fellowships, and scholarship programs that will allow them to gain and maintain meaningful jobs, no matter where military life takes them.

The Department of War is home to the best and brightest this country has to offer. Project Patriot Pipeline will help us to ensure that our warriors are building the skills they need to sustain our military advantage, in uniform and beyond.

Strengthening the Department of War Education Activity

A Service member who is well cared for is a Service member who is focused on mission. Providing the best possible education to our military-connected children enables our warriors to remain present and prepared to execute, facilitates retention, and supports overall readiness.

Since my confirmation last July, my team and I have met with administrators, teachers, staff, parents, and students across the DoWEA school system. What we have found is that while there is good work happening throughout this system, there is also frustration with high vacancy rates for permanent teacher positions, lack of parental access, and inability to measure proficiency and growth in students.

Under the leadership of Secretary Hegseth, the Department is transforming DoWEA to address these concerns and reverse its decline. We are prioritizing instructional excellence and student outcomes; renewing our focus on patriotic values, rigorous academic standards, physical fitness, and expanded curriculum choices embedded in classical education; and emphasizing parental transparency.

The Secretary and I have brought in a new Director, Paul Craft, and a new Chief Academic Officer, Tiffany Hoben, to lead DoWEA. Both are seasoned education executives with prior military service. Together, we have launched an innovative pilot program focused on reducing time-to-hire for educator positions, ensuring that we attract high-quality talent and provide our students with the support they need to succeed in the classroom. We have also begun to develop new nutritional and physical education standards in coordination with the President's Council on Sports, Fitness, and Nutrition to improve the health of our military-connected children and recently rolled out the newly restored Presidential Fitness Test across all 161 of our DoWEA schools to promote healthy youth, strong families, and high standards. Finally, we are

putting in place even more robust measures to track performance and growth and support student development and achievement.

To these ends, we are requesting a significant plus-up in the FY27 budget – roughly \$1.4B – for DoWEA to facilitate school choice and repair our facilities, enhancing student experiences and overall learning.

Rewarding Civilian Personnel

One of the reasons why the DoWEA hiring pilot program is so crucial is because the civilian personnel hiring system in the Department and across the federal government is broken.

Secretary Hegseth and I recognize that this process is complex and challenging. We also recognize that it is inhibiting our ability to meet our mission, whether we are talking about filling critical roles in DoWEA schools, hiring military spouses, or bringing onboard high-demand, low-density talent in critical areas like cyber security and healthcare.

The Department is evaluating and taking action to address civilian hiring and workforce management issues, ensuring that we can attract and retain high-quality talent and strengthen accountability in support of a ready force.

Deputy Secretary Feinberg directed all DoW Components to fund civilian awards and enforce meaningful distinctions in performance reviews. Building on this initiative, Secretary Hegseth ordered all DoW Components to recognize and reward the top 15% of civilian performers with significant monetary awards. To date, the Department has disbursed \$1.23 billion to 92,859 high-achievers, with an average award of \$13,273.41.

In addition, I recently signed out a memo focused on maximizing employment flexibilities for our military spouses, ensuring that they can secure and retain positions with the Department (e.g., authorizing alternate worksites for spouses accompanying active-duty Service members on assignments outside of the commuting area of their primary worksite).

By focusing on expediting hiring, rewarding excellence, and demanding accountability, we are continuing to build a strong civilian team, one that is prepared to help us meet evolving mission needs.

Fostering Pharmaceutical Supply Chain Resilience

Our access to mission-critical medicines is at risk due to a heavy reliance on foreign nations, particularly China, for raw materials and manufacturing. This vulnerability could be exploited during a geopolitical crisis and requires rapid, interagency innovation.

In line with the Administration's directive, the Department is actively engaging with public and private sector partners to bring pharmaceutical supply chains for military-essential medications—from start to finish—back to America. DoW, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and the Department of Health and Human Services are leveraging our combined \$120 billion in purchasing power to incentivize industry to reshore medicines that save lives on the battlefield. The Department has identified a consortium to help stockpile raw materials and reshore the manufacturing of active pharmaceutical ingredients. This proposal is currently being reviewed by the Office of Strategic Capital to determine its feasibility and identify next steps. We are committed to overcoming obstacles and making progress on pharmaceutical onshoring to protect our readiness and our people.

Strengthening Suicide Prevention Efforts

As we reported to you in March, in Calendar Year (CY) 2024, 471 Service members died by suicide, which was less than in CY 2023, when 531 Service members died by suicide. Recognizing that every death by suicide is a tragedy, the Department will continue to take action to support the health, safety, and wellbeing of our men and women in uniform and their families.

We are applying a comprehensive, integrated approach to suicide prevention to advance force readiness and resilience, and achieve long-term, lasting change. This includes increasing mental health support, revising suicide prevention training, and implementing a comprehensive postvention response program. And, as part of The Brandon Act, Service members can continue to self-refer for mental health evaluations. Our investment in ongoing research ensures that the Department remains responsive to the evolving needs of our Service members and their families.

In addition, at the start of the fiscal year, we realigned the Defense Suicide Prevention Office (DSPO) under the Defense Health Agency to further advance DSPO's mission and impact in line with DHA's clinical mental health mandate. Note that neither DSPO's mission nor its routine activities of reporting suicide rates and managing prevention programs have changed. Its goal remains one of decreasing risk factors, while increasing protective factors with the right professionals in charge of care.

The Department will continue to implement initiatives to decrease suicide prevalence in the military community and support our people.

Furthering DoW-VA Collaboration

Nearly a year ago, Secretary Hegseth and Secretary Collins signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between DoW and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), underscoring the strong partnership between our departments and reiterating our enduring commitment to our men and women in uniform, their families, and veterans. Since then, we have worked together to optimize healthcare resources, personnel, and facilities; facilitate uninterrupted access to healthcare; and provide comprehensive, continuous, and compassionate mental health treatment.

For example, we are bringing veterans into specific Military Treatment Facilities (MTFs) for complex specialty care. In 2025, more than 400 DoW providers delivered 100,000 appointments in VA facilities, and more than 300 DoW providers performed 10,000 procedures for VA patients, enabling our medical professionals to practice and refine their skills in real-world settings and helping to generate active-duty medical forces for real-world crises. The Department has expanded this collaboration to five more facilities in 2026, including Naval Medical Center Portsmouth, William Beaumont Army Medical Center, and Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.

DoW and VA are also in the process of finalizing a related MOU that will allow seamless movement of providers between our two systems, increasing efficiencies, improving medical readiness, and better supporting our beneficiaries. In addition, we are prioritizing the swift and seamless transfer of Service Treatment Records (STRs) from DoW to VA, aiming to make them available the day a Service member becomes a veteran with zero days of medical record unavailability. Toward that end, instead of waiting for a Service member to separate to begin digitizing their paper records, we are beginning this process before he or she separates and are using technology to automate the detection of misfiles and other violations, improving quality control.

Transforming the Military Health System

The Department recognizes that gaps in health and safety are gaps in lethality and readiness. We are moving out on several fronts to build a medically ready and ready medical force, with a bias toward innovation and expedience. We are reinvigorating critical construction projects, such as the Landstuhl Hospital project. Landstuhl was over budget and behind schedule until I made it a top priority to get the project back on track in order to ensure our Service members continue to receive the world class care they deserve, no matter where in the world they are deployed.

On March 9, 2026, the Department formally notified Congress of the Military Health System (MHS) Restructuring Plan. This initiative continues crucial work from the first Trump Administration to streamline MTFs for our beneficiaries.

The Department is also carefully pursuing critical TRICARE reform for FY 2028. For years, TRICARE beneficiaries have reported steadily declining satisfaction with their access to care, stemming from structural constraints in TRICARE's benefit design. The discounted fee-for-service model and long-duration, too-big-to-fail regional contracts limit provider participation and beneficiary choice. We are committed to creating a system that leverages competition and the free market to increase access and choice for our military families.

Strengthening Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Efforts

Restoring members' trust through sexual assault prevention and response is key to the warrior ethos, force readiness, standards and accountability, and unity of force. The FY 2026 NDAA reformed the military's sexual assault policy by expanding medical and legal support for survivors, ensuring independent prosecution, and modernizing the military justice code. This year, the President's Budget request includes \$1.067 billion for the Department's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) program, an increase of \$51.0 million (5.0 percent) from the FY26 enacted level of \$1.016 billion, reinforcing the President's commitment to countering sexual assault in the Total Force.

The Department continues to implement the Sexual Assault Workforce Model, which allows our SAPR Office to work collaboratively with the Military Departments to ensure that the sexual assault response workforce is organized in a manner that accounts for differences in command structure, while also incorporating the appropriate level of independence.

We remain focused on and committed to progress and recognize continued and sustained resourcing in the sexual assault response and prevention workforce are the primary means to further reduce the occurrence of sexual assault and other harmful behaviors within the force, monitor and neutralize early warning threats to readiness, hold offenders appropriately accountable, and assist victims with recovery.

Integrating the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency

The Department recently realigned the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) under P&R. The sacred mission of DPAA – to provide the fullest possible accounting of our missing personnel to their families and the nation – is critically important and falls squarely in line with our efforts serve and support the men and women who serve and support our country.

Every unaccounted-for U.S. service member, DoW civilian, and DoW contractor is entitled to one certainty: that he or she will not be forgotten. In FY 2025, the DPAA accounted for 231 formerly missing persons from past conflicts. Now that DPAA is part of P&R, our entire leadership team is committed to ensuring a smooth, transparent, and seamless transition, enabling the team to continue delivering on its critical mission: honoring our missing personnel and bringing peace of mind to their families.

Let me put a face on these efforts. U.S. Army Captain (CPT) Willibald Bianchi, a 29-year-old from Minnesota, was assigned to the Philippine Scouts and for his actions at Corregidor, he was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor. He was captured and endured the Bataan Death March; survived three Japanese POW Camps; was aboard the Japanese POW transport ship, *Ōryoku Maru*, and survived its mistaken bombing by U.S. planes in December 1944 in the Philippines. CPT Bianchi was then transferred to another POW transport ship, *Enoura Maru*, which itself was mistakenly bombed in January 1945, while docked in Formosa, and that is where he perished.

In August 2025, DPAA identified CPT Bianchi's remains and in September, Secretary Hegseth announced CPT Bianchi's identification, as well as met with his family. CPT Bianchi's remains were transported back to Minnesota last month, where CPT Bianchi was laid to rest by his family and community.

Conclusion

These are our core areas of focus and priorities in P&R. They are ambitious, but they are achievable and essential for our national security. We are building a force that is lethal, merit-based, and ready to achieve peace through strength. My colleagues – our Assistant Secretaries of War – will now provide greater fidelity on their respective portfolios and the incredible work their teams are doing to serve our men and women in uniform, their families, and Department civilians.

Thank you for your continued support and collaboration. We look forward to your questions.

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