

Stenographic Transcript
Before the

Subcommittee on Personnel

COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES SENATE

HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON
THE STATUS OF MILITARY RECRUITING AND
RETENTION EFFORTS ACROSS THE DEPARTMENT OF
DEFENSE

Wednesday, September 21, 2022

Washington, D.C.

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1 HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON THE STATUS OF
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3 DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

4
5 Wednesday, September 21, 2022

6
7 U.S. Senate

8 Subcommittee on Personnel

9 Committee on Armed Services

10 Washington, D.C.

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12 The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 3:38 p.m.
13 in Room SR-222, Russell Senate Office Building, Hon. Kirsten
14 E. Gillibrand, chairwoman of the Subcommittee, presiding.

15 Committee Members Present: Senators Gillibrand
16 [presiding], Hirono, Warren, Tillis, Hawley, and Tuberville.

1 OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND, U.S.
2 SENATOR FROM NEW YORK

3 Senator Gillibrand: Good morning, everyone.

4 The Personnel Subcommittee meets today to receive
5 testimony on the current state of military personnel
6 recruiting and retention in the Department of Defense.

7 Let me start by welcoming Senator Tillis, ranking
8 member of this subcommittee. Senator Tillis, in particular,
9 has shown great interest in ensuring our military has what
10 it needs to recruit and retain the best people that our
11 country has to offer and I want to thank him for his
12 leadership on this issue.

13 I look forward to working with Senator Tillis to help
14 find ways to facilitate both recruiting and retention in the
15 military services.

16 Our military faces headwinds in its effort to attract
17 and retain quality recruits. By the end of 2022, the active
18 U.S. military will be at its smallest size since the
19 creation of the all-volunteer force for which we mark the
20 50th anniversary next year.

21 All four military services here today have signaled
22 significant concerns about the strength of their recruiting
23 operations and their prospects for success in 2023.

24 The Army, in particular, has said -- has had a very
25 difficult year. With nine days remaining in the fiscal year

1 the Army reports it has met only 70 percent of its fiscal
2 year 2022 active duty recruiting goal and that is on track
3 to miss its recruiting target by up to 30,000 soldiers.

4 The troubling drop in military accession comes at a
5 time of global uncertainty brought on by COVID-19, rising
6 inflation, unprovoked Russian military aggression.

7 As the security environment becomes more unstable, it
8 is critical that our military remains fully equipped to meet
9 the challenges of our day.

10 At the same time, we know that America's youth have a
11 historically low level of interest in military service and
12 enjoy a highly favorable job market, which makes it even
13 more difficult to recruit and retain highly-skilled
14 personnel.

15 We also know that some critical skill capabilities are
16 especially at risk, including billets in cyber operations,
17 intelligence, and electronic warfare.

18 As our military looks to fill positions in these
19 fields, I challenge the services to think outside the box.
20 Creating new career paths, offering innovative pay and
21 incentive structures, and realigning some capabilities from
22 military to civilian workforces should all be on the table.

23 I know that America's military is by far the best
24 fighting force in the world and that our service members are
25 overwhelmingly proud to serve.

1 Paradoxically, the recent drop in military recruiting
2 has coincided with historically high retention rates across
3 all our services. The statistics you have provided show
4 clear evidence that those members who have joined the
5 military are more likely than ever before to remain in
6 uniform by choice.

7 But decades of hard-fought conflict in Iraq and
8 Afghanistan have created a perception that service in the
9 military leaves people broken, damaged, or disadvantaged in
10 society.

11 In reality, I know from my many interactions with our
12 service members and veterans the majority report positive
13 experiences in the military, positive post-military
14 outcomes, and are proud of their service.

15 They end up with more education, higher household
16 income, and greater levels of civic engagement than their
17 peers who did not enter military service, and veteran
18 unemployment is lower than the general unemployment rate
19 across the country.

20 Our military has wonderful things to offer, from high-
21 tech skills building, leadership training, camaraderie and
22 friendship, generous civilian education benefits, and robust
23 family support programs.

24 I want to know what we can do to help the military
25 recruit the best and brightest people into service. I am

1 looking forward to hearing from today's witnesses on this
2 topic. We have one panel today featuring human resource
3 experts from DOD and each military service.

4 Witnesses on our panel include Dr. Stephanie Miller,
5 Deputy Assistant Secretary for Defense for Military
6 Personnel Policy; Lieutenant General Douglas F. Stitt,
7 Deputy Chief of Staff, G-1 United States Army; Vice Admiral
8 Rick J. Cheeseman, Jr., Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for
9 Personnel Manpower Training, United States Navy; Lieutenant
10 General Caroline Miller, Deputy Chief of Staff for Manpower,
11 Personnel, and Services, United States Air Force; Dr.
12 Michael R. Strobl, Acting Deputy Commandant for Manpower and
13 Reserve Affairs.

14 Again, I welcome the witnesses today. Thank you for
15 appearing and thank you for your testimony. Thank you, most
16 of all, for your service. We are deeply grateful.

17 Senator Tillis?
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1 STATEMENT OF HON. THOM TILLIS, U.S. SENATOR FROM NORTH
2 CAROLINA

3 Senator Tillis: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I want to
4 thank you for the work that we have done on this committee
5 for several years now, and I look forward to doing more work
6 in the remainder of this Congress and in the future.

7 At our subcommittee hearing last year, I said I was
8 worried that the current challenges in military recruiting
9 represented a long-term threat to the all-volunteer force.
10 Over the summer, I think things have gotten worse and there
11 is no sunlight on the horizon.

12 It is becoming clear the all-volunteer force that has
13 served our country well for the last 50 years is at an
14 inflection point.

15 While only the Army is in the unfortunate position of
16 missing its recruiting goal this year, the truth of the
17 matter is unless we do things differently for the -- and do
18 things for the better, I believe every service except for
19 the Space Force is at risk of missing the recruiting mission
20 over the next year, and we need to act.

21 I hope you use this hearing to separate the truth from
22 fiction of what is actually causing Americans to take a pass
23 on serving their country.

24 There is no shortage of misleading information related
25 to military service. Members of Congress, the media, and

1 even military and veteran community all contribute to these
2 disproportionately negative and often inaccurate portrayals
3 of military service.

4 The result of these prevailing narratives is a
5 misinformed American public who do not know much about the
6 military but what they do know is mostly incorrect.

7 According to the DOD surveys of potential recruits, the
8 top two reasons young people give for not joining the
9 military are the possibility of physical injury or death and
10 the possibility of PTSD or other emotional psychological
11 issues.

12 The truth, of course, is that the vast majority of
13 those who join the military come out and much better for
14 their service. A recent peer-reviewed paper by the
15 Quarterly Journal of Economics found that enlisting in the
16 Army increases cumulative earnings, post-secondary education
17 attendance, homeownership, and marriage.

18 While there are some jobs in the military that can be
19 dangerous, most people serve without being exposed to any
20 more danger than the average American does on a worksite.
21 And while I am glad we are turning a corner in the way we
22 talk and care about those who have PTSD and TBI, I am
23 certain that the risks posed by these conditions should not
24 dissuade otherwise interested Americans from enlisting.

25 One unfortunate trend that is undoubtedly harming

1 recruiting is the politicization of the military for
2 partisan gain. The military is not full of woke warriors or
3 extremists.

4 Americans of all political persuasions should feel
5 supported in serving their country and, unfortunately, some
6 indications suggest that is just not the case.

7 I look forward to hearing from the witnesses today to
8 figure out how we can work together to better prepare you to
9 make your recruiting goals and better inform future recruits
10 about the wonderful opportunity that they could have in
11 military service.

12 Thank you, Madam Chair.

13 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Mr. Ranking Member.

14 VFW has asked us to enter their position paper into the
15 record and, without objection, it is so admitted.

16 [The information follows:]

17 [SUBCOMMITTEE INSERT]

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1 Senator Gillibrand: I would now like to hear from Ms.
2 Miller for your opening statement.

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1 STATEMENT OF STEPHANIE MILLER, DEPUTY ASSISTANT
2 SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR MILITARY PERSONNEL POLICY

3 Ms. Miller: Thank you.

4 Chairwoman Gillibrand, Ranking Member Tillis, and
5 distinguished members of the subcommittee, I appreciate the
6 opportunity to appear before you to discuss the current and
7 future state of military recruiting and retention.

8 As fiscal year 2022 comes to a close, the department
9 anticipates we will, collectively, miss our annual
10 recruiting mission, despite assessing more than 170,000
11 remarkable young men and women.

12 Our shortfall constitutes an unprecedented mission gap
13 and is reason for concern for the greater state of national
14 service. Recruiting shortfalls are not merely a DOD issue
15 but a national one.

16 As we will discuss today, there is no one silver bullet
17 or specific action that the department or the services can
18 take to quickly resolve the current challenges.

19 But we must focus on galvanizing our citizens, both
20 youth and influencers, on the merit and value of
21 contributing to the country's well being through military
22 service.

23 Changing this dynamic requires involvement from members
24 of Congress, veterans, teachers, coaches, as well as
25 parents, grandparents, and other influencers because the

1 military is more important than ever to ensure power
2 projection that allows for individual freedoms, promotes
3 free trade, protects human rights, and the rule of law
4 across the globe.

5 However, the portrayal of the mission and what service
6 looks like for military members and their families is often
7 skewed in the media and in the minds of the current
8 generation of youth.

9 The next generation of Americans to serve should know
10 that there has never been a better time for them to choose
11 military service. Our data indicates that Generation Z is
12 primarily driven by purpose, relationships, and a clear path
13 to success. We can offer all three.

14 Purpose -- they can apply passion for change in
15 military service and make a global impact protecting
16 freedom. From medical training and humanitarian aid to
17 cyber technology to leadership under pressure, service
18 members find personal fulfillment serving in every part of
19 the world and responding with skills to truly make a
20 difference every day.

21 Relationships -- military service provides a connection
22 between members, an esprit de corps that simply does not
23 have a parallel in civilian sectors.

24 A clear path to success -- military service affords a
25 wide range of career opportunities where we will

1 individually challenge them to reach peak potential while
2 also providing a clear path to succeed, and along the way
3 they will see and do things that most Americans never will.

4 Additionally, we provide our service members
5 competitive pay packages with unprecedented opportunities
6 for continued training and education. In short, we offer
7 the things that Generation Z looks for when choosing a
8 career, but in many respects they just do not know it.

9 While a picture of the current recruiting environment
10 is difficult, the services and the department are actively
11 committed to overcoming recruiting challenges through strong
12 collaboration and innovative thought.

13 Congress can help our efforts by improving high school
14 access where high schools are incentivized to grant
15 predictable and regular access to recruiters and support to
16 the Career Exploration Program, updating authorities for
17 targeted marketing and advertising to ensure our messages
18 are uniquely tailored to diverse audiences with multifaceted
19 interests, an on time budget approval with consideration of
20 two-year funding for marketing and advertising for earlier
21 media buys, which would not only maximize critical taxpayer
22 resources through reduced price purchasing but also give
23 recruitment advertising a more competitive advantage in an
24 already crowded market.

25 In conclusion, I want to thank the members of this

1 subcommittee for taking the time to focus on this critical
2 issue and the continued advocacy by the members and their
3 staffs on behalf of the men and women of the Department of
4 Defense.

5 We appreciate your continued support for funding the
6 programs that keep the force and their families safe,
7 strong, and healthy. I look forward to your questions.

8 [The prepared statement of Ms. Miller follows:]

9 [SUBCOMMITTEE INSERT]

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1 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Ms. Miller.

2 We are now prepared to hear from Lieutenant General
3 Stitt.

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1 STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL DOUGLAS STITT, DEPUTY
2 CHIEF OF STAFF, G-1 UNITED STATES ARMY

3 General Stitt: Chairwoman Gillibrand, Ranking Member
4 Tillis, distinguished members of this committee, thank you
5 for the opportunity and the honor to testify on behalf of
6 the soldiers of the United States Army today.

7 America's military currently faces the most challenging
8 recruiting environment since the inception of the all-
9 volunteer force in 1973.

10 These unprecedented recruiting challenges are driven in
11 part by a low national unemployment rate, a strong job
12 market, intense competition with the private sector, and a
13 declining number of young Americans interested in and
14 qualified for uniform service.

15 Currently, only 23 percent of 17- to 24-year-old
16 Americans are fully qualified to serve. The top
17 disqualifiers for service are obesity, addiction, conduct,
18 test scores, medical and behavioral health conditions.

19 The Army is taking strong actions to ensure we have a
20 ready force comprised of cohesive teams of fit, trained, and
21 disciplined soldiers. All initiatives are designed to
22 increase our accessions of qualified candidates under three
23 guiding principles.

24 We will not sacrifice quality for quantity. We will
25 not lower our standards. We will invest in America's youth

1 so that those who want to serve can meet our standards.

2 The United States Army exists for one purpose, to
3 protect the nation by fighting and winning our nation's wars
4 as a member of the Joint Force. Our readiness to fight and
5 win depends on a quality all-volunteer force.

6 We have high standards for our soldiers and that will
7 not change. But we are committed to removing barriers to
8 service. We want to give individuals who want to be the
9 opportunity to be all they can be while serving in the
10 United States Army.

11 Chairwoman Gillibrand, Ranking Member Tillis,
12 distinguished members of this committee, thank you for your
13 support to the soldiers of the United States Army. We are
14 committed to working collaboratively with this committee and
15 with Congress as a whole to help us maintain the Army as the
16 world's premier fighting force.

17 I look forward to your questions.

18 [The prepared statement of General Stitt follows:]

19 [SUBCOMMITTEE INSERT]

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1 Senator Gillibrand: We are prepared to hear from Vice
2 Admiral Cheeseman.

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1 STATEMENT OF VICE ADMIRAL RICK CHEESEMAN, DEPUTY CHIEF
2 OF NAVAL OPERATIONS, PERSONNEL, MANPOWER AND TRAINING, N1
3 UNITED STATES NAVY

4 Admiral Cheeseman: Thank you.

5 Chairwoman Gillibrand, Ranking Member Tillis, and
6 distinguished members of the Personnel Subcommittee, thank
7 you for the opportunity to appear before you today to
8 discuss our Navy's most important strategic asset, our
9 people.

10 Recruiting and retaining sailors is the Secretary of
11 the Navy's top priority and he is personally involved in our
12 Navy Working Group to address these challenges.
13 Additionally, the recently released Chief of Naval
14 Operations Navigation Plan for 2022 reaffirms his
15 fundamental belief that people are our most important
16 element. We cannot accomplish a single mission without
17 them.

18 Strategic competition demands that we remain ahead of
19 our adversaries, who persistently challenge our traditional
20 warfighting dominance through new weapon systems and
21 innovative tactics.

22 In response, our Navy forms an essential element of the
23 Joint Force by building and sustaining warfighting
24 capability. Our perennial advantage remains our people and
25 our sailors relentlessly pursue operational excellence.

1 However, without a steady supply of new sailors this
2 advantage could quickly wane. It is for this reason that we
3 pulled every possible lever to achieve mission success in
4 recruiting.

5 As fiscal year '22 draws to a close, I can report that
6 Navy has met 100 percent of our active component enlisted
7 recruiting mission, which is the vast majority of our new
8 total accessions.

9 However, while we continue to fight for every person, I
10 expect that we will fall short of reserve enlisted mission
11 as well as our active and reserve officer mission.

12 Our Navy team continues to focus on the factors that
13 influence our recruiting efforts, assess the current
14 situation to meet our recruiting goals, and implement
15 initiatives to keep our force near end strength controls.

16 We continue to leverage our large-scale digital
17 recruiting presence through our "Forged by the Sea"
18 marketing and advertising campaign, which allows us to reach
19 each and every zip code to access previously undiscovered
20 talent.

21 In 2017, 34 percent of our marketing and advertising
22 was digital. Today, we are at nearly 100 percent digital,
23 resulting in a 30 percent increase in national leads while
24 taking the message to where our future sailors are
25 operating, online.

1 While we remain committed to aggressively fighting for
2 the best our nation has to offer, we are beginning to
3 witness an increased competition for needed talent. In
4 particular, we are experiencing challenges due to labor
5 market conditions, strong commercial competitors, and low
6 propensity to serve among our 18- to 24-year-old target
7 demographic.

8 2022 has seen low unemployment with continued wage
9 growth, resulting in strong labor demand in all markets
10 nationwide. The Navy welcomes support to promote military
11 service with as much enthusiasm and credibility as colleges,
12 trade schools, or nontraditional gig economy careers.
13 Legislation to support an increase to the enlistment bonus
14 statutory maximums and specialists' skill pay and bonuses
15 will help as well.

16 Building upon the gains of the last few years, Navy
17 remains committed to retaining the right talent and
18 experience in the right pay grades and ratings. This is a
19 mutually supporting effort with recruiting and we have used
20 every lever within our authority to maximize those making
21 the decision to stay Navy.

22 Navy retention remains above our year to date retention
23 forecasts in all zones, which are tracking to meet or exceed
24 our fiscal year '22 retention attainment benchmarks. That
25 said, we remain cautiously optimistic for fiscal year '23

1 while we closely monitor all of our retention metrics.

2 Our Navy is committed to attracting, developing, and
3 inspiring America's finest so we can best protect and defend
4 our American way of life. We cannot fully accomplish this
5 without your continued support.

6 As CNO frequently states, every day matters in this
7 critical decade. Everything that you can do to prevent the
8 negative impacts of a Continuing Resolution will help ensure
9 our warfighting capability and the fulfillment of our
10 commitment to our sailors and their families.

11 I remain inspired by our sailors. They exceed every
12 expectation on watch today and every day around the globe.
13 You and every American can be proud of the sailors and
14 families of your United States Navy as they serve our great
15 nation.

16 Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

17 [The prepared statement of Admiral Cheeseman follows:]

18 [SUBCOMMITTEE INSERT]

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1 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Vice Admiral.

2 Lieutenant General Miller, we are prepared to hear your
3 opening statement.

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1 STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL CAROLINE MILLER,
2 DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF FOR MANPOWER, PERSONNEL, AND SERVICES,
3 UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

4 General Miller: Chairwoman Gillibrand, Ranking Member
5 Tillis, and distinguished members of the committee, thank
6 you for the opportunity to appear before you to discuss the
7 recruiting efforts of the Department of the Air Force.

8 I am honored to be able to highlight the things we are
9 doing to showcase the Air Force as the employer of choice.
10 As we near the end of the fiscal year, I can report to you
11 that the active duty Air Force has met its recruiting goal
12 for fiscal year '22 by a narrow margin but with a minimal
13 bank of ready recruits for fiscal year '23.

14 The Air Reserve components, however, will fall short of
15 their recruiting goals. The Department of the Air Force is
16 actively aware that there is an intense competition for
17 talent driven by an ongoing national labor shortage. We
18 anticipate the recruiting environment to be even more
19 challenging in 2023 and beyond.

20 One major concern is that the current youth market is
21 increasingly disconnected and unfamiliar with the military,
22 resulting in fewer youths interested in or planning to join.

23 Today, only one of 11 eligible individuals in the 17- to
24 24-year-old range has a propensity to serve.

25 Furthermore, overall, public perception of the military

1 is often inaccurate with negative publicity overshadowing
2 the tangible benefits and positive global impact airmen make
3 every day.

4 To combat these challenges and increase our recruiting
5 pool, the Air Force is engaging with several angles. We are
6 improving our recruiter training program. We are increasing
7 monetary incentives for recruits.

8 We are intensifying our recruiting efforts to target
9 diverse populations and improving our marketing campaigns to
10 include initiatives to use general officers to expand the
11 arm's reach of our recruiters.

12 Hampered by restrictions from worldwide COVID-19
13 pandemic, our recruiters have been unable to access schools
14 or conduct other public engagements. This lack of access
15 atrophied the required skills and greatly diminished the
16 routine contacts recruiters need to successfully communicate
17 and promote the Air Force brand.

18 Currently, 70 percent of active duty recruiters have
19 never recruited in a non-COVID environment. To rehone their
20 skills we have implemented an aggressive training plan for
21 recruiters to address training deficits and increase
22 community presence.

23 In fiscal year '22, we increased enlistment incentive
24 bonuses by approximately \$22 million. This resulted in over
25 2,200 new recruits contracted between April and September of

1 2022.

2 Additionally, we implemented a quick ship bonus,
3 allowing us to successfully contract 320 enlistees and
4 immediately send them to basic training, ensuring we filled
5 every available seat. We intend to continue this in fiscal
6 year '23.

7 Furthermore, we are actively examining all accession
8 policies to determine if there are any areas in which we can
9 adjust to eliminate unnecessary barriers to serve. Our
10 drive program provides motivated but medically disqualified
11 airmen a chance to serve their country in ways other than in
12 uniform.

13 The program is designed to transform medically
14 disqualified airmen with unique skill sets into viable civil
15 service applicants, thereby keeping the talent within the
16 Air Force.

17 This summer, the Secretary of the Air Force established
18 new goals for officers' source of commissioning applicant
19 pools. We have been -- we have expanded diversity
20 recruiting efforts with additional recruiters and ongoing
21 improvements to total force marketing with a specific focus
22 on underrepresented female, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific
23 Islander, and American Indian/Native Alaskan populations.
24 We have increased our recruiter presence to various academic
25 institutions in untapped geographic regions.

1 The department is also focusing efforts on K through 12
2 youth with our Inspire Operations and aviation inspiration
3 mentorship programs. These programs are designed to
4 encourage young students in underrepresented groups to
5 pursue STEM in aviation careers.

6 This challenging recruiting environment is likely to
7 continue for the foreseeable future. Our ability to remain
8 competitive as an employer of choice relies on increasing
9 the reach of our recruiting efforts to expand the recruiting
10 pool, and from the bottom of my heart I can tell you that we
11 continue to have an unbeatable value proposition where we
12 offer opportunity, community, and purpose to these willing
13 Americans.

14 Not only do we offer an opportunity to come serve
15 alongside some of the greatest Americans they will ever meet
16 in the Air Force and Space Force, but we offer an
17 opportunity to change the trajectory of lives, make better
18 citizens, and to leave people with an undeniable sense that
19 they have made a difference, that they have made it matter.

20 I appreciate your continued support of the Department
21 of Defense. Thank you, and I look forward to your
22 questions.

23 [The prepared statement of General Miller follows:]

24 [SUBCOMMITTEE INSERT]

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1 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Lieutenant General.

2 Dr. Strobl, we are prepared to hear your opening

3 statement.

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1 STATEMENT OF DR. MICHAEL STROBL, ACTING DEPUTY
2 COMMANDANT FOR MANPOWER AND RESERVE AFFAIRS, UNITED STATES
3 MARINE CORPS

4 Mr. Strobl: Chair Gillibrand, Ranking Member Tillis,
5 and distinguished members of this subcommittee, it is my
6 distinct privilege to appear before you today to provide an
7 overview of your Marine Corps' recruiting efforts.

8 As we approach the 50th anniversary of the all-
9 volunteer force, we must remind ourselves that its success
10 is not a given. It is predicated on our nation's youth and
11 their patriotic inclination to serve our nation.

12 The reality is the Marine Corps is facing significant
13 recruiting challenges. Residuals from COVID, a very tight
14 labor market, historic lows in qualification rates
15 propensity and the public perception of the military, and a
16 fragmented advertising environment have made it increasingly
17 difficult to recruit.

18 While we had to reduce our original fiscal year
19 accession mission, an exceptional retention year enabled the
20 Marine Corps to adjust its fiscal year '22 accession goal
21 only slightly, which our hardworking and dedicated
22 recruiters are on track to meet while sustaining our high
23 quality standards.

24 We are fortunate for the amazing youth who want to step
25 up and experience the honor, courage, and commitment of

1 being a Marine and part of our corps.

2 There are three things we must do to address these
3 challenges.

4 One, modernize recruiting. Today's youth are on social
5 media all the time. We are there, too, but we do not
6 currently have the authority to implement modern tools for
7 outreach to those who may be interested in serving.

8 We are, in some respects, still in the telephone book
9 era. We are taking advantage of new high-tech tools in many
10 areas of the military. We need them for recruiting, too.

11 Number two, maintain and improve access to high
12 schools. We thank Congress for its continued support for
13 recruiter access to high schools and student directory
14 lists.

15 This access remains critical to recruiting quality
16 applicants. Without it, both Marine recruiters and
17 interested students lose the most effective and productive
18 means of communicating together about the opportunities for
19 military service.

20 Number three, we must create a national dialogue on
21 service. Those who serve in uniform departed our ranks with
22 increased professionalism, leadership, education, skills,
23 and a well earned sense of pride that set them up for life
24 professionally and personally.

25 Marine veterans are leaders in industry, education, and

1 government throughout our nation, including the halls of
2 Congress. There are incredible benefits, both tangible and
3 intangible, that come with service in the military.

4 We must work together to change the narrative, to
5 promote the value, so that our nation's youth do not miss
6 out on the benefits of service and our country does not miss
7 out on them. We appreciate your support for these goals and
8 for predictable funding we need to accomplish them.

9 Victory is a Marine Corps with improved readiness and
10 lethality in combat and a force that fulfills our
11 congressional mandate to be the most ready when our nation
12 is least ready today and on the battlefields of the future.

13 Our continued success in recruiting the best and
14 brightest of our nation's youth is foundational to that
15 victory.

16 Semper fidelis.

17 [The prepared statement of Mr. Strobl follows:]

18 [SUBCOMMITTEE INSERT]

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1 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you all for your testimony.

2 Ms. Miller, in 2020, DOD issued its 13th Quadrennial
3 Review of military compensation. Among the findings and
4 recommendations the report noted that for certain military
5 career fields such as cyber military pay falls behind pay in
6 the civilian labor market.

7 The report recommended a study to examine a more
8 expansive view of military pay, including special incentive
9 pays for target -- to target at recruitment and retention.

10 Has DOD conducted this study and, if so, what impacts
11 are special and incentive pays having on recruitment and
12 retention in especially high demand occupations like cyber?

13 Ms. Miller: Ma'am, thank you for that question.

14 We continue to conduct that review and formulate that
15 into the final report for the committee. We agree that in
16 looking at our force structure and looking at recruitment
17 and retention that critical skills such as cyber and
18 information warfare technology are some of the not only
19 hardest to recruit but the hardest to retain.

20 And so we agree with you, ma'am, that it will be
21 important to have flexible and responsive incentive packages
22 not only with regular military compensation but with
23 additional bonus authority to be able to respond to the
24 demand signal that we see in not only recruiting them,
25 training them, but then retaining them.

1 Part of that is also looking at the community itself
2 and looking as to whether that traditional career path that
3 we have within the Department of Defense is the right career
4 path for that skill set and that talent, whether we need
5 more permeability between active and reserve and whether we
6 need more permeability into the civilian sector so that we
7 can kind of keep and leverage those skill sets.

8 So we are committed to working with the committee and
9 with you, ma'am, to make sure that we have the right
10 authorities that we need to be able to respond to that
11 demand.

12 Senator Gillibrand: And when do you expect to give
13 those recommendations, especially with regard to
14 permeability?

15 Ms. Miller: Ma'am, that is something that we continue
16 to work on and particularly with respect to duty status
17 reform, and so we are working on that this year and I will
18 commit to providing the committee an update within the next
19 quarter.

20 Senator Gillibrand: Okay.

21 General Miller, as the Air Force modernizes and
22 prepares for the future of our nation's defense, we know
23 that attracting and retaining high-quality airmen is
24 critical to our capabilities such as cyber, intelligence,
25 and electronic warfare. We also know that the private

1 sector competes aggressively for the people with these
2 capabilities.

3 What is the Air Force doing to ensure it is attracting
4 and keeping personnel in critical skills such as cyber and
5 what additional authorities does the Air Force need in this
6 area that it currently does not have?

7 General Miller: Madam Chairwoman, thank you for the
8 question. We actually have a Cyber Task Force right now
9 that is looking specifically at that and how do we, similar
10 to what Ms. Miller talked about, is how do we attract those
11 individuals.

12 There is absolutely a fight for talent right now,
13 especially in those areas, and so similarly to what Ms.
14 Miller talked about, but we are also looking at how do we
15 manage the force differently.

16 So one of the taskers that the chief has given me was
17 to say, okay, we have got -- we have to look at things
18 differently. How can we attract the individuals, and then
19 we are also looking at where can we attract them.

20 We have a lot of partnerships with industry right now
21 and that we are doing. Often we send airmen out to them,
22 but what we are trying to do is get some of the those high
23 industry and the cyber career fields and other areas in to
24 us so they can they can work on different projects, they can
25 train our individuals, and then it provides additional

1 talking points out in the industry of what we are capable of
2 doing.

3 But we are -- I think that probably all of us are
4 struggling to figure out how to get that talent. Some of
5 the -- some of our policies prevent us from -- right now
6 prevent us from paying them what we should.

7 We did increase some of their -- some of the cyber
8 specialties bonus money and so we are we are looking at
9 everything available right now, ma'am.

10 Senator Gillibrand: And then, Admiral Cheeseman --
11 [Off microphone.]

12 Senator Gillibrand: -- military service at least
13 invested in developing and maintaining cyber capabilities.
14 The Navy lags the other services in readiness on the cyber
15 mission force and places very few officers in cyber-specific
16 billets.

17 What is the Navy's plan to grow its cyber dedicated
18 personnel and what recruiting and retention challenges do
19 you face?

20 Admiral Cheeseman: Senator, thank you very much for
21 the question.

22 Our marketing and advertising campaign -- the digital
23 "Forged by the Sea" campaign -- specifically targets cyber
24 fields on social media to get at this recruiting challenge.
25 We also target job search sites to get at the recruiting

1 challenge as well. We partner with various STEM affinity
2 groups for community outreach in support of generating
3 additional talents.

4 On the legislation side, we do support increases to the
5 targeted bonuses -- statutory increases to the targeted
6 bonuses and specialized skill pay. We think that will go a
7 long way in retaining the personnel we need, ma'am.

8 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you so much.

9 Senator Tillis?

10 Senator Tillis: I will defer to Senator Hawley and
11 Tuberville and take less.

12 Senator Hawley?

13 Senator Hawley: Thank you very much to the ranking
14 member and thank you, Madam Chair, and thanks to the
15 witnesses for being here.

16 General Stitt, let me talk with you. Let me start with
17 you, if I could.

18 I have spoken repeatedly with the Secretary of the Army
19 about replacing aging homes at Fort Leonard Wood in my home
20 state, and there is no doubt in my mind that service members
21 deserve better than they are getting right now.

22 I was just there a few weeks ago. I toured the homes
23 myself. I spoke to residents. I spoke to spouses. I spoke
24 to children who lived in the homes.

25 These homes need to be replaced. What concerns me is

1 the Army does not seem to have a plan to replace this aging
2 housing stock. So let me just ask you this.

3 In your opinion, how does the availability or maybe
4 lack of availability of quality military housing for service
5 members and their families affect recruiting and retention?

6 General Stitt: Senator Hawley, good afternoon.

7 The Army takes the care and quality of life of all of
8 our service members and their families very seriously. So
9 we are making and committed to investing in our housing
10 within -- not just that but within our daycare centers,
11 childcare, offering opportunities, expanding beyond that for
12 spousal employment, to put kind of a whole package on the
13 table to ensure that our facilities and our care and
14 commitment towards family members is first class.

15 Senator Hawley: You say a whole package. When will we
16 be seeing this package?

17 General Stitt: Senator, we continue to work on it and
18 I can take that question for the record, please.

19 Senator Hawley: That is fine. I mean, but let me just
20 say again for the record -- I have said this in the full
21 committee, I will say it again here -- that I think we are
22 past the point of continuing to kick this down the road. I
23 mean, this is a problem now. Frankly, at Fort Leonard Wood
24 it was a problem a decade ago.

25 But, listen, I have been there. I mean, I have seen it

1 myself. I have talked to the service members myself. I
2 have been in their houses. I have been in their kitchens.
3 I looked at their bathrooms where there is mold growing. I
4 have seen the -- they do not have places for their kids. I
5 have seen the substandard living conditions and it just is
6 not acceptable, General.

7 You know what? I promised those service members that I
8 would be a royal pain in the you know what until something
9 changed. So I am keeping that commitment and I am going to
10 continue it until something changes.

11 And, frankly, I have heard this now for -- it is going
12 on two years. I have only been in the Senate three but I
13 have heard it continuously that, well, we will get to it.
14 We will get to it. We will get to it.

15 Well, at Fort Leonard Wood we have not gotten to it,
16 and I bet -- if we went around the table here, I bet that
17 the other members of the subcommittee would have the same
18 situation in their states.

19 So I will give you the question for the record. But I
20 just want to put on notice again, and you can take this
21 back, that I want to see some progress on this and I want to
22 see it soon. And what I do not want to see are any more
23 commitments from the Army that they are going to spend X
24 number of dollars -- this happened last year -- we are going
25 to commit X number of dollars to Fort Leonard Wood and then

1 as it turns out zero dollars were spent on housing. I am
2 still ticked off about that and I do not want to see it
3 happen again and I want to see progress made.

4 So that is my piece. I think you understand where I am
5 coming from.

6 General Miller, let me come to you. Can you help me
7 with something here?

8 Andersen Air Force Base, I understand -- this is in
9 Guam, of course -- leaders there recently received an
10 official email that prohibited them from using pronouns or
11 descriptors like he/she, youngest/oldest, male or female.

12 Why is that? I mean, what is going on?

13 General Miller: Senator Hawley, thank you for that
14 question.

15 Actually, that is -- we have been talking a lot about
16 that because it was an email, from my understanding, that
17 went out locally from one of the commanders there, and I do
18 not remember at what level. I do not know if it was a group
19 commander or the wing commander there.

20 I believe that it was a Facebook post that went out
21 based on a question. It is not the Air Force policy to not
22 use pronouns, and so I think it was a social media -- you
23 know, exacerbated by individuals that said that they were
24 directed for that.

25 Senator Hawley: Okay. Good. Well, I think that is

1 progress.

2 So you are saying -- I am looking at a news article
3 here published August 31, 2022, saying that PACAF has been
4 -- has sent this letter around. Leaders of the base are
5 instructed do not use pronouns, age, race, et cetera, and
6 they go on. The unauthorized -- examples of unauthorized
7 language are male/female, youngest/oldest, he/she. But you
8 are saying that that is not -- that was not an official
9 communication -- that has not been a directive?

10 General Miller: That is not an official communication
11 from the HAF. Correct.

12 Senator Hawley: Okay. Okay. And so your position to
13 me is today that that is not policy and that they have not
14 been so instructed --

15 General Miller: That is correct. That is not policy.

16 Senator Hawley: -- that this is social media
17 kerfuffle? I mean, this is not real? It is not happening?

18 General Miller: I do not know if it is not happening
19 but it is not an official policy from the Department of the
20 Air Force.

21 Senator Hawley: Okay. I ask because part of the way
22 it has been reported is that the rationale is to help with
23 lethality and also recruiting, and I just was curious as
24 heck how not using he/she can help with lethality and how it
25 is helping with recruiting.

1 But I take your word for it that this is not policy and
2 that satisfies me. So thank you.

3 Thank you, Madam Chair.

4 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you.

5 Senator Hirono?

6 Senator Hirono: Thank you, Madam Chair.

7 Recruiting and retaining female service members is
8 essential for our military readiness and national security.

9 Yet, women are more likely to leave service than their male
10 peers given frustrations with family planning, gender bias,
11 and discrimination, not to mention sexual assault and sexual
12 harassment.

13 And now following the disastrous Dobbs decision that
14 has created fear, chaos, and confusion all across the
15 country, service members' reproductive and healthcare rights
16 have become dependent on their duty station.

17 Last week, the RAND Corporation published a report
18 indicating that 40 percent of female service members no
19 longer have access to or have severely restricted access to
20 abortion services where they are stationed.

21 This will not only harm individual service members but
22 will likely have staggering impacts on our ability to
23 recruit and retain women.

24 In June, I sent a letter to Secretary Austin urging DOD
25 to support and protect female service members seeking

1 reproductive services.

2 I would like to ask Ms. Miller -- General Miller.

3 Senator Gillibrand: [Off microphone.]

4 Senator Hirono: Okay. General Miller?

5 [Laughter.]

6 Senator Hirono: Okay. Well, thank you for that.

7 Either one of you, frankly, or any of you, has not the
8 Supreme Court's decision made it even more challenging to
9 recruit and retain women?

10 Ms. Miller: Thank you for that question, ma'am.

11 Secretary Austin has made clear that the health and well
12 being of service members and their families is a top
13 priority and that includes the access to reproductive care.

14 And so we agree that while technically that the rules
15 governing access to covered versus noncovered abortion care
16 was not necessarily affected by the outcome of the Supreme
17 Court decision, we do recognize that the outcome may make it
18 more difficult for service members to electively choose a
19 noncovered abortion and it could make it more difficult to
20 travel and to -- they may incur additional expenses.

21 And so we are committed to taking a look at the full
22 range of our current authorities and policies and make sure
23 that we are providing information and support where
24 appropriate.

25 Senator Hirono: I think this is a real concern because

1 you have service members who are serving in states such as
2 Alabama, Tennessee. There was a whole, you know, number of,
3 basically, Southern states where they would have to travel a
4 long ways in order to get reproductive or abortion services.

5 So I would like to know what the Department of Defense
6 plans to do to enable the service members to get the care
7 and the services that they need in the reproductive area.

8 So that is just -- let me just put it out there.

9 For Ms. Miller, one of the top reasons service members,
10 particularly women, choose not to join, remain, or leave the
11 armed forces is the impact military service has on family
12 planning, and across the U.S. and around the world egg
13 freezing and in vitro fertilization are commonly used for
14 individuals who wish to have children in the future, but for
15 personal and professional reasons they delay.

16 In July, I called on DOD to study the impact and costs
17 of offering cryopreservation to service members, something
18 that I understand the -- Great Britain does provide these
19 kinds of options.

20 Ms. Miller, would covering the cost of cryopreservation
21 under TRICARE be something the department could consider to
22 improve retention rates?

23 Ms. Miller: Ma'am, I think that is a good question.
24 Unfortunately, I am not a subject matter expert per se in
25 that area, although I know that our health affairs

1 colleagues continue to look at that possibility, and I
2 commit to you that we will take that question for the record
3 and provide a follow up.

4 Senator Hirono: Thank you very much.

5 One more thing. I heard -- I think it was Dr. Strobl
6 -- talk about the importance of having access to high
7 schools. All of you are really engaging in recruiting at a
8 much younger age, and so for high schools there was a report
9 in the New York Times that there were 33 cases of instructor
10 misconduct in the Junior ROTC program, and how are you going
11 to address this kind of misconduct?

12 You talk about wanting access to high schools but that
13 is not going to work very well if your instructors are
14 engaging in sexual harassment, other kinds of misconduct.

15 So are you aware of the problem? And this is where,
16 Dr. Strobl, since you mentioned wanting access. So how will
17 you demonstrate that the recruiters and military personnel
18 can be trustworthy?

19 Mr. Strobl: Senator, thank you for that question, and
20 I share your concern in this area.

21 We have implemented enhanced training of all of our
22 Marines from even before they enlist all the way up until
23 the general officer level to ensure that they understand the
24 zero tolerance policy for sexual assault and sexual
25 harassment.

1 Even before the Independent Review Commission
2 recommendations the Marine Corps moved out in fiscal year
3 '22 by nearly doubling its budget for sexual assault
4 prevention training, response coordinators, victim
5 advocates, and prevention coordinators.

6 We are in the process of hiring 120 of these types of
7 skills to distribute around the Marine Corps to get after
8 this problem.

9 Then there is the Independent Review Commission. We
10 support all 82 of the recommendations of the commission and
11 we are committed to spending \$560 million to hire and train
12 826 prevention response coordinators and behavioral health
13 experts to help us eradicate sexual assault and sexual
14 harassment.

15 Senator Hirono: Is this an issue -- Madam Chair, if I
16 may -- are the other services also paying attention to this
17 kind of problem behavior in your Junior ROTC programs?

18 Air Force?

19 General Miller: Yeah. Yes, we are. Absolutely.

20 In fact, before the IRC report we actually had a
21 substantial preventive workforce organization, and so with
22 the recommendations from the IRC we are implementing them
23 across the service.

24 We also just started a pilot program at seven different
25 installations right now in which we are co-locating all of

1 the helping services for victims.

2 What we want to do -- and we have got it on -- and in
3 the area of those installations in which the victims can go
4 there and it is not -- not everybody will know why they are
5 going there. So it provides them privacy.

6 I will also say on the particular case in which you are
7 talking about or the article that was in the New York Times
8 on the Junior ROTC, I mean, sexual assault is a crime. I
9 mean, it is a crime and we take it very seriously.

10 We are actually looking to expand Guard and Reserve
11 into the Junior ROTC programs as an initiative to make sure
12 that there is a little bit more oversight.

13 Right now the Junior ROTC programs across the United
14 States are vast and there is only about seven different
15 regional folks that actually monitor them. There is a
16 requirement that they are supposed to be assessed in person
17 -- an institution -- once a year.

18 But right now, there is not enough individuals to do
19 that. So we are looking at all of those avenues from the
20 Air Force perspective, ma'am.

21 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you.

22 Senator Tuberville? And we will go through the rest of
23 the services to answer that question when it is my turn. So
24 we will complete it for the record.

25 But go ahead, Senator Tuberville.

1 Senator Tuberville: Thank you, Madam Chair.

2 Thank you all very much for being here today. You all
3 got a tough job. I recruited for a long time. I know how
4 hard it is.

5 So you have got a challenge, especially when only one
6 out of every five American youth is eligible to join the
7 military. Drugs, obesity, the lack of education, criminal
8 activity -- they prevent a lot of our young people from even
9 wanting to get in the military. That is hard enough.

10 But this administration has made the job so much harder
11 for you. I feel bad for you. The number-one reason young
12 people join the military is they have a family connection.
13 Military is a family business. Eighty percent of our force
14 has a family member presently enlisted.

15 After watching this administration's blunder in
16 Afghanistan, tossing 20 years of sacrifice down the drain,
17 why would a veteran encourage their child sign up? I know
18 you are running into that problem.

19 So this administration does not inspire our youth about
20 America. It paints our service members as extremists, white
21 supremacists, but are surprised that only 9 percent -- only
22 9 percent -- of young people even want to serve. That is a
23 small, small pool.

24 Faith in our military has collapsed for decades. Our
25 military was the most trusted organization in America.

1 Under President Biden, trust in the military has cratered 45
2 percent. What we have is a national security emergency.

3 Secretary Miller, I reviewed the list of speaking
4 engagements for senior leaders at the Pentagon and could
5 find no trace -- zero -- of anyone speaking publicly about
6 recruiting -- the leaders of our military.

7 But there were plenty of speeches on climate change,
8 Pride Month, and global water security. What is going on
9 here? What actions have the DOJ leaders taken to solve this
10 crisis?

11 Secretary Miller?

12 Ms. Miller: Thank you, Senator, for that question.

13 The senior leadership of the department, from Secretary
14 Austin, Secretary Hicks, to the secretaries of the military
15 departments, are absolutely focused on the issue of
16 recruiting and critical retention, and we do see our senior
17 leaders engaging on this topic.

18 Just as recently as this past weekend we had Army
19 senior leadership that was on the "Today Show" talking about
20 this issue because we agree with you that it is important to
21 get our message out to youth and influencers about the
22 opportunities that service affords and to kind of cut
23 through the chaff that you mentioned on some of the more
24 provocative rhetoric that is often shaped by well
25 intentioned but, perhaps, misinformed external providers.

1 And so we agree that through strategic marketing and
2 advertising, strategic engagements by our senior leadership
3 inside the department, that we do have a role to play to
4 ensure that the right information is getting to the right
5 people at the right time about the opportunities that
6 military service affords.

7 Senator Tuberville: I know you all are great
8 recruiters but our leaders -- our President and our leaders
9 in the military that are seen on TV every day -- I know they
10 are busy. We got a dangerous world we are living in.

11 But they have got to spend time on helping us recruit.

12 I mean, we need everybody on board. This panel -- we have
13 heard a lot of concerns or critiques but I want to, first,
14 take a moment to commend the United States Marine Corps.
15 The Marines are the only service currently to meet the
16 fiscal year '22 recruiting numbers. Well done.

17 The Marines are meeting their numbers because they
18 stick to talking about defending our nation. Compare any
19 Marine Corps' recruiting ad to the Army's woke campaign and
20 you will see why the Marine Corps is meeting its numbers.

21 "The Calling" campaign of the Army was so widely
22 trashed that they had to turn off comments on YouTube, and I
23 saw it. I mean, it is not what this country looks for when
24 we are talking about military and defending our freedom.

25 Dr. Strobl, are there any legal or policy changes that

1 Congress could direct that would allow the services to
2 modernize recruiting efforts and to be more effective with
3 their current budget?

4 Mr. Strobl: Senator, I am glad you asked that
5 question.

6 I do think there are some things we need to look at as
7 far as accessing data. When a potential applicant, for
8 example, comes to marines.com we would like to be able to
9 use modern tools to be able to send targeted advertising to
10 that applicant when they leave our website.

11 So if they click on a picture of a howitzer we might be
12 able to later have a howitzer show up on something else that
13 they might be looking at.

14 To do that requires us moving out of the telephone book
15 era, just having social directories that the high schools
16 provide us.

17 Senator Tuberville: Yeah. Thank you.

18 And along some of those same lines, to add insult to
19 injury, the White House has now decided to cancel up to
20 \$20,000 student loan per borrower. Student loan forgiveness
21 and the GI Bill are two of the biggest and most successful
22 incentives for military recruitment.

23 To your knowledge, any of you, were the consequences of
24 military service recruiting considered during the recent
25 student loan forgiveness? Anybody want to answer that?

1 Ms. Miller: Senator, I can answer that.

2 Certainly, for any strategic decision all of the
3 federal agencies are asked for input and the White House
4 does take that under consideration.

5 As for the training and education incentives that the
6 Department of Defense offers, there is still a robust
7 package that we can offer to young men and women who are
8 interested in joining the services and one of the unique
9 things that we have that, perhaps, other programs do not
10 have is that under certain conditions you can actually
11 extend those benefits to your family members.

12 And so we still believe that we have a very competitive
13 package to offer to young men and women and, potentially,
14 their families.

15 Senator Tuberville: Health care, GI bill --

16 Ms. Miller: Yes, sir.

17 Senator Tuberville: -- going to school, paying for
18 school. I mean, they work for welfare benefits. Okay. We
19 all know that. We have all seen it and heard about it, and
20 we need to correct some of this.

21 But I want to end this on -- I read an article from
22 Thomas Spoehr of -- the national defense director of
23 Heritage and he says the American military remains a
24 faithful and loyal servant of the republic.

25 Most Americans are still proud and trusting of our

1 military. But this trust and support cannot be taken for
2 granted. If Americans perceive that the military is being
3 exploited for political purpose or being used for
4 experiments and woke social priorities, that support will
5 evaporate and the consequences will be dire.

6 My hope and prayer are that we figure out all this
7 before it is too late.

8 Thank you very much.

9 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you.

10 Senator Warren?

11 Senator Warren: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I am so
12 glad that Senator Tuberville raised the question of debt
13 forgiveness.

14 I am sure he is aware that the debt forgiveness package
15 that was designed by the President has disproportionately
16 helped veterans who are struggling with student loan debt
17 because our current benefits do not fully cover the cost of
18 post-high school education for them, and I am glad to get
19 them any help we can.

20 So I want to echo my colleagues' concerns about the
21 impact of military sexual assault on recruiting and
22 retention. The Department of Defense found that reports of
23 sexual assault went up 13 percent in 2021, showing that we
24 are, clearly, going in the wrong direction.

25 But I also want to follow up on an issue raised by

1 Senator Hirono. One of the key tools that our military has
2 for recruitment is the Junior Reserve Officers Training
3 Corps program. The JROTC program is led by retired members
4 of the military and it is meant to teach high school
5 students the values of citizenship.

6 DOD is currently studying how this program impacts
7 enlistment, as they should. But a previous Army study found
8 that these students are more than twice as likely to enlist.

9 Unfortunately, in too many cases it has become also a
10 hunting ground for predators.

11 A recent disturbing investigation by the New York Times
12 found that at least 33 JROTC instructors have been
13 criminally charged with sexual misconduct, which is higher
14 than the rate for civilian school teachers.

15 Ms. Miller, obviously, if JROTC instructors are
16 sexually assaulting high school students we have a problem
17 that goes far, far beyond the impact of this behavior on
18 recruitment.

19 But I want to ask, how do you think criminal behavior
20 like this by retired members of the armed services reflects
21 on the military?

22 Ms. Miller: Senator, thank you for that question.

23 We agree that the reports from the New York Times are
24 concerning, not only in the fact that this is a criminal act
25 but to the point that you made that it also reverberates

1 with respect to potential recruitment and just casts a pall
2 on the JROTC program, which, as you noted, is a program that
3 we are very proud of, both of the citizenship development
4 program and as a way to expose youth to the prospect of
5 military service since many of them have never had that
6 exposure.

7 We completely agree that additional oversight is
8 necessary and, as General Miller mentioned, the services are
9 actively engaged at looking at their current oversight
10 structures.

11 We also think that we need to take a hard look at our
12 current background investigation process. Regardless of
13 whether that individual had a background investigation, a
14 background investigation recently conducted while they were
15 in service, and that we need to look even beyond our
16 traditional background investigation to see if there is
17 other tools that we need to add to that such as,
18 potentially, social media checks to make sure that we get a
19 360-degree look at those that we are putting in a leadership
20 role to some of our most vulnerable and young Americans.

21 Senator Warren: I very much appreciate this and I am
22 glad that you give a full answer on this. But I would like
23 to stress another point here. You are talking about
24 background checks -- obviously, powerfully important before
25 somebody gets out there.

1 But there is also a question about supervision once
2 they are in the field and a question about how to respond
3 when there has been some kind of concern or allegation
4 raised.

5 And I want to give you an example that goes directly to
6 that. The New York Times piece tells the story of Dominique
7 Mixon, a young woman who entered the JROTC program because
8 she wanted to join the Air Force. That is why she was
9 there.

10 She was groped and harassed by her instructor, Brad
11 Gibson, who had retired after 24 years of service in the
12 military. But here is the part that really pushes me on
13 this.

14 She reported the incident to a teacher. Apparently,
15 Mr. Gibson had already been counseled about, quote/unquote,
16 "borderline behavior" before he stuck his hand up Ms.
17 Mixon's shirt. So this was not the first time that he had
18 harassed someone but it was not the last time either.

19 Ms. Mixon's report went nowhere and she was pushed out
20 of the program.

21 Mr. Gibson, however, continued to lead the JROTC
22 program, and eight years later Ms. Mixon received a call
23 that another 16-year-old had filed a report saying that Mr.
24 Gibson was groping her.

25 General Miller, should the Air Force be protecting

1 someone like Ms. Mixon or someone like Mr. Gibson?

2 General Miller: Thank you, Senator, for letting me
3 talk about this.

4 So the first thing is sexual assault, sexual
5 harassment, they are crimes. They are crimes and they are
6 not tolerable, and I will tell you in the Air Force we have
7 a very strong preventive program right now and we are making
8 it more robust, specifically on the IRC.

9 But we -- for Junior ROTC or for any individual that is
10 harassed sexually or any way that they are not treated with
11 dignity and respect they need to report it and they need to
12 report it up and we need to investigate it.

13 So should the individual in this particular case -- he
14 should have been investigated and substantiated he is
15 removed from that position forever.

16 And so and, ma'am, just one more. You talked about
17 oversight, and there -- for Junior ROTCs there are so many
18 programs and there is very little oversight.

19 In the Air Force right now we are looking at putting
20 Guard and Reserve members into some of those programs to
21 provide additional oversight in that and then also increase
22 the regional directors that are around the world -- around
23 the country right now.

24 Senator Warren: This is an important point you raise
25 because jurisdiction at the federal level is shared between

1 the military services and the Department of Education. But
2 if the military does not step up to prevent these kinds of
3 abuses then it is the military that is endangering our
4 ability to build up our force for the future and for it to
5 have real credibility.

6 The military screens these instructors and, ultimately,
7 it is your reputation on the line.

8 I know that my colleagues and I have a number of
9 questions about the oversight of this program and why it
10 failed these students.

11 Today, we sent letters to the DOD and to the Department
12 of Education to try to learn more, and I look forward to
13 learning what steps each of you will be taking to make sure
14 that the military is not responsible for the sexual assault
15 of high school students.

16 I see that I am over on time but I do want to just
17 follow up with a question about student loan debt, and that
18 is loan cancellation right now is helping 43 million
19 Americans who are buried under student loan debt.

20 It is keeping people from starting small businesses,
21 from buying homes, from starting families. I just want to
22 ask the question, do any of the witnesses think that
23 ensuring that 43 million Americans keep choking on student
24 loan debt is the best solution to the military's recruitment
25 problems?

1 Ms. Miller: Senator, I appreciate that question.

2 We agree that when we are working with potential
3 applicants I can say that we do look at debt ratio in terms
4 of what debt they may have and how they may be able to still
5 continue to execute their commitment to paying off that debt
6 under our pay structures, particularly if they are starting
7 as a junior enlisted service member.

8 It is something that we do pay attention to. We do
9 have strong programs, as I said before, for training and
10 education, which includes the ability to do additional
11 incentives for loan repayment.

12 What we actually do find on our side is that in many
13 cases they are actually more interested in looking at what
14 bonuses we offer because then they have greater flexibility
15 in how they want to use that money and, potentially, paying
16 off that debt or if they want to put it towards another
17 priority.

18 But we do agree that looking at current debt ratio is
19 something that we do pay attention to.

20 Senator Warren: I think maybe I did not make my
21 question entirely clear and that is on me.

22 But I just really want to emphasize the point that
23 surely we have not become a country that thinks that the
24 best way to be able to recruit people into the military is
25 to crush them under a burden of student loan debt and hope

1 that they will then find their way to the military -- that
2 we are people who want to show the best of what the military
3 has to offer and work to make sure that none of our young
4 people are crushed by student loan debt.

5 I hope we are all in agreement on that. I will take
6 that as a yes.

7 Thank you.

8 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Senator Warren.

9 Senator Tillis?

10 Senator Tillis: Ms. Miller, I suspect that there are
11 at least some otherwise qualified recruits who may opt not
12 to go into the military because of the COVID vaccine
13 mandate. You all put that policy in place in August of
14 2021.

15 That is before we knew a lot about -- that is before we
16 knew about Omicron. That is before we knew about the
17 vaccine is only marginally effective at preventing the
18 spread.

19 I had COVID in 2020. I got vaccinated. I had COVID
20 again. So in light of what we know today, is the department
21 considering maybe revising or retracting that requirement or
22 at least using waivers if we have otherwise qualified
23 recruits?

24 Ms. Miller: Senator, I appreciate that question.

25 I can say as of right now the department currently has

1 no plans to eliminate the COVID-19 vaccine mandate. We
2 strongly do believe that vaccine requirements significantly
3 enhance the readiness of our force and diminish the threat
4 of serious illness.

5 Senator Tillis: Do we have any data on people who are
6 in the recruiting pipeline that have otherwise opted out
7 because of the vaccine mandate?

8 Ms. Miller: Sir, we do have some survey data where we
9 have asked. We do market survey data where we asked if the
10 requirement to become vaccinated is a deterrent to
11 considering joining the military services and the vast
12 number of respondents actually responded that no, it did not
13 significantly influence them one way or the other.

14 The other thing that we implemented was an attestation
15 form during the early recruitment phase where if they had
16 not already been vaccinated we asked them to indicate their
17 willingness to be vaccinated for a wide range of conditions
18 once arriving at basic training, as we have always done.

19 We have not seen a significant number of potential
20 applicants decline to endorse that form nor have we seen a
21 significant number of applicants who, once arriving to basic
22 training, have then declined to actually become vaccinated.

23 Senator Tillis: Thank you.

24 General Stitt, the Secretary of the Army has created a
25 task force to make recommendations on Army recruiting

1 practices. Tell me a little bit about the composition of
2 the task force and when we could expect a work product.

3 General Stitt: Senator Tillis, the Army Recruiting
4 Retention Task Force is headed up by a two-star general,
5 Major General Deb Kotulich, and has subject matter expertise
6 from across the department staff, United States Army
7 Recruiting Command, Training and Doctrine Command, Medical
8 Command.

9 All of the subject matter experts are participating and
10 this group has been given the charter, quite simply, to look
11 at our recruiting and retention enterprise and tear it down
12 to the studs and see what is out there -- what policies,
13 procedures do we need to look at to set the conditions in
14 '23, '24, and beyond, Senator.

15 Senator Tillis: Thank you. And, again, the time frame
16 for coming up with recommendations?

17 General Stitt: Senator, they present recommendations
18 biweekly to the chief and the Secretary, and then the chief
19 and the Secretary make a decision and say, yes, go forward
20 and action that item. We are happy to share with the
21 committee the results of what we see with the Recruiting and
22 Retention Task Force.

23 Senator Tillis: Dr. Strobl, you mentioned something
24 that I was talking with the subcommittee staff about having
25 more information with the vast majority of your recruiting

1 online and heavy dependence online -- getting access to that
2 data.

3 Some of the members of the committee not may not be
4 aware that you all are limited as compared to recruiting in
5 the civilian sector in terms of cookies and tracking and try
6 to tailor the message to the specific profile of the person
7 that is visiting one of your websites.

8 Have the Marines or the department -- Ms. Miller, this
9 may be a question for you -- made any specific
10 recommendations to Congress? I know it is going to take
11 congressional action if we are going to do it.

12 There are some thorny issues we have to work out around
13 data privacy but I think we need to at least take a look at
14 it.

15 So either Dr. Strobl, Ms. Miller, or both, is the
16 department in a position to where they want to make a
17 specific recommendation on a congressional action?

18 Ms. Miller: Yes, sir. I can start and then ask Dr.
19 Strobl to follow up.

20 Sir, you are exactly right. We would very much like to
21 work with the committee to potentially expand our current
22 authorities for marketing and advertising.

23 As mentioned before, our current authorities are,
24 really, almost 1990s authorities that really focus on
25 directory information from telephone books and we do not

1 have the same level of ability to access content that, say,
2 the commercial sector does, and we attempt to work with our
3 advertising agencies to try to navigate and make sure that
4 we get some of that information. But with your support I
5 think we can do a lot more.

6 And, certainly, recognize your point about protecting
7 privacy interests. We want to safeguard that as well. But
8 what we really want to be able to do here is to be able to
9 provide more personalized and tailored content.

10 As I mentioned before, we are trying to recruit from
11 the youth of America that has a vast range of interests and
12 what we are really right now is a blunt force instrument,
13 and we want to be more strategic.

14 We want to be able to kind of package our messaging so
15 that it can resonate with greatest effect to a generation
16 where we count seconds in terms of being able to capture
17 their attention. And so we want to work with the committee
18 to potentially expand our current authorities to do that.

19 Senator Tillis: Anything to add, Dr. Strobl?

20 Mr. Strobl: Thank you, Senator.

21 I would just add I really appreciate your interest in
22 this and would like to work with this committee and your
23 staff to think about and study how we can better gain access
24 to information that will help us recruit.

25 Our ultimate goal or maybe our second goal after

1 maintaining and sustaining readiness and lethality is to
2 optimize our recruiting budget so that we -- when I
3 enlisted, there were three TV channels and I got "Sports
4 Illustrated," I think, and that was how I saw my
5 advertising.

6 Now it is so fragmented it has become so much more
7 difficult to target advertising, and if we can figure out
8 how to leverage some of the technologies that are out there
9 while protecting privacy I think we can get more bang for
10 our advertising dollar.

11 Senator Tillis: I think if we do it right we can
12 address the privacy concerns. You not only are going to
13 react -- be in a position to where you can react to people
14 who visit a potential recruiting website but you can be more
15 proactive and identify people based on other data, just like
16 platforms that are marketing to the population do every
17 single second of the day.

18 I have got some other questions, Admiral and General
19 Miller and General Stitt, I will be submitting for the
20 record. Thank you for your time.

21 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you also for your time. I
22 have one question I am going to submit for each of you to
23 respond to and that is following up on Senator Hirono and
24 Senator Warren's line of question.

25 Lieutenant General, you are right to say these are

1 crimes and they are not tolerated. But that is not how you
2 should see this problem because with a 1 percent conviction
3 rate, does that mean not tolerated? I do not think so.

4 The message that goes to service members, to potential
5 recruits, is it is tolerated because it is not prosecuted
6 and not prosecuted effectively.

7 So I would just suggest an ounce of humility because
8 this is an area where we do not excel, and the most recent
9 report was the worst ever -- 35,000 estimated cases.

10 And General Austin cares deeply about this issue. He
11 impaneled experts to come up with recommendations. We are
12 going to implement those recommendations.

13 This is something Senator Tillis and I worked very hard
14 on. We are going to have independent prosecutors up and
15 running for top 10 crimes. That is going to take a little
16 while to get up and running.

17 But what I would like is a thoughtful analysis from
18 each of you about what you can do as commanders, as
19 policymakers, to create a culture and to create a climate
20 where the message is received that valuing your fellow
21 service member is one of the most important characteristics
22 that is necessary for promotion, that valuing your fellow
23 service members is necessary character for you to stay in
24 the military, and that sexual assault, sexual harassment,
25 posting naked pictures of your fellow service members, all

1 of that behavior is something that will end your career.

2 It is a message that has to be sent from commanders
3 about climate. So even though we will have expert
4 prosecutors, hopefully, taking more cases to trial, if you
5 do not have a climate that says we want people to be valued
6 it is not going to work.

7 So Senator Tillis and I worked extremely hard on this
8 issue. I do not expect things to get better quickly but I
9 do expect everyone to understand we are still failing our
10 service members and we are not prosecuting enough cases. We
11 are not getting enough cases ending in a conviction and we
12 are not preventing enough.

13 We had a GAO report at one of our hearings last year
14 that said this committee had put forward something like 200
15 different policy ideas and at least 50 that were
16 preventative, and only a handful of the preventative
17 measures were implemented.

18 That is a commander problem for not implementing the
19 things that Congress is asking you to do that are preventive
20 in nature. It means we are not taking it seriously. So it
21 is about how serious do you take the problem, do you know it
22 is real, do you know we are not good at getting it done.

23 So please write an analysis of what you would like to
24 do within your service, what you think would be helpful from
25 Senator Tillis and I, what other policy ideas we should be

1 thinking about.

2 But I would really like a thoughtful response. I do
3 not want something defensive and I do not want something
4 declaring victory. If I get either thing, this exercise was
5 useless.

6 So I love big ideas, thoughtful ideas, and ones that
7 Senator Tillis and I can work on for next year's personnel
8 mark because I promise you this problem is not going away
9 and it is a reason why especially women are not as
10 interested in joining the armed services.

11 So thank you for today. Thank you for your testimony.

12 Thank you for being so thoughtful and responsive to each of
13 the senators.

14 This hearing is adjourned.

15 [Whereupon, at 4:52 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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