

**Opening Remarks of
Ranking Member Andy Kim
Military Personnel Subcommittee Hearing
*Senior Enlisted Leaders Perspective***

March 9, 2023

It has been quite a few years since our subcommittee had our Service Senior Enlisted Leaders testify and I look forward to hearing from you about the issues that matter most to our service members and their families.

We are always asking a lot of our servicemembers. We ask them to risk their lives to protect our country. The promise we make to them is that we will have their backs and support them and their families. We don't always live up and need to do better. One example of that is the challenge with suicides and mental health. I hear from many service members in my district at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst how they struggled to get the care and support they needed. Let's work together to solve this problem and ensure our service members get not just adequate care, but the best care our country can provide.

As several of you alluded to in your testimony, you may recruit the Soldier, Sailor, Marine, Airman or Guardian, but to retain them, you must retain their families. So, ensuring access to quality health care, safe housing, affordable childcare and the right pay and benefits package is critical to sustaining the health of the force.

Military compensation is a combination of various pays and allowances, some of which are taxed and others not. While Congress was able to deliver a 4.6% across the board pay increase to all service members, I believe it may be time we consider reevaluating whether there are additional ways that could help deliver important support to our servicemembers and their families. I'm looking forward to the findings from the Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation which kicked off in January, although I admit the results could be delivered faster.

In the meantime, I had been optimistic short-term solutions would have an impact on the financial challenges faced by some service members. Yet, I was disappointed to see so few service members are eligible for the Basic Needs Allowance provision in last year's NDAA. We can and must do better.

Like most of my colleagues, I'm gravely concerned by the findings of the RAND report that food insecurity is a problem for approximately 25 percent of active duty service members. I

appreciate that more research is needed to identify the root causes of this problem... is it a pay issue... a money management issue... an access to food issue? Or some combination of all the above. I am looking forward to reviewing potential concrete actions the soon-to-be-released FY24 defense budget includes to address this urgent issue.

I am also grateful we're having this hearing today so we can address the pressing recruiting challenges faced by the Services.

Over the last 10 years we have seen a steady decrease in the eligible youth population to serve without a waiver. And while waivers have become increasingly common among recruits, ineligibility to serve due to multiple reasons is the predominant disqualifier.

In addition, we continue to see a decrease in young adults who have close ties to the military or basic knowledge about what service looks like.

Perhaps as we celebrate the 50th year of the All-Volunteer Force, we should be asking ourselves if the tools we are using are the most effective with a generation that has different perspectives and priorities when approaching the question of what kind of work and career they seek.

Lastly, we must address the multitude of quality-of-life issues that impact our service members and their families. As I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks -- health care, housing, childcare, and pay and benefits -- are a critical component of a ready and healthy force and I am confident we can find common ground across party lines to do what's right for our most important military assets -- our people.

I yield the balance of my time.