

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE PRESENTATION
TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SUBJECT: MERITOCRACY IN THE MILITARY SERVICES: ACCESSIONS, PROMOTIONS,
AND COMMAND SELECTION

STATEMENT OF:

MS. KATHARINE KELLEY
DEPUTY CHIEF OF SPACE OPERATIONS FOR HUMAN
CAPITAL
UNITED STATES SPACE FORCE

September 20, 2023

NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL
RELEASED BY THE COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Banks, Ranking Member Kim, distinguished members of this subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you and represent your United States Space Force. Building and managing a capable force is essential to defending our Nation's vital interests in space. Protecting our national security interests in space requires the right Guardian, with the right talents, in the right position, at the right time, equipping them with the tools and experiences necessary for space superiority, and the protection of the joint force, our allies, and our partners. I look forward to sharing the Space Force promotions, accession, and recruitment processes with the entire committee today.

THE FORCE WE NEED

The United States Space Force (USSF) operates in a unique and dynamic personnel environment. We must be able to successfully build and develop a highly-skilled, ready, resilient, and combat-credible force.

We have engaged in a modern approach to talent management incorporating education, training, and individualized development in addition to supporting a healthy work-life balance, holistic health and family programs. We continue to build on the principles outlined in the Guardian Ideal, amplifying the Guardian spirit by expanding on the Space Force values of character, connection, commitment, and courage. We do all of this while remaining true to the statutory requirements set forth in promotions and selections for all Guardians.

The needs of the Nation require that we be operationally capable of deterring conflict and defending our Nation's interests in the now contested space domain. To this end, we continue developing the training, processes, and experiences necessary to be the most effective digital force necessary to deter our adversaries. At the same time, we are enhancing our end strength through new accessions to include inter-service transfers, lateral entry opportunities, investment in K-12 Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM), and higher education to generate our pipeline of talent, along with maximizing civilian personnel authorities. Our Guardians, both military and civilian, are our greatest strength. I am proud to share with you that we anticipate achieving our highest end strength to date of 8600 military guardians by the end of this month.

RECRUITING AND RETENTION

The competitive market for STEM talent creates significant competition for those unique and essential capabilities necessary for the Space Force. Despite the environment, the Space Force, with the help of the Air Force Recruiting Service, has met recruiting goals to acquire exceptional talent for STEM and cyber-related disciplines for this complex mission set. While we have been successful to date, the recruiting landscape is dynamic; there is a high demand for talent in these technical communities, across the Department of Defense, the United States (U.S.) Government, and industry. This year, the Department of Defense's Joint Advertising Market Research Studies program recorded an historic low of 10% propensity to serve. This low propensity for military service, along with the general lack of awareness concerning the Space Force "brand," require uniquely innovative outreach and incentive methods to attract and retain highly-qualified talent in a challenging marketplace. To address this, the USSF is investing to increase brand awareness and tap into key talent pipelines.

While we have met our recruitment goals for this year, we are not content to presume this to continue and we anticipate a potential need for growth in outyears. Our focus today is on expanding our reach to parents, coaches, friends, and prospective Guardians in order to ensure our talent pipeline remains robust. We are focusing investments to ensure that our nation understands what the Space Force contributes to our national security and how a Guardian career offers opportunity to serve, educate, contribute, and defend our national interests.

ASSIGNMENTS, COMMAND, AND SENIOR MATERIAL LEADER SELECTION

USSF senior leader officer and enlisted assignment selection processes are board-based. They are governed, planned, and executed in accordance with Title 10 USC as well as DoD and DAF instructions. These processes provide for thorough review of Guardian performance and potential, ensuring only the most qualified and deserving Guardians—based upon performance and needs of the service—are selected for Senior Leader Positions.

Colonels competing for Command and Senior Enlisted competing for Senior Material Leader (SML) positions will be reviewed by the board panel based on performance reports, decorations, and Guardian Statements of Intent to develop an order of merit for all nominees competing for command and SML positions. The Board identifies the best-qualified based on leadership potential, performance and “best fit” for the leadership positions available. The board considers evidence of fitness for selection in duty performance, breadth of experience, Professional Military Education, civilian education, and/or any other facet of the member’s record.

PROMOTIONS

It is crucial that we pick the best and the brightest to help shape the space domain for the Joint fight. The Space Force promotion system is regulated by law, Department of Defense and Department of the Air Force policy. Our promotion program fulfills the requirements of section 619 of Title 10, United States Code and Secretarial policy by promoting the “best qualified” officers to positions of increased responsibility and authority. The Space Force promotion system selects the best qualified commissioned and noncommissioned officers with regard to their record, their education, their contributions and demonstrated potential. Promotion boards convened to consider officers for promotion are charged with recommending the best fully qualified officers based on this ‘whole-person’ concept. We leverage the Air Force Personnel Center to help the Space Force execute its statutory requirements for promotion of officer, enlisted and General Officers.

As we continue to grow our foundation, we are thoughtfully instituting Space Force policy and process changes to bring us into closer alignment to the future state described in the Guardian Ideal, in line with the Guardian Spirit.

CONCLUSION

Your Guardians, both military and civilian members, are preserving U.S. freedom of action in an increasingly contested space domain. This requires a military force specifically trained and equipped for the purpose. U.S. projection for space superiority demands space capabilities our Guardians provide to this nation. Developing our force, both military and civilian, is a national imperative and a once in a lifetime opportunity. Guardian talent and expertise is our most important

operational advantage. Amplifying the Guardian Spirit starts with taking care of our personnel and shaping their experiences. Doing so unleashes the creativity, innovation, determination, and patriotism of our force. We thank you for your continued support for our Space Force, its uniformed and civilian Guard and their families, caregivers, and survivors.