

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: ACCESSION, PROMOTION
AND COMMAND SELECTION

STATEMENT OF:

LIEUTENANT GENERAL CAROLINE M. MILLER
DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF FOR MANPOWER,
PERSONNEL AND SERVICES

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INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon, Chairman Banks, Ranking Member Kim and distinguished members of this subcommittee. I am honored to have this opportunity to appear before you with my fellow service personnel colleagues. My focus today is on the Air Force's most significant competitive advantage over our adversaries: our Airmen. We need to ensure our Airmen possess the abilities and talents to maintain and increase our competitive advantage. Air Force Talent Management is focused on one simple principle: having the right Airman, in the right job, at the right time. Today's Air Force, more than ever, relies on the strength of our meritocracy in all facets of our personnel system to achieve that principle. From Accessions to Promotions and Selection for Command, we are rooted in our conviction that our continued success depends on attracting, promoting and retaining those who have the competencies to ensure operational success.

ACCESSIONS

Today's military recruiting environment is one of the most challenging it has ever been, due to a near-record-low propensity to serve and a decline in the eligible population. The United States Air Force is aggressively engaging in both areas to reverse these negative trends. We are increasing our direct engagement with citizens—"a call to serve"—to internalize the importance of protecting our Country, our way of life, our families and all Americans. Initiatives such as 'GO Inspire' are aimed at high school and college youth to educate them on the opportunities available to them in the Air Force. We are also focused on selecting recruiters with life experiences in areas of the country that are underrepresented in our Service. To increase the eligible pool of applicants, we are making significant progress in updating over-restrictive policies, including relaxing some tattoo and body composition restrictions, re-evaluating requirements for driver's licenses and offering Naturalization at basic training. Additionally, we have increased incentives for personnel with civilian-sector cyber certifications to enter the Service at higher pay grades than standard accessions. Throughout all of these efforts, our primary intention remains attracting and retaining individuals with the abilities and talents we need to maintain and further our competitive edge.

PROMOTIONS

Meritocracy is the foundation of the Air Force promotion system. It is an Air Force imperative to promote the best qualified commissioned and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) with the requisite competencies for successful mission execution across the entire range of Air Force operations.

Officer Promotions

The Air Force promotion board process strictly adheres to provisions outlined in law and Department of Defense policy. Officers are considered for promotion based primarily on their “eligibility window,” determined by time spent in their current grade. Promotion boards convened to consider officers for promotion are charged with recommending the best fully qualified officers based on a ‘whole-person’ concept. Board members review each officer’s Officer Selection Record, which includes career history and performance evaluations. Each record is assessed on its own merit without regard to race, gender or ethnicity, using factors in the officer’s record that highlight exceptional job performance with specific achievements (the most important factor), professional qualities, leadership, depth & breadth of experience, job responsibility and advanced academic & developmental education. Once the Promotion Board produces a list of officer nominees for promotion, the Secretary of the Air Force must certify that the submitted nominees meet the exemplary conduct provisions of Title 10, USC by conducting financial disclosure reviews and monitoring all agency systems for adverse or reportable information.

Noncommissioned Officer Promotions

Eligibility for promotion within the enlisted ranks is also based primarily on time spent in their current grade. Airmen are selected for promotion to the NCO ranks (Staff Sergeant and Technical Sergeant) based on their objective cumulative score within the Weighted Airman Promotion System, which assigns qualitative points for performance evaluations, scores on the Specialty Knowledge Test for their assigned career field and decorations for superior performance. Candidates for promotion to the Senior NCO ranks of Master Sergeant through Chief Master Sergeant go through a promotion board process similar to officers. Board packages are assessed without regard to race, gender or ethnicity, focusing on sustained superior performance measured by performance reports and decorations.

Lieutenant General and General Officer Selections

Lieutenant General and General Officer positions are nominatively filled. The process starts in the Air Force General Officer Management Office, which uses the General Officer Future Assignment and Strategy Tool to objectively analyze each position’s requirements against the qualifications of all general officers, including duty history and career progression paths, in order to produce a slate of highly qualified candidates. The proposed slate is then briefed to the Chief of Staff of the Air Force and Secretary of the Air Force, who select a candidate to forward to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for concurrence based on joint duty experience. The candidate must then be approved by the Secretary of Defense for nomination by the President to the Senate for confirmation.

COMMAND SELECTION

The process for selecting senior officers for command is very similar to promotions. However, unlike promotion boards, Command Screening Boards (CSBs) are non-statutory and controlled by the Chief of Staff of the Air Force under the purview of the Secretary of the Air Force. CSB members also review each officer's Officer Selection Record without regard to race, gender or ethnicity, focusing on exceptional job performance with specific achievements and demonstrated leadership potential to produce a final candidate list. Individuals who are selected for the final list must undergo a review by the Air Force Inspector General for adverse information prior to final approval by the Chief of Staff of the Air Force.

CONCLUSION

In order to maintain supremacy in today's world against two peer adversaries, the Air Force must maintain an unwavering focus on its most significant competitive advantage over our adversaries: our Airmen. Ensuring the right Airman will be in the right job at the right time requires that we not only attract talented individuals with critical skills, but that we promote and increase responsibility for those individuals who clearly demonstrate exceptional job knowledge and performance. For that reason, the Air Force processes for Accession, Promotion and Command Selection are based on individual merit to advance those Airmen who are best qualified to maintain and increase our competitive advantage. Thank you for your continued advocacy for our Airmen, both military and civilian, and the families who support them.