

United States Space Force



Testimony
Before the House Armed Services
Subcommittee on Military Personnel

Quality of Life in the Military

Witness Statement of
CMSSF Roger A. Towberman
Chief Master Sergeant of the Space Force

March 9, 2023

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BIOGRAPHY

UNITED STATES SPACE FORCE

CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT OF THE SPACE FORCE ROGER A. TOWBERMAN

Chief Master Sergeant of the Space Force Roger A. Towberman serves at the highest enlisted level of leadership, and as such, provides direction for the enlisted force and represents their interests, as appropriate, to the American public and to those in all levels of government. He acts as the personal adviser to the Chief of Space Operations and the Secretary of the Air Force on all issues regarding the welfare, readiness, morale, proper utilization and development of the U.S. Space Force. Chief Towberman is the first chief master sergeant appointed to the highest noncommissioned officer position.



Chief Towberman entered the Air Force in September 1990, and his career has included various duties as a ground and airborne cryptologic language and intelligence analyst. Throughout his career, he filled myriad leadership roles at the squadron, group, wing, Numbered Air Force, Major Command and Combatant Command level, while stateside, overseas and deployed. His deployments included supporting Operations Joint Forge, Allied Force, Northern Watch, Southern Watch, Iraqi Freedom, Enduring Freedom and Unified Protector. As a Career Enlisted Aviator, he logged more than 4,500 flying hours.

He entered the United States Space Force on April 3, 2020.

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Introduction

Chairman Banks, Ranking Member Kim, and distinguished members of this Subcommittee, thank you for your continued support and dedication to the quality of life of our Guardians, their loved ones, and our Space Force. I am incredibly honored to address you and express the needs of our service. I am sincerely grateful for your positive impacts on the lives of our Guardians and their families, caregivers, and survivors. You have my deepest and most sincere appreciation for your enduring and steadfast support to our country and our service members.

Our most important weapon system lives and breathes. More than any technology or system we acquire, our greatest advantage remains the dedicated human beings who make up our service. Our Guardians not only develop, employ, and advance space power for our Nation, they **are** space power for our Nation. As combat credible joint warfighters and space warfighting experts, our Guardians are committed to preserving our Nation and our way of life against all enemies and, like their counterparts across the Armed Services, that commitment requires sacrifice—a sacrifice we never take lightly.

Connecting with and serving our Guardians is the reason I get up each day. Because their service is voluntary and unconditional, the leadership, training, facilities, and care we provide to them and the way we care for their loved ones are inextricably linked to us carrying out the National Defense Strategy.

Every Guardian's experience, and the experience of their loved ones, is directly connected to our continued ability to recruit and retain our warfighting advantage. The importance of the ecosystem in which they live, and work cannot be overstated. Quality of life is not something we do for them; it is something we do for our warfighting readiness. It is part and parcel to our military advantage and the very reason for our mission success. Guardians continue to serve because we take care of them. It really is that simple.

Recruiting, growing, and retaining our space warfighting advantage requires the best quality of life possible, and we remain committed as a service to provide all the resources and execute all the authorities at our disposal. We are seamlessly connected to our Air Force teammates in many of these endeavors while remaining an important and distinct voice within the Department of the Air Force. Many of the things which matter greatly to our Guardians and

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their families – unaccompanied and privatized housing, base military and family services, and child development centers – are carried out as team efforts, and I am incredibly proud of the direct and important support we receive from the Air Force. We simply could not succeed without their help and resources.

Beyond our teaming efforts, we are doing what we can to provide an experience specific to Guardians and their families and we are committed to curating innovative new strategies to address new or specific needs as they emerge.

Teaming Efforts as the Department of the Air Force

As a Department, the Space Force and Air Force work together on some of the most important Quality of Life efforts. Sexual Assault Prevention and Response, Suicide Prevention, Military Childcare, Military Spouse Licensure, Unaccompanied Housing, and Privatized Housing are a few examples of the important programs and initiatives that we tackle, and will continue to tackle, as “One Team.” I could not ask for a better partnership than we have with the United States Air Force. One such example is our Child Development Centers which remain crucial to our families and our readiness. We continue to struggle at times with both facility capacity and provider shortages but are doing what we can to overcome these challenges. The Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood program at Peterson-Schriever Space Force Base is one such example. We have found childcare for an additional 136 military children through great partnerships with the community and, to date, 40 actively participating providers are lending their support to our families. I welcome sharing a closer look at this small win with this committee and finding opportunities to scale or extend to other locations. This may not be a permanent solution where new or improved facilities are necessary to support 24-hour a day, employed-in-place joint warfighting missions across virtually all Combatant Commands. I also look forward to exploring more enduring solutions new or improved facilities may offer.

Amplifying the Guardian Spirit

As we began our fourth year as a service, the Chief of Space Operations outlined three Lines of Effort, the second being “Amplify the Guardian Spirit.” As the saying goes, space is hard. Remaining dominant in an increasingly complex warfighting environment takes something

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special, perhaps something not easily defined. Amplifying the Guardian Spirit is the sum total of our efforts to recruit, develop, and retain Guardians who are something special. Internally, we want Guardians to know they are Guardians. It is not easy to choose service, especially enlisted service, over other career options when one's talents open many doors. It is not easy to outthink highly competitive adversaries in a still emerging domain with still emerging norms of behavior. It is not easy to commit to a career of employed in place missions, executing 24-hour missions at all times, working inside restricted areas without windows or fresh air and unable to "offload" to family members or friends off-duty because of security classifications. Being a Guardian is not for everyone and as a service we must continue our efforts to find and invest in those worthy of our unique challenges. From the outside, we want everyone who meets us to know we are Guardians. We want Guardians easily and immediately recognizable as principled public servants, space experts, and collaborative, innovative problem solvers. Everything we do must amplify these traits and incentivize commitment to this team and our Nation. Everything about the way we recruit, develop, and retain is focused on finding and amplifying that Guardian Spirit.

Recruiting

Tens of thousands of Americans seek opportunity to enlist in the Space Force each year through rigorous screening, the highest aggregate ASVAB scores of any service, and a selection board process that prioritizes our values and warfighting needs. We select approximately 500 applicants: less than three percent of those who want to be Guardians, get to be Guardians. We are proud of our selection process and our prioritization of talent and character. It has given us a deep talent pool which, after many challenging months (sometimes well over a year) of training, gives us exceptionally capable and combat credible warfighters. Retaining those warfighters is critical and far more difficult than finding them.

Retention

Without longitudinal data and because of some artificialities of standing up a new service, we do not yet have reliable data on current or future retention rates or how we might better retain the talented force we need. The current end strength variances allowed by Congress are critical as we collect data and build sustainment plans. Also critical is our continued work to offer both

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full- and part-time positions to our uniformed Guardians under a single personnel management system and we look forward to your continued support and guidance over the coming months. Our most important effort to retain talent is our Guardian Value Proposition.

Guardian Value Proposition

The Guardian Value Proposition, or GVP, is how we describe the ecosystem of all those things we do for, or provide to, Guardians which incentivize their continued service. From direct pay and compensation to empowerment, we are looking at all angles and committed to getting this right. We surveyed nearly 4000 Guardians in 2021 and executed follow on working and focus groups to best understand what Guardians value and why they come to work each day. Not surprisingly, they enjoy serving. It matters to them that what they do matters to our Nation and to Congress. I can't thank you enough for your direct engagements to understand and appreciate the important work they do. Compensation was also on the top of their list -- again, not surprising. These are talented human beings with plenty of options, and we look forward to the Quadrennial Review on Military Compensation, and along with this committee, exploring any ideas you might have.

In the meantime, we are doing what we can to improve the financial wellbeing of our Guardians and their families and ensuring the few who need help get help. The most recent data we have from the Defense Commissary Agency shows 6.6 percent of our E-6 and below families have used WIC benefits while shopping. That number is small but concerning. Finally, on the top of their list, was the opportunity to work on cutting edge technologies and be challenged intellectually in an innovative environment. In many ways, this is the easiest to deliver as the domain already requires these things. We look forward to working with you to find new and better ways to be more innovative, less bureaucratic, and more empowering at all levels. Space is hard; it will be less so if we can equip and empower these digital natives to be their best selves.

Conclusion

Chairman Banks, Ranking Member Kim, and distinguished members of this Subcommittee, thank you again for this opportunity to represent our incredible Guardians and their families, caregivers, and survivors. Your Guardians, supported by some of the strongest

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families our nation has ever known, stand ready to serve and it is our mission to support them with the highest caliber of resources, training, and care we can provide.

We appreciate your continued support for our brave Guardians, their selfless families, and the communities they serve. It is your commitment to protect the quality-of-life initiatives they need to confidently and competently defend and proudly serve our great Nation. Thank you for your leadership and continued commitment to providing the resources and oversight necessary to care for our Guardians as they take care of us.