

**Opening Remarks of
Ranking Member Chrissy Houlahan
Military Personnel Subcommittee Hearing
*Military Department Personnel Chiefs:
Personnel Posture*
April 16, 2026**

Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Airmen, and Guardians, are engaged in missions around the globe. Whether they are conducting combat operations or delivering humanitarian assistance, they are ready and able to respond to national security challenges across the world. We ask a lot of our service members. We ask them to risk their lives to protect our country and in turn, we must make sure that we have their backs and support them and their families. We don't always live up to that and need to do better.

I had a chance to speak to most of the witnesses on the panel earlier this week and was pleased to hear that all of the Services are on track to meet their recruitment and retention targets for this year. I am also happy to see proposed end-strength increases across the board in the President's budget submission for fiscal year 2027.

That being said, I am very concerned about the continued politicization of service members by Department of Defense leaders. I come from a military family where several generations, including myself, opted to serve, but that exposure to a military lifestyle is decreasing across our nation, and parents, teachers, counselors, and coaches are less willing to recommend military service to young people in their spheres of influence.

Whether it is the President using visits to military installations to promote candidates and his party, or allowing social media postings that are partisan and offensive by active duty service members working at the Pentagon, or unlawfully removing well-qualified individuals from promotion; all of these actions clearly lead to the erosion of trust in the military. These actions will undoubtedly have a negative impact on our nation's youth propensity to serve and I am also worried about how these events are affecting the morale of the force.

I am also concerned that this Administration continues to institute unnecessary and arguably discriminatory barriers to service that may be preventing fully qualified and willing individuals from joining the military or continuing in service: from new overly rigid grooming standards to ever-changing fitness tests. Rather than establishing obstacles to service, we should be ensuring that we are able to sustain the proposed military growth and keep looking for ways to widen the pool of applicants from which we can draw our all-volunteer force.

We have also heard many times that we recruit the service member but we retain their family, so it is imperative that we continue the work we started in the bipartisan Quality of Life Panel. Congress is closely monitoring the implementation of the panel's recommendations that made it into law, but we must continue to work on improving areas like food security, housing, childcare, and access to health care.

The Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Airmen and Guardians who serve today have different needs than in the past. The percentage of women serving has increased to over 17% and nearly a third of our active-duty force have children. More than ever, the military must be able to provide service members with affordable and convenient childcare. However, childcare staffing shortages have resulted in untenable waitlists that negatively impact unit readiness across the force. Moreover, we must not lose sight of the impact current events have on our military.

Finally, the continued and indiscriminate attacks on Department of Defense civilians will have lasting, negative effects on the military. Yet, while the Department of Defense remains under a hiring freeze, it has directed the Services to establish Strategic Hiring Committees. These Committees are responsible for managing the exemption processes to the hiring freeze, to include which categories of positions the services can hire. I'm interested in hearing from our witnesses about how that process is going, whether it is working, and the impact it is having in bringing critical civilians on board.

Civilians are part of the total force, and they staff many essential support programs for military families. Bureaucratic delays and incompetence in implementing flawed personnel policies have left military personnel performing sometimes two or three jobs while positions are being routed through the Strategic Hiring Committees.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for having this hearing today so we can discuss the importance of personnel policies on the lives of servicemembers.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here. And to Lieutenant General Miller, thank you for your dedicated service and congratulations on your upcoming retirement.

I yield the balance of my time.