



DACOWITS: Articles of Interest

WELLNESS

[DoD Efforts to Combat Sexual Assault Begin Paying Off](#)

(1 May) DoD News, By Jim Garamone

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[Independent Survey Shows Decline in Military Sexual Assaults](#)

(1 May) DoD News, By Jim Garamone

An independent survey confirms the prevalence of sexual assault in the military has dropped, Defense Department officials said today.

[Carter: DoD Examines, Uses New Data to Combat Sexual Assault](#)

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DoD will capitalize on being a learning and growing organization as it takes new data and forms new policies to combat sexual assault, Defense Secretary Ash Carter said today.

[New data shows confusion between hazing, sex assault](#)

(1 May) Marine Corps Times, By Hope Hodge Seck

The Marine Corps is celebrating gains after new data indicates the service is closing the gap between sexual assaults that occur and those that are reported. At the same time, officials say they're examining troubling new information regarding male victims of sexual assault and hazing-related incidents.

[More sexual assault victims report the crime](#)

(1 May) Air Force Times, By Stephen Losey

The number of sexual assaults reported in the Air Force increased 17 percent in fiscal 2014, from 1,149 reports in fiscal 2013 to 1,350 last year.

[Female service members say they face retribution for reporting sexual assaults](#)

(1 May) McClatchy Washington Bureau, By James Rosen

Two-thirds of women in the military who reported they'd been sexually assaulted endure professional retaliation or other social ostracism, Pentagon leaders said Friday.

[Pentagon Accused Of Withholding Sex Crimes Info](#)

(4 May) Associated Press, By Richard Lardner

WASHINGTON – The number of sex-related crimes occurring in U.S. military communities is far greater than the Defense Department has publicly reported, a U.S. senator said Monday in a scathing critique that asserts the Pentagon has refused to provide her information about sexual assaults at several major bases.

[Navy: Fewer Sexual Assaults in '14, But More Reports](#)

(4 May) Virginian-Pilot, By Mike Hixenbaugh

The Navy appears to be making progress in efforts to prevent and prosecute sexual assault within its ranks, according to data released Friday.

[No witnesses or arguments at Air Force Academy sexual assault hearing](#)

(6 May) Colorado Springs Gazette, By Tom Roeder

Government lawyers called no witnesses and made no arguments in presenting their sexual assault case against an Air Force Academy cadet Tuesday.

ASSIGNMENTS

Peer review next obstacle for first women to undergo Army Ranger school

(2 May) *McClatchy DC*, By Chuck Williams

It will be a week before the eight women trying to earn the coveted U.S. Army Ranger tab find out if they move from the hills of Fort Benning to the mountains of North Georgia and the next step in the brutal leadership training process.

Air Force leadership lacks diversity

(3 May) *USA Today*, By Tom Vanden Brook

The senior leadership of the Air Force remains largely white and male despite an emphasis on diversity in the service and throughout the military, according to data and interviews with service leaders.

Navy SEALs See No Barrier To Women In Combat Ranks

(3 May) *Washington Times*, By Rowan Scarborough

U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command has found no barriers to integrating women into all-male SEAL teams, a finding that greatly increases the chances that Defense Secretary Ashton Carter will open the units to females by January.

Standards For Women In Combat Examined

(4 May) *The Washington Post*, By Dan Lamothe

The question of physical standards continues to dog the debate, and there are several distinct constituencies in it.

Viral video: This U.S. soldier refused to give up on an Army road march

(4 May) *The Washington Post*, By Dan Lamothe

A female soldier struggles to her feet on April 27 while completing a grueling 12-mile road march while carrying a combat load. The video of it has gone viral.

Flag Officer Announcement. Secretary of Defense Ash Carter announced today that the president has made the following nomination: Navy Capt. Shoshana S. Chatfield for appointment to the rank of rear admiral (lower half). Chatfield is currently serving as senior military assistant, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, SHAPE, Belgium.

EXTRA

DACOWITS conducts study on Fort Carson

Fort Carson Mountaineer, By Sgt. William Smith

The Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) visited Fort Carson April 9-10, 2015, to conduct independent research for part of its annual report to the secretary of Defense.

Report: Hazing fuels male-on-male sex assaults

(1 May) *Military Times*, By Andrew Tilghman

Across the military, men suffered more sexual assaults last year than women, and many of those were male-on-male assaults stemming from hazing incidents rather than sexual aggression, according to a new Pentagon report.

Veteran Tells Congress VA Fails at Providing Maternity Care

(1 May) *Military.Com*, By Bryant Jordan

Dawn Halfaker, an Army military police captain who lost her right arm in an ambush during the Iraq War, testified before Congress on access and quality of VA health care for women.

The Quest For Transgender Equality

(4 May) *New York Times Editorial*

Being transgender today remains unreasonably and unnecessarily hard. But it is far from hopeless. More Americans who have wrestled with gender identity are transitioning openly, propelling a civil rights movement that has struggled even as gays and lesbians have reached irreversible momentum in their fight for equality.

DoD Efforts to Combat Sexual Assault Begin Paying Off

(1 May) DoD News, By Jim Garamone

WASHINGTON, May 1, 2015 – The attention the military is paying to preventing sexual assault in the military is paying off, the director of the Defense Department’s Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office said in a DoD News interview this week, as Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month drew to a close.

Army Maj. Gen. Jeffrey J. Snow said unprecedented attention that leadership has focused on the crime has trends going in the right direction. Still, while there is progress, no one is doing a victory lap, he said, noting that much remains to be done to reach out to victims and to put in place programs that prevent the crime in the first place.

Defense secretaries Leon Panetta, Chuck Hagel and Ash Carter have made combatting sexual assault a priority for the department, Snow said. This has led to a strategic plan with clear lines of effort and objectives, he added. “We’ve developed measures to determine whether it is working, and when it is not, we’ve taken steps to address it,” he said.

More Than 50 Initiatives

The secretary of defense has directed more than 50 initiatives to fight sexual assault in the military’s ranks and is tracking their progress, Snow said. Additionally, Congress has passed legislation to combat the problem.

“It really shows we are a learning organization,” he said.

“When we identify a problem, we take steps to address it.

We’ll continue to do that until we’ve eliminated sexual assault.”

The program began in 2005, as little more than a clearinghouse for information, Snow said. “We’d collect data, but I’m not sure it got to the appropriate leaders,” he said.

“Certainly with Secretary Panetta taking this information and acknowledging that there is a problem with sexual assault in the military, that has really given it a boost right to the present day.”

Snow said the effort has increased awareness of the crime and the effect it has on units and on individuals of all ranks. “We started at the top, but I think there is a conversation in the ranks that was not happening four or five years ago,” he added.

But that doesn’t mean the education effort can stop, the general said.

Keeping the Message Out There

“I think the message is out there, but in any given year, we have about 20 percent of the force that is turning over,” he noted. “We bring in folks that make the decision to join the services, and one of the things we have to do is inculcate our values into them. Then we’ve got to educate them on what constitutes the crime.”

When the military educates recruits on the definition of the crimes and what steps they can take if it happens to them, they seem to get the message the general said. He noted that 8 percent of those filing a report this past year actually reported an incident that occurred to them before they entered the service.

“It tells me there’s something going on in the climate that soldiers, sailors, airmen [and] Marines feel comfortable

enough given what they have learned that they can tell somebody, . . . and that opens them up for the care and services available within the military” that can assist them in getting help, he said.

Partnership With Congress

Snow stressed that the department’s partnership with Congress has been incredibly helpful. The Air Force established special victim counselors, a practice that has since spread to the rest of the services. Congress codified the position. There is no capability like that in the civilian world, the general said.

“This is a game-changer, and we are seeing it is having a very powerful impact, because there is a counselor there to specifically guide a victim through the [legal] process,” he said. Once victims who filed a restricted report are briefed, he added, 20 percent of them opt to convert it to an unrestricted report.

“That gives us the opportunity to hold the alleged perpetrator accountable,” the general said.

Snow said he believes the theme for Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month -- “Eliminate Sexual Assault: Know Your Part, Do Your Part” -- was particularly powerful, noting that it stresses the importance of the idea that all members of the department must contribute to ending the crime.

“Whether you’re a private in the organization or you’re a four-star general, what am I doing to address this particular issue?” Snow said. “And this can’t be limited to the month. We have to do this every month of every year.”

Knowing What to Do

Statistics show more service members are aware of the crime, the general said, adding that he wants more of them to know exactly what to do if people come to them and say they have been victims.

Service members made aware of sexual assault should “act and not look away,” Snow said. Feedback shows 90 percent indicating that if they saw something, they intervened, he added.

Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month is an opportunity to acknowledge all of the people who are working on this problem day in and day out, the general said. He specifically mentioned the contributions of first responders: the sexual assault response coordinators, the victim advocates, sexual assault nurse examiners and other first responders. “If someone is going to come forward, they are going to contact these people,” he said.

But it doesn’t stop with them, he noted. April also highlighted the work of the people who operate the DoD Safe Help Line, an anonymous capability that victims can reach out to and get feedback from, he said.

“They know their part and they do their part,” the general said. “Now it’s up to the rest of the military. Do they know their part and are they doing their part? We need all that to come together to address this issue.”

<http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128717&source=GovDelivery>

Independent Survey Shows Decline in Military Sexual Assaults

(1 May) DoD News, By Jim Garamone

WASHINGTON, May 1, 2015 – An independent survey confirms the prevalence of sexual assault in the military has dropped, Defense Department officials said today. Statistics in the 2014 RAND Military Workplace Study show the percentage of active duty women who experienced unwanted sexual contact over the past year declined from 6.1 percent in 2012 to an estimated 4.3 percent in 2014. For active duty men, the estimated prevalence rate dropped from 1.2 percent in 2012 to 0.9 percent in 2014. Based on these rates, an estimated 18,900 service members experienced unwanted sexual contact in 2014, down from around 26,000 in 2012.

Army Maj. Gen. Jeffrey J. Snow, the director of the DoD Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, told DoD News the statistics also show a correlation between sexual harassment and sexual assault and gives more information about the difference between men and women with regard to sexual assault. “We have suspected this, but this gives us a level of granularity that will be helpful in addressing this as we move forward,” he said.

Making Progress

These trends show the department is making progress, Snow said. He acknowledged that sexual assault is an under-reported crime, but noted that since 2012, DoD has seen a 70-percent increase in reporting. “While that’s progress, ... by no means do we think this constitutes success,” he added, because we know that we still have three of four victims not coming forward.”

And that is an overall message Snow said he wants to get across: there is no silver bullet for sexual assault prevention and response. Overcoming this crime will take time, effort, knowledge and persistence, he said.

The statistics show nearly 40 percent of women who are victims of the crime come forward, but only about 10 percent of men report -- so because the military is 85 percent men, there are more male victims of sexual assault than female victims in the military in terms of sheer numbers.

Snow said the survey statistics will allow his office to target programs toward male victims and improve the care victims receive.

On sexual harassment, the survey shows a clear correlation between harassment and assault, the general said. “In an environment that is perhaps permissive of sexual harassment or gender discrimination, women and men ... are at greater

risk of sexual assault,” he said, adding that this suggests more effort may be needed at addressing sexual harassment.

Results Confirm Military Studies

The RAND Military Workplace Study confirmed previous military studies of sexual assault, Snow noted.

“We really have two independent measures ... that show there is a significant decrease in prevalence,” he said. “The fact that between 2012 and 2014 we’ve had a 25 percent decrease in the prevalence of this crime is an indication of progress.” Linking this statistic with the increase in reporting, Snow said he sees the military closing the gap. “I’m encouraged about the dialogue going on about the crime,” he said.

During a Dec. 4 Pentagon news conference on the results of the Defense Department’s annual report on sexual assault, Snow emphasized that although the crime had become less prevalent in the military, the battle is far from won.

“No one here is declaring success,” he said. “We have much more work to do. However, any decrease in prevalence indicates that there are fewer victims of this horrible crime, and I think we all would agree that is a step in the right direction.”

Leaders get it, the general said, but first-line supervisors need still need to work on their skills. Junior noncommissioned officers and junior officers -- those most in contact with the at-risk population -- need more training, and they will get it, he added.

More Victims Reporting the Crime

Last year, victims made 4,660 unrestricted reports and 1,840 initial restricted reports of sexual assault. Victims can convert their restricted reports to unrestricted, and last year 20 percent did so. This was up from 15 percent in years past.

The survey shows victims were satisfied with their decision. About 72 percent of victims who responded to the survey indicated that they reported their sexual assault and would make the same decision if they had to do it over again. Further, 73 percent of respondents would recommend that others report the crime.

“I am encouraged,” Snow said. “I think the process is working, I think the dialogue is working, but ultimately we’re trying to [reinforce an ethos of honor and trust], and it’s going to take time. We’ve been able to demonstrate progress, but it’s victory on.”

<http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128718&source=GovDelivery>

Carter: DoD Examines, Uses New Data to Combat Sexual Assault

(1 May) DoD News, By Jim Garamone

WASHINGTON, May 1, 2015 – DoD will capitalize on being a learning and growing organization as it takes new data and forms new policies to combat sexual assault, Defense Secretary Ash Carter said today.

The secretary told the Pentagon press corps that the fiscal year 2014 annual report on sexual assault in the military helps the services understand and correct flaws in the program.

The report, he said, contains a new measurement to better estimate the number of service members who experienced sexual assaults last year. That number is 20,300.

“That’s clearly far, far too many,” Carter said. “But we judge that it is a more accurate measurement of sexual assault, because it is more in line with the range of crimes that military law defines as sexual assault.”

An examination of the data also gives a clearer picture of male-on-male assaults, he said.

“Compared to women, men are less likely to report and more likely to experience multiple incidents by multiple offenders, and they’re more likely to view the incident as hazing or an attempt to humiliate,” the secretary said.

Examining, Using Data to Combat Sexual Assault

Carter has directed the services to examine the data and look for the best ways to meet the needs of men and women seeking treatment for sexual assault.

The survey also suggests that 22 percent of active-duty women and 7 percent of active-duty men may have experienced some form of sexual harassment last year. The secretary said that alone is abhorrent, but it is particularly so as the survey says those who experience sexual harassment are more likely to be sexually assaulted.

“So we have to better attack permissive behaviors like sexual harassment,” Carter said.

Carter is aiming at this nexus between harassment and assault. “I’m directing the services to update their prevention training to incorporate what we’ve learned and have that integrated in the training,” he said.

Carter is also taking full aim at retaliation, especially peer-on-peer retaliation.

“Too many service members, the data shows, feel that when they report or try to stop these crimes, they’re being ostracized or retaliated against in some way,” he said.

New data shows confusion between hazing, sex assault

(1 May) Marine Corps Times, By Hope Hodge Seck

The Marine Corps is celebrating gains after new data indicates the service is closing the gap between sexual assaults that occur and those that are reported. At the same time, officials say they’re examining troubling new information regarding male victims of sexual assault and hazing-related incidents.

A survey conducted by the RAND Corporation on the armed forces has alerted the Corps to a blind spot that has potentially left hundreds of incidents of unwanted sexual contact — particularly those with male victims — uncounted. The survey asked specific questions about hazing-style incidents that fit the definition of sexual assault, involving touching or penetration of sexual areas.

“What we’re seeing is, is different from women, men are much more likely to have an event at work unrelated to alcohol and typically associated with some type of other behavior like what would be perceived as a hazing incident or something like that,” said Col. Scott Jensen, the Corps’ branch head for Sexual Assault Prevention and Response. “Males don’t always associate that they’ve been sexually assaulted. They associate that some other type of bad behavior happened, like a hazing incident.”

The Defense Department released its sexual assault report for fiscal 2014 on Friday, compiling statistical data with insights gained from the RAND survey taken over the past year.

While the Marine Corps remains the service with the highest rate of sexual assaults, the number has dropped significantly, Jensen said. Between 2012 and 2014, he said the data shows the number of victims of unwanted sexual contact decreased from roughly 3,300 to about 2,300, a drop of 30 percent. Meanwhile, the number of sexual assault reports increased

Secretary Directs DoD-wide Strategy

Carter ordered DoD to develop a defense-wide comprehensive strategy to prevent retaliation against service members who report or intervene on behalf of victims of sexual assault and other crimes.

“The report makes it crystal clear that we have to do more, and it gives insights on how to improve this ongoing campaign to ensure dignity and respect in our institution,” he said.

“No man or woman who serves in the United States military should ever be sexually assaulted, nor should they experience reprisals for reporting such crimes,” Carter said.

The secretary said all in the department are dedicated to eradicating the crime, but that it will take time. Still, he said, the military has particular strengths.

“We believe in an ethos of honor and trust,” Carter said.

“We’ve tackled tough problems before, and again, we’re a learning organization, so we’ll keep getting smarter, we’ll keep getting better, we’ll keep doing everything we can to beat back sexual assault, and we won’t let up.”

<http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128720&source=GovDelivery>

during the same time frame from 453 reports to 880, an increase of roughly 94 percent.

That equates to a “reporting gap” closure of about 12 percent, Jensen said — and a moderate increase in incident reporting since DoD released a preliminary report at the end of last year. He pointed to the \$16 million the Corps had spent over the last two years to combat sexual assault and more than 50 new directed initiatives from the defense secretary as contributors to these gains.

Still, the new report shows some confusion between what’s considered hazing and what’s considered sexual assault.

While the survey did not produce service-specific statistics regarding the hazing-style incidents, the data shows about .66 percent of male Marines experience unwanted sexual contact. Jensen said it’s important for the Corps to properly identify these “hazing” incidents as sexual assaults in order to inform victims of their rights and of the seriousness of the crime and to make clear to would-be perpetrators that the violations are criminal.

“If there’s bad behavior occurring to a Marine, we need to make them comfortable and let them know they can report it,” Jensen said. “If it is happening out there, we need to let them know.”

Now the service is revising training for commanders and Marines in the fleet to include discussion of hazing-related sexual contact and similar incidents, he said.

The challenge of reaching male victims of sexual assault continues to be a concern for the Marine Corps, he said. While

6 May 2015

data shows that more than 8 percent of all female Marines experience unwanted sexual contact and less than 1 percent of male Marines do, the number of male and female victims of these incidents is roughly equivalent. However, Jensen said, only 22 percent of sexual assault reports come from male Marines.

"Trying to understand the why of that is obviously something we need to get to, to take appropriate action so we can help the victims and prevent the crimes," Jensen said.

The Marine Corps incorporated messages designed for male victims into a sexual assault prevention social media campaign launched in October. Using the service's official Facebook page, the campaign successfully directed some 1,000 users to the Defense Department's confidential hotline for victims, Jensen said.

One aspect of the report Jensen expressed concern with was the section related to retaliation. DoD-wide, the survey showed, about 62 percent of self-identified victims said they experienced social or professional retaliation related to their

More sexual assault victims report the crime

(1 May) Air Force Times, By Stephen Losey

The number of sexual assaults reported in the Air Force increased 17 percent in fiscal 2014, from 1,149 reports in fiscal 2013 to 1,350 last year.

And more sexual assault victims last year filed unrestricted reports, which launch an investigation and make it possible to hold an offender accountable, than ever before, according to figures released May 1. The number of unrestricted reports increased by 28 percent, from 737 to 944. It has nearly doubled since fiscal 2012, when 483 victims filed unrestricted reports.

The number of restricted reports, under which a victim chooses not to launch an investigation at that time but gets access to medical and mental health care, declined slightly from 412 reports to 406, a 1.5 percent drop.

The shift means that 70 percent of sexual assault reports in the Air Force were unrestricted last year, up from 64 percent in 2013.

Maj. Gen. Gina Grosso, director of the Air Force Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, said in an April 29 interview that she thinks the numbers show growing confidence in the Air Force's ability to investigate and prosecute sexual assault cases.

"It takes great courage to come forward and make a report," Grosso said. "And then to make that step to be willing to start an investigation is a huge step. We think the things we've put in place are making more airmen comfortable going on with an investigation."

decision to report the incident. However, Jensen said, the survey did not define what constituted retaliation. It also asked victims if they had been transferred to another post following their report, classifying transfers as a form of retaliation without distinguishing between normal change of station moves, victim-requested transfers or other command-directed moves.

Because of these ambiguities, Jensen said, the Marine Corps is planning more specific questions aimed at highlighting the realities of retaliation. They are also updating forms for Marines who file unrestricted sexual assault reports to include more questions about retaliation incidents.

"We're going to get pretty specific guidance for developing a strategy for collecting data and understanding what the numbers really are," he said. "Regardless of whether it's actually happening or just perceived, we still need to address this stuff."

<http://www.marinecorpstimes.com/story/military/2015/05/01/marines-focus-hazing-retaliation-after-sapr-report/26624845/>

Grosso said the care shown by sexual assault response coordinators and the establishment of the special victims' counsel program, which provides attorneys to advocate for assault victims, has helped build confidence. Those counsels can stand up for the victim in court and, for example, object when the prosecution or defense wants to bring in the victim's prior sexual history or mental health records.

"I think that's been a huge game-changer," Grosso said. "The interests of the victim don't necessarily mesh with either the government [prosecutors] or the defense."

The Air Force numbers were part of the Defense Department-wide Fiscal 2014 Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military, which was released May 1.

Decline in assaults

While the number of reported assaults has increased, Grosso said the estimated number of sexual assault victims has dropped from 3,200 in 2012 to 2,400 in 2014.

While she thinks the numbers are promising, she said the Air Force needs to sustain this progress into 2016.

Grosso credits the decline in the number of estimated assaults to changes enacted over the past three years to improve victim care, improve investigations and prosecutions of assaults, and hold leaders accountable for reducing sexual assaults.

6 May 2015

To build on this progress, Grosso said the Air Force plans to focus on preventing assaults from happening, and not just responding to them.

"There's lots of research on this," Grosso said. "We know what risk factors lead to perpetration, and it's all about mitigating those risk factors. That's where we're putting that plan together, to really hone in on who's committing this crime, and how do we prevent them from committing it. It gets to positive messages on what you should do and not negative messages on what you shouldn't do."

Grosso said she was disappointed to learn at a prevention summit in January that, often, airmen in the field perceive the Air Force's message about sexual assault as "women are weak and men are bad."

"Clearly, that's not the message we transmitted," Grosso said. "When we think about positive messages, we're talking about: What does healthy sexuality look like? What does a healthy relationship look like? And for airmen who have never had that modeled for them, because we bring in such a diverse force, how do we help them understand what the positive looks like? Instead of saying, 'Don't don't don't,' say, 'This is what you do.' "

But Grosso is aware that some prevention programs such as the anti-drug D.A.R.E. program — which sought to encourage elementary and middle-school students to say no to drugs — backfired and worsened behaviors they were intended to prevent. She wants to make sure the Air Force doesn't make things worse with its sexual assault prevention efforts.

"It's so complex that you can do harm, and you don't even know you're doing harm," Grosso said. "We want to be very deliberate. We want to use known, validated programs — which there's not many — and then we want to see if they work."

The Air Force is finalizing its new prevention strategy and hopes to unveil it soon. By summer of 2016, Grosso hopes to have it fully in place across the Air Force.

The Air Force derived this year's sexual assault estimates using data from a survey conducted by the Rand Corp. The survey is sent to every active-duty female airman below the grade of colonel and 25 percent of active-duty male airmen. Grosso was happy with the 42 percent response rate.

The survey suggests roughly one in every three airmen who experienced unwanted sexual assault last year reported it, Grosso said. That gap compares with one in six in the previous survey in 2012.

Grosso said not all of the 1,350 sexual assault reports filed last year were from airmen who were assaulted in 2014. Some were civilians who were allegedly assaulted by airmen, and some filed reports for assaults that happened in previous years. Another 109 reports regarded cases where the airman was assaulted before joining the Air Force. When those cases are factored out, she said, 1,076 airmen reported assaults that happened in 2014, which accounts for the one in three statistic.

The survey also showed the prevalence of unwanted sexual contact has dropped to its lowest level since 2006, Grosso said. In 2012, she said, 3.1 percent of female airmen had experienced unwanted sexual contact, but by last year, that had dropped to 2.28 percent.

Over the same period, the percentage of male airmen who had experienced unwanted sexual contact dropped from 0.5 percent to 0.43 percent.

Reaction

Protect Our Defenders, a group that advocates for survivors of sexual assault in the military, said the Defense Department's overall numbers "demonstrate a systemic failure in confronting rape in the military."

Protect Our Defenders said one of the findings -- that 62 percent of service members who reported sexual assault were retaliated against for coming forward -- is disturbing. Most of those were reprimanded against by leaders in their chain of command, Protect Our Defenders said. About 35 percent of those who were retaliated against faced an adverse administrative action, 32 percent faced professional retaliation, and 11 percent received a punishment for an infraction.

"The report released today is an overwhelming indictment both of the hostile environment that women and men in the military face, as well as the Pentagon's continued attempts to minimize the severity and scope of the problem," retired Col. Don Christensen, a former Air Force chief prosecutor and president of Protect Our Defenders, said in a Friday release. "The Pentagon's shameful attempt to downplay the retaliation that an overwhelming number of survivors experience for simply reporting their assault is offensive to the men and women who serve our military. Further, the fact that a majority of offenders of sexual harassment are in the victim's chain of command should raise deep concerns about our military leaders. This report shows that the people who have been entrusted to create a safe climate for victims and administer justice in sexual assault cases are the same people perpetrating this unacceptable behavior in the first place." <http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/2015/05/01/more-sexual-assault-victims-filing-unrestricted-reports/26647335/>

Female service members say they face retribution for reporting sexual assaults

(1 May) McClatchy Washington Bureau, By James Rosen

WASHINGTON — Two-thirds of women in the military who reported they'd been sexually assaulted endure professional retaliation or other social ostracism, Pentagon leaders said Friday.

In releasing an annual study required by Congress on sexual harassment and assault within the ranks, Defense Secretary Ash Carter said combating the problem had proven difficult.

"We're not making enough progress in countering retaliation," Carter said at a Pentagon briefing. "Too many service members feel that when they report or try to stop these crimes, they're being ostracized or retaliated against in some way."

Carter said he was issuing a directive for his top military and civilian advisers to devise a strategy for protecting service members who report unwanted sexual contact.

About 22 percent of female service members and 7 percent of male service members experienced some form of sexual harassment last year, ranging from crude jokes to assaults, according to the report.

"That's abhorrent, and it has to stop," Carter said.

Carter declined to answer reporters' questions, but his deputies were at pains to explain what, on the surface at least, appeared to be a contradiction in the study's central findings: While the number of reported sexual assaults increased in 2014 for the fourth straight year, to 6,131, a survey of troops done in an effort to capture information on unreported sexual assaults suggested that assaults overall had declined.

"We continue to see an unprecedented increase in the reporting of sexual assault from victims, which suggests growing confidence in the department's response system, and estimates indicate overall occurrences of the crime have decreased since 2012," said Brad Carson, acting defense undersecretary for personnel and readiness.

Pentagon officials said that extrapolations from the survey of 560,000 active duty and reserve service members set the total number of sexual assaults at 20,300 in 2014. The Pentagon made no such extrapolation last year, but the number of sexual assaults actually reported in 2013 was 5,518.

Forty percent of the women who reported they'd been sexually assaulted in 2014 said they'd also suffered professional retaliation because they'd reported the crime, according to a summary of the report. It did not break down the form of retaliation.

Another 26 percent of women said they felt they had been ostracized by their fellow soldiers because they had reported the crime, the summary said.

The Pentagon has been grappling with the problem of military sexual assault for decades, going back at least 1991, when Navy and Marine Corps aviation officers were alleged to have sexually assaulted 83 women and seven men at a Las Vegas convention in what became known as the Tailhook scandal.

In an effort to counter the problem, military leaders in recent years have punished senior commanders for covering up sex crimes.

Army Secretary John M. McHugh last August demoted a general and forced him to retire over his response to a sexual assault complaint against one of his officers. Maj. Gen. Michael T. Harrison, former commander of Army troops in Japan, was demoted to brigadier general before his retirement.

Nathan Galbreath, senior executive adviser in the Pentagon's sexual assault prevention office, said the Pentagon believes that victims are more likely to report a sexual assault than they were previously. He said the Pentagon's surveys suggest that one in four victims is now reporting the crimes, up from one in 10 in 2007, when he joined the office.

"Even with the increase in reporting, though . . . sexual assault remains under-reported, and we encourage any service member who's experienced a sexual assault to choose a reporting option that's right for them, to make a report and get the help that they need," Galbreath said.

Among several reasons Galbreath cited for the increased reporting, he said service members can now file "restricted reporting" that enables them to tell superiors about alleged sexual assaults without pursuing criminal prosecution.

Commanders also are now asking those who file reports whether they have experienced retaliation or ostracism, including disparaging social media posts, Galbreath said.

In more than three-quarters of the reported cases, disciplinary action was taken against perpetrators, in most cases including military criminal prosecution.

The Pentagon has set up a toll-free anonymous hotline -- 877-995-5247 -- for anyone who feels they have been the victim of sexual assault by a service member.

Women are five times more likely than men to be sexually assaulted, but the number of male victims is about the same as female victims because 1 million of the nation's 1.2 million service members are men. About 1 percent of men in the military said they were victims of sexual assault, while 5 percent of woman said so.

"Men that have experienced a sexual assault are more likely than women to describe the event as hazing and nonsexual," Galbreath said.

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2015/05/01/265338/female->

[service-members-say-they.html#storylink=cpy](http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2015/05/01/265338/female-service-members-say-they.html#storylink=cpy)

Pentagon Accused Of Withholding Sex Crimes Info

(4 May) Associated Press, By Richard Lardner

WASHINGTON – The number of sex-related crimes occurring in U.S. military communities is far greater than the Defense Department has publicly reported, a U.S. senator said Monday in a scathing critique that asserts the Pentagon has refused to provide her information about sexual assaults at several major bases.

The spouses of service members and civilian women who live or work near military facilities are especially vulnerable to being sexually assaulted, Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., said in a report. Yet they "remain in the shadows" because neither is counted in surveys conducted by the Defense Department to determine the prevalence of sexual assaults within the ranks, the report said.

"I don't think the military is being honest about the problem," Gillibrand said in an interview.

The senator said her analysis of 107 sexual assault cases found punishments that were too lenient and the word of the alleged assailant was more likely to be believed than the victim. Less than a quarter of the cases went to trial and just 11 resulted in conviction for a sex crime. Female civilians were the victims in more than half the cases, according to Gillibrand, an outspoken advocate for an overhaul of the military justice system.

In its annual report on sexual assaults in the military released Friday, the Defense Department reported progress in staunching the epidemic of sexual assaults. It estimated that sex crimes are decreasing and more victims are choosing to report them – a sign that there is more confidence that offenders will be held accountable.

Laura Seal, a Defense Department spokeswoman, said the department does not have authority to include civilians in its surveys.

In one of the cases Gillibrand reviewed, an airman allegedly pinned his ex-girlfriend down and then raped her. During the investigation, two other civilian victims stepped forward to accuse the same airman of sexual assault. One of them, the wife of another service member, awoke in the night to find the airman in bed with her. Two of his fingers were inside her vagina. The investigating officer recommended the airman be court-martialed. If convicted, he faced a lengthy prison term. But the investigator's superiors decided against a trial. They used administrative procedures to discharge the airman under "other than honorable conditions." The Air Force said the victims preferred this course of action. Two of them had decided they "wanted no part in the case," according to the Air Force, while the third said he did not want to testify.

To Gillibrand, the outcome was suspicious and suggested the victims may have been intimidated.

"It's frustrating because you look at the facts in these cases and you see witnesses willing to come forward, getting the medical exam and either eventually withdrawing their case or the investigators deciding that her testimony wasn't valid or believable," she said.

The report said the case files contradict the Pentagon's assertion that military commanders will be tough on service members accused of sex crimes. Gillibrand has backed

legislation that would remove commanders from the process of deciding whether serious crimes, including sexual misconduct cases, go to trial. That judgment would rest with seasoned military attorneys who have prosecutorial experience. The Pentagon is opposed to the change.

Gillibrand's request for the case files followed a February 2014 Associated Press investigation into the U.S. military's handling of sexual assault cases in Japan that revealed a pattern of random and inconsistent judgments in which most offenders are not incarcerated. AP obtained through the Freedom of Information Act more than 1,000 reports of sex crimes involving U.S. military personnel based in Japan between 2005 and early 2013.

To determine whether the same situation existed at major U.S. bases, Gillibrand asked then-Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel for the details of sexual assault cases investigated and adjudicated from 2009 to 2014 at four large U.S. military bases: the Army's Fort Hood in Texas, Naval Station Norfolk in Virginia, the Marine Corps' Camp Pendleton in California and Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio.

In December, nearly 10 months later, the Pentagon provided case files just for 2013, Gillibrand said, and those 107 cases were delivered only after former Sen. Carl Levin, then chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, intervened. At the time, Gillibrand led the committee's military personnel panel.

The refusal to provide the data, Gillibrand's report said, "calls into question the department's commitment to transparency and getting to the root of the problem."

Seal said the scope of Gillibrand's request was "extraordinary." The senator and the department "came to an agreement to provide a subset of the documents originally requested."

Gillibrand said she still wants the files from the other years.

The senator also questioned whether the 107 cases represented the actual total for the four bases. There were five for Wright-Patterson even though the base told AP its legal office had received nine allegations of sexual assault in 2013. There were 15 cases for 2013 at Naval Station Norfolk, the largest naval installation in the world with 43,000 service members stationed there.

In another case cited by Gillibrand, a married, 34-year-old Marine Corps staff sergeant received a reduction in rank and was docked \$2,042 in pay after forcing a 17-year-old girl to have sex with him.

They met on an online dating website called Plenty of Fish. She said she was 18 and he said he was 24. After a date, she returned with him to his room and had a glass of wine. He got on top of her and kept asking if she "wanted it," according to the records. She repeatedly told him to stop and get off of her. He ignored her.

The Air Force investigating officer said the victim was not a credible witness because there were glaring inconsistencies in her story. Under the terms of a pretrial agreement, a sexual assault charge was withdrawn. The Marine pleaded guilty to

providing alcohol to a minor, making a false statement and adultery.

<http://www.aol.com/article/2015/05/04/pentagon-accused-of-withholding-sex-crimes-info/21179369/>

Navy: Fewer Sexual Assaults in '14, But More Reports

(4 May) Virginian-Pilot, By Mike Hixenbaugh

NORFOLK -- The Navy appears to be making progress in efforts to prevent and prosecute sexual assault within its ranks, according to data released Friday.

The number of sailors who stepped forward to report a sexual assault was up by more than 50 percent from two years ago, while a survey of troops suggests the actual number of assaults has been cut nearly in half.

In other words, fewer sailors are being assaulted, and those who are show increasing confidence in the military justice system to handle the case fairly.

Other service branches saw similar trends, a good sign for military leaders who've been under fire in recent years for what many considered rampant sexual abuse among troops and a culture that made it difficult for victims to come forward. Officials sounded a cautiously optimistic tone after reviewing the new data.

"We're making progress in our efforts to respond to sexual assault, but there is still work to be done," said Rear Adm. Rick Snyder, head of the Navy's 21st Century Sailor Office.

The office was established two years ago to improve the service's health and welfare training, including programs to educate sailors on sexual assault.

In fiscal year 2014, about 1,300 sailors formally reported being sexually assaulted by another service member, up from about 750 in 2012. More reports is a good sign, Snyder said, because it means more victims trust the system.

About one in five victims of unwanted sexual contact came forward, according to a survey of thousands of sailors conducted by RAND Corp. on behalf of the Pentagon. Two years ago, only about one in 17 victims came forward.

The report did not include stats detailing how often reports result in charges or convictions.

"We're not promising results of a process," Snyder said. "But we are promising a fair and thorough process."

The report wasn't all good news: Snyder said he remains concerned by the number of victims who experienced retribution after reporting unwanted sexual contact.

About 62 percent of all victims said they faced some form of retaliation -- either from peers or superiors -- after coming forward, a figure that has not changed since 2012. Snyder said the Navy needs to get a handle on that issue or risk losing the trust of victims.

Another point of concern: Only about one in 13 men who experienced unwanted sexual contact filed a complaint with the Navy. Men who were sexually assaulted were also more likely than women to have experienced multiple incidents in the past year, to have been assaulted by multiple offenders during a single incident and to have been assaulted during duty hours.

"If the men aren't reporting it, we can't get them the help they need and we can't hold those offenders accountable," Snyder said.

Men also were more likely to describe a sexual event as hazing or intended to humiliate them. The findings point to a need for additional education, Snyder said:

"They need to understand it's sexual assault if it involves sex parts."

<http://www.military.com/daily-news/2015/05/04/navy-fewer-sexual-assaults-in-14-but-more-reports.html>

No witnesses or arguments at Air Force Academy sexual assault hearing

(6 May) Colorado Springs Gazette, By Tom Roeder

Government lawyers called no witnesses and made no arguments in presenting their sexual assault case against an Air Force Academy cadet Tuesday.

Instead, prosecutors relied on investigative paperwork and a pair of video recordings to show why sophomore cadet Zachary L. Chubb should be tried.

"With that, the preliminary hearing is closed," announced Maj. Elizabeth McDaniel, who will decide whether the evidence is enough to justify a court-martial for Chubb.

Chubb was charged in March with abusive sexual contact and sexual assault on allegations that he fondled a female cadet and touched her genitalia. Court papers allege the incident took place on the campus in October.

A preliminary hearing in the case set for last month was postponed. Tuesday's proceeding, with no statements describing the case against Chubb, shed little light on the matter. The documents entered into evidence have not been released to the public.

Attorneys for Chubb and prosecutors also declined to make arguments in the case to advocate their positions.

The academy said the brief hearing came amid changes in military procedures for evidence hearings. In January, military rules limited the scope of the hearings and allowed victims not to testify.

Those changes aside, lawyers are allowed to argue their case and call witnesses. Tuesday's hearing was the first in recent years in which prosecutors declined to call witnesses. Eugene Fidell, an expert in military law and lecturer at Yale, said similar instances have been rare.

"There are times when government, defense, and complainant(s)' interests may all align to frustrate the public's right to a public hearing," Fidell wrote in an email. Brian Purchia, a spokesman for the Washington, D.C., advocacy group Protect Our Defenders, which is pushing for enhanced protection of military victims of sexual assault, said the prosecution's handling of the hearing raises some concern. "Sounds very peculiar," he said.

<http://gazette.com/no-witnesses-or-arguments-at-air-force-academy-sexual-assault-hearing/article/1551034#FQeDFT140k07yJh0.99>

Peer review next obstacle for first women to undergo Army Ranger school

(2 May) McClatchy DC, By Chuck Williams

FORT BENNING, Ga. — It will be a week before the eight women trying to earn the coveted U.S. Army Ranger tab find out if they move from the hills of Fort Benning to the mountains of North Georgia and the next step in the brutal leadership training process.

The current class of Ranger School — the first in its more than six-decade history to include women — started two weeks ago with 399 soldiers, including 19 women. It was pared down after four days of intense physical assessment to 192, including eight women. There are three more potential cuts between now and the June 19 graduation. Students can also fall out for medical reasons.

One of the factors determining who earns a tab is a peer evaluation system, a critical tool used to judge potential Rangers. It evaluates an individual Ranger student's performance in comparison to the performance of peers within his or her squad.

"In the peer process, you learn about yourself, your buddy and everybody else," said retired Command Sgt. Maj. Dennis L. Smith, who owns Uncommon Athlete Inc., a workout and training facility in nearby Columbus, Ga. "You know right off what somebody is thinking about you."

Smith, a Ranger, is more than familiar with the process because his final assignment in the Army was command sergeant major of the Airborne and Ranger Training Brigade.

Each student receives peer reviews three times during the course. Those reviews come at the end of the current Camp Darby phase, the Camp Merrill phase in the mountains and the Camp Rudder phase in the Florida swamps.

Sgt. 1st Class Travis Pheanis has served as a Ranger instructor and is currently assigned to the Airborne and Ranger Training Brigade.

"As part of that process, they are asked two questions," Pheanis said. " 'Would you go to combat with this person? Would you share a foxhole with this person?' "

The answers can sometimes be brutally honest, Pheanis said.

"I can tell you that you get some very truthful answers when they are tired and they are fed up with their fellow students," Pheanis said.

Smith agrees.

"I have seen a student write that he would not send his worst enemy into combat with someone," Smith said.

If a squad manipulates the peer process in any way in regard to women, it will be obvious, Smith said.

"It is going to come out," he said. "It will be thrown out and that squad will be brought in and talked to. They will be told, 'We know you tried to keep her or lose her' — whatever it is. They will make sure there is no cheating and it is a fair process."

When a soldier fails a peer evaluation in the first phase, the battalion commander determines whether the soldier should go forward. If allowed to move on to the next phase, the Ranger student is switched to a different platoon or company before beginning training at the next phase, according to the Airborne and Ranger Training Brigade.

If a student fails to complete one of the last three phases, he or she is eligible to re-enter the process at the point where they washed out.

"That student — if he or she happens to recycle — will get to read" the assessments, Pheanis said. "They will see the harshness that maybe their brethren gave to them."

The questions are asked for a reason, said Col. David G. Fivecoat, commander of the Airborne and Ranger Training Brigade.

"The way we see those two questions is, with the foxhole, 'Are you more annoying and I can't stand to be next to you all

the time,' ” Fivecoat said. “The going-to-war one is more competency and ‘Do I trust you to go to combat with you?’ That is the bigger one.”

During the last three phases, the leadership abilities are assessed in small-unit patrols during which students plan and execute missions under difficult circumstances that include lack of sleep and lack of normal meals and nutrition. These missions are also carried out in difficult and demanding high-mountain terrain and the critter-invested swamps. Students also have to carry provisions and essentials for the missions, with a weight that can top 100 pounds for each person.

Approximately 4 percent of the Ranger students will fail peer evaluations, Fivecoat said. Many Ranger students who fail peer reviews also score low on another portion of the course.

Poor peer reviews play out in a very practical way, Smith said. He uses the following example:

“You never know when you are going to be called to be a leader,” Smith said. “They’ll stop in the middle of the patrol. You might have planned the mission, then I have to execute it. I better have been paying attention because me and you both are being graded if that happens. If that happens you ain’t going to like me very well if you put a great plan together and I didn’t execute it correctly.”

There is also another way that can play out, Smith said.

“If you were just in charge and I was Joe the Ragman and I worked for you,” he said, “I was helping out — I was putting people in, I was putting machine guns in, I was getting everything done, I was trying to get things right — and we are switched, I am in charge and you are Joe the Ragman. You are falling asleep and not keeping up. You are like, ‘I am done with my grade. I got my stuff.’ I am going to peer you pretty low — or vice versa.”

Air Force leadership lacks diversity

(3 May) USA Today, By Tom Vanden Brook

WASHINGTON — The senior leadership of the Air Force remains largely white and male despite an emphasis on diversity in the service and throughout the military, according to data and interviews with service leaders.

The Air Force has 280 generals, but just 18 of them belong to minority groups. That includes two Hispanic officers, or less than 1% of the total. The 13 African-American generals make up 4% of the Air Force's general officer corps.

The Pentagon's other branches, including the Army, share the same struggle to diversify their forces, a priority of Defense Secretary Ashton Carter. A key concern for the Army resides in the lack of minority officers leading its combat battalions and brigades. That's where lieutenant colonels and colonels are groomed for top leadership jobs, indicating the lack of diversity among combat leaders could persist for years.

When the small unit work begins, which comes after the initial week of intense physical training and assessment, you can't hide, Smith said.

“Everybody sees that,” he said. “The cream rises. The kids who are really good, great leaders and step to the top, they peer high.”

Those who added value to their units also do well in peer reviews, Fivecoat said.

“Strength and endurance is a premium in this course,” the colonel said. “Usually with peers, it will focus back on if a soldier will carry extra weight. In that small microcosm of a squad, if he is willing to carry extra weight, then I don't have to.”

There are other elements of teamwork that come into play, according to Fivecoat.

“Do they help with the patrol? I don't have to tell him things multiple times,” Fivecoat said. “That is value added. Each day you have to find way to provide value to the squad. If you are small person and you can't carry a lot of weight, but you do a great job planning or you go and get water, that is how you do well in the peers.”

The school has not altered the strict standards in any way for this class. The women are having to meet the same physical, mental and peer standards that the men are held to.

Smith does not think the male soldiers will be pressured to review a woman one way or another.

“I don't think there will be any pressure unless they apply it on themselves,” Smith said. “If everybody is honest, the assessment process will work just as intended.”
<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2015/05/02/265368/peer-review-next-obstacle-for.html#storylink=cpy>

The Air Force has a similar problem among its wing commanders. Commanding a wing is considered by the Air Force to be a near-prerequisite to becoming a general. Of the 135 wings, there are four black officers in charge, according to Air Force data, or less than 3%. In all, the current class of wing commanders is 93% white and 91% male.

Air Force Secretary Deborah James, in a statement to USA TODAY, acknowledged the problem.

"We value diversity," James said. "However, the statistics tell a different story. As a service we need to do better at achieving greater diversity of thought and experiences in leadership positions."

6 May 2015

The Air Force, with few exceptions, traditionally has drawn its top leaders from combat pilots, especially those who fly fighter jets. Its chief of staff, Gen. Mark Welsh, is an F-16 and A-10 pilot. Gen. Philip Breedlove, Supreme Allied commander in Europe and leader of European Command, is also an F-16 pilot.

To be sure, not all of the top Air Force leaders are white men, or even pilots. Its No. 2 officer, Gen. Larry Spencer, the vice chief of staff, is an African American. Two women are four-star officers: Gen. Lori Robinson, who commands Pacific Air Forces; and Gen. Janet Wolfenbarger, who leads materiel command.

But the surest path to the top, as in the Army, is leading front-line combat units.

"We're not that much different than the Army in that the combat arms part of our Air Force has traditionally been where we have drawn our most senior leaders," said Gen. Darren McDew, the four-star officer in charge of Air Force Air Mobility Command, a C-17 pilot and an African American. "It's because those combat arms have a natural link to the operational part that is the core of the service."

The Air Force's 9,000 combat pilots are at least 87% white. More officers declined to identify their race, 5%, than the next highest minority group, African Americans, at 3%. Nearly 94% are men. The military, as a whole, is dominated by men at 85% of its personnel.

WHY DIVERSITY MATTERS

James and Welsh issued a memo to airmen on why greater diversity is needed in the service. It also outlined several initiatives aimed at expanding the ranks of women and minorities in the Air Force.

"This approach is necessary because our increasingly diverse citizenry places a special trust in us and we must keep that trust by ensuring our Air Force is representative of the best of the populace from which we draw our considerable strength," the memo says.

Beyond better representing the United States, the Air Force views diversity as necessary for effectiveness. It loses out on talented minorities and women when they're underrepresented, said Chevalier Cleaves, the Air Force director of diversity and inclusion and a retired KC-135 tanker pilot.

"Diversity and inclusion are national security imperatives," Cleaves said. "So we must succeed. There is no second place for us. In order to do that, we need to make sure that we leverage the talent of all Americans, not just some."

For McDew, diversity of experience and thought lead to better decisions.

"In the 33 years I've been doing this, I've found you get a better solution if the people around the table aren't all mimicking back to you what you've said," he said. "What I want is a group of people who will come at it from a different angle, who will challenge what I'm thinking. And force me to think differently. I believe that's what diversity gets you."

WHY FEW MINORITY PILOTS

McDew cites several factors limiting minority interest in joining the Air Force and the military in general. Among them: teachers, coaches and clergy who don't view military service as an option for young minority students. Members of Congress often don't take advantage of the opportunity to nominate high school minority students to the military academies.

The lack of role models — the few top black officers — can also discourage potential officers from joining the military, he said.

McDew said his path to senior leadership is instructive. For him, the military was a natural fit. "I was born an airman," he said. His father was an Air Force master sergeant, the family moved around the country and overseas to his posts.

"I grew up seeing a very diverse Air Force, because our enlisted force is quite diverse," McDew said. "It's actually quite representative, I believe, of America."

Air Force enlisted personnel are much more diverse than their officer counterparts. About 70% of enlisted airmen are white and 15% African American; nearly 19% of its enlisted ranks are women.

Gifted in math and science, and encouraged by a teacher, McDew won a four-year Air Force ROTC scholarship.

"Then I go to a military school that is deeply rooted in the old South, the Virginia Military Institute," McDew said. "When I attended, they still played Dixie. They still waved the rebel flag. Out of my 420 classmates, I can't believe there were 20 of us who were not white males when I started. When we graduated, there were three of us."

That same "tyranny of small numbers" of women and minority officers exists today, McDew said. "For every single person you lose, you may lose 25% You may lose a whole cohort."

Changing the face of the Air Force will take years, he said.

INITIATIVES FOR DIVERSE LEADERS

James has announced several initiatives this spring, including identifying enlisted airmen for officer-training school who show the "ability to lead in a diverse and inclusive Air Force culture."

6 May 2015

To keep talented women in the service, the Air Force is considering extending the period in which they can defer deployments after having a baby from six months to one year. Women with four to seven years in the Air Force leave the service at twice the rate of men, often citing family and deployment concerns.

"The bottom line for me in this is leadership and developing the next generation of leaders," McDew said. "I believe that cohort of leaders ought to look like America, and I believe that it can."

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2015/05/03/air-force-diversity/26731691/>

Navy SEALs See No Barrier To Women In Combat Ranks

(3 May) *Washington Times*, By Rowan Scarborough

U.S. Naval Special Warfare Command has found no barriers to integrating women into all-male SEAL teams, a finding that greatly increases the chances that Defense Secretary Ashton Carter will open the units to females by January.

The command has completed studies ordered in 2013, including one that examined the physical standards for becoming a SEAL as well as study of the unit that killed Osama bin Laden and has conducted hundreds of other counterterrorism missions against Islamic extremists.

The Navy validated that each demanding standard remains relevant to the occupation of a SEAL and that none should be lowered, a special operations source told *The Washington Times*.

Furthermore, commanders do not see the standards, or other issues, such as mixed-sex teams in isolated austere locations, as a barrier if women have what it takes to pass the physical challenges.

"We don't see anything that will prevent us from moving forward with our integration," the source said. "We don't see any barriers to being able to integrate females into Navy special warfare."

The final approval process will play out this year. In the fall, Army Gen. Joseph Votel, commander of U.S. Special Operations Command, will make recommendations to Mr. Carter on now-closed SEAL positions, as well as other exclusively male units such as the Army's Green Berets, Rangers and Delta Force.

According to timelines set up by then-Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta, who revoked the ban on women in direct ground combat, Mr. Carter will make a final decision by January.

The outcome seemed certain when Mr. Panetta and Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, the Joint Chiefs chairman, made the announcement. Gen. Dempsey said that if there were any combat standard women could not meet, the military better have a good reason for not lowering it.

In March 2013, retired Adm. William McRaven, a SEAL and then-chief of Special Operations Command, sent an upbeat memo to the Joint Chiefs.

"I applaud the department's decision to eliminate the Direct Combat Assignment Rule and believe the eventual and complete integration of women into U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) will provide a new and powerful dimension to our Special Operations Forces (SOF) formations," he wrote.

Last week, during an appearance at Georgetown University, Mr. Carter was asked if various ground combat jobs will be opened to women. "I think most will. Maybe all will," he answered.

Uncharted Territory

The SEALs have not used women volunteers in any type of pilot program.

In contrast, the Marine Corps dispatched 27 women volunteers on the grueling Infantry Officer Course. None passed. Enlisted women, however, completed less-demanding infantry training. The Army also went the volunteer route on April 20 by putting women into the Ranger Course at Fort Benning, Georgia. After the first week, a step called Ranger Assessment Phase (RAP), eight of 19 women remain. Of 381 men, 184 are moving on.

An Army press release said the success rate – 48 percent for men and 42 percent for women – is "within historic norms for the Ranger course."

The RAP test consisted of 49 pushups, 59 situps, a five-mile run in under 40 minutes, six chin-ups, a swim test, a land navigation test and a 12-mile march with a 35-pound rucksack in under three hours.

Naval Special Warfare has opened some support jobs, or military occupational specialties (MOS), to women. But the tip of the spear, SEALs (3,957 jobs) and special warfare combatant craft crewmen (944 jobs) remained closed pending the defense secretary's final decision.

Grueling Training Ahead

The Special Warfare Command completed several studies before concluding that there are no barriers to admitting women.

The Joint Special Operations University looked at how mixed-gender small teams would perform.

Researchers at the University of Kansas queried personnel on their attitudes for admitting women and impact on unit cohesion. The Rand Corp., a Pentagon-supported research group, looked at the same issues.

Karen R. Kelly, a physiologist for the Department of Warfighter Performance at the Naval Health Research Center in San Diego, studied current standards for becoming a SEAL and their occupational relevance.

A command statement to *The Times* said, "Standards will not be lowered."

The future of all-male SEAL teams has garnered much attention since they are arguably the most famous, and macho, commandos in the U.S. arsenal.

If the Pentagon orders the command to open its jobs, female candidates will face what some experts consider the toughest military training qualification test in the world.

It begins with a preparatory school and, next, an indoctrination and pre-assessment phase. Then comes a grueling six-month, phased qualification called Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL, or BUDS.

Carried out at the Naval Special Warfare Training Center in Coronado, California, BUDS demands strength, endurance, speed, underwater and airborne skills, mental toughness and marksmanship.

According to a naval special warfare website, the BUDS phases are: basic conditioning for running, swimming and calisthenics culminating in a sleep-deprived “Hell Week”; combat diving; land warfare; and then final qualifications that test candidates across the combat spectrum.

Throughout, exhausted sailors are pushed and tormented by instructors looking to weed out those who cannot carry a comrade off a Pacific Ocean beach, for example, or belly-crawl up a steep sand berm.

‘Days Of Rambo Are Over’

Elaine Donnelly, who runs the Center for Military Readiness, says she doubts that standards will be maintained because of political pressure.

“The presumption that tough standards in SEAL or Delta Force training would remain the same is in conflict with the administration’s stated paramount goal of ‘gender diversity metrics,’ meaning quotas,” Mrs. Donnelly said. She painted this scenario: “A few women might be accepted at minimum performance levels, displacing higher-scoring men. Then, to achieve higher numbers, officials would question, modify or incrementally drop physically demanding training elements while coping with new personal relationship complications in conditions of high stress and forced intimacy. The result would be less preparation and higher risks of injury, death or failure in sea/land special forces combat operations, with no trade-off benefits in terms of mission success.”

Standards For Women In Combat Examined

(4 May) *The Washington Post*, By Dan Lamothe

FORT BENNING, Ga. – Retired Army Col. Ralph Puckett watched thoughtfully as a few dozen soldiers prepared for an outdoor breakfast of eggs, home fries and waffles after a six-mile road march. A legendary Army Ranger, he earned two Distinguished Service Crosses, two Silver Stars and five Purple Hearts while serving in Korea and Vietnam, but was reflecting on the military’s future before dawn on a damp morning in April.

Puckett, 88, is revered enough in the Rangers to have a street named after him on this massive base in western Georgia. He’s the sort of old-school soldier that is celebrated for his heroism, and welcome virtually anywhere on base.

He also appears relatively open-minded when it comes to the polarizing idea of women serving in the infantry and other combat units.

“It’s okay with me if they maintain standards,” Puckett said April 19. “I think there are some who can meet the standards, and I want to see it.”

Puckett’s views are common among combat veterans as the military examines how to integrate women into more combat units. A decades-long ban on women serving in direct ground combat assignments was lifted in January 2013, but top Pentagon officials gave the services until later this year to research whether it should submit requests to keep some jobs closed.

Mrs. Donnelly said she was “astonished” when a senior SOCOM officer appeared in the Pentagon briefing room and said, “We’re looking for smart, qualified operators. You know, there’s just – there’s a new dynamic. I mean, the days of ‘Rambo’ are over.”

“This was an affront to the professionalism of Special Operations Forces everywhere,” she said. “And policies affecting our most elite fighting forces should not be based on the fictional images, whether it’s Sylvester Stallone as Rambo or Demi Moore as G.I. Jane.”

During an interview in February with *The Washington Times*, former Navy Chief Petty Officer Robert O’Neill, the man who shot and killed Osama bin Laden, answered “absolutely” when asked if women can make the SEALs.

“I’ve met women that I think can beat me up. I’m not joking. Here in the States. There are some tough women out there,” he said.

Mr. O’Neill said SEAL training “is the toughest in the world. It’s tough physically. But it comes to a mental spot where you need to talk yourself into doing more. And you can convince your body through your mind to do anything, and I think a lot of women are mentally tougher than men. Like I said, if they don’t lower the standards. If they can do the amount of pullups, do the ‘slide for life,’ get over the cargo net and carry the log, then, yeah.”

Will the red-blooded SEAL community accept women?

“I would say, based on the guys I know, if they do not lower the standards, then yes,” he said.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/may/3/navy-seals-see-no-barrier-to-women-in-combat-ranks/>

The question of physical standards continues to dog the debate, and there are several distinct constituencies in it. Among them: those who are adamantly opposed to any change; those, like Puckett, who are open to it, but only if existing requirements are maintained; and those who think the military is unfair while evaluating women and should start from scratch with a new set of standards.

The issue came up repeatedly this week in Washington at a forum titled “Women in Combat: Where We Stand.”

Sponsored by a few groups that call for all jobs in the military to be opened to women, it featured a recurring undercurrent of skepticism that the services are evaluating women fairly.

“It’s really important that the standards are there, but it’s really important that we’re using the right standards, and not just something that’s based on research done 40 years ago,” said Army Sgt. 1st Class Meghan Malloy, who served alongside Special Forces in Afghanistan as a member of an all-female cultural support team. “I feel like those opportunities need to be there for those of us that want to go out and get them.”

The military’s ongoing research has included female officers going through the Marine Corps Infantry Officer Course (IOC) in Quantico, Va., women attending the Army Ranger School at Fort Benning, and other efforts. In the case of Ranger School and Marine IOC, students were told up front that if they graduated, they would be considered pioneers but

not be allowed to join all-male units like the Marine Corps infantry or the 75th Ranger Regiment.

Both courses include a grueling series of requirements that include pull-ups, obstacles courses and swimming. The Ranger School, for example, begins with the four-day Ranger Assessment Phase, commonly known as RAP Week. Rangers see it as a tried-and-true way of finding out who can handle the rigors of elite combat units, but critics question whether the standards set are arbitrary. As of April 23, eight of 19 women attending had moved on to later stages of the courses. The Marine Corps is grappling with the physical standards it has set now through a unit called the Ground Combat Element Integrated Task Force. Since last fall, it has evaluated skills needed to serve in each ground combat job. About 100 female Marines will go through physical rigors at Camp Lejeune, N.C.; Twentynine Palms, Calif.; and a mountain warfare course in Bridgeport, Calif., between now and July, with the service planning to validate physical requirements for each job

by the fall, said, Capt. Maureen Krebs, a Marine Corps spokeswoman.

“We really want to look at what are the specific tasks needed to do the job,” she said. “It’s going to take time, but we’re trying to do this the right way.”

Regardless, the findings will be controversial. Any change to physical standards is likely to be perceived by some as a lessening in requirements for the sake of integrating women. That’s deeply of concern to many combat veterans.

“People need to remember that we have an Army to defend our country,” Puckett said. “We need to remember that.”

If the services resist change, meanwhile, they’ll be accused of dragging their feet to halt gender integration. It’s a culture war that still has a long way to go.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2015/05/01/why-physical-standards-still-dog-the-fight-about-women-in-combat-units/>

Viral video: This U.S. soldier refused to give up on an Army road march

(4 May) The Washington Post, By Dan Lamothe

In the closing moments of a grueling 12-mile road march, Army Capt. Sarah Cudd fell to her knees. She was exhausted, bowed over by the heavy pack on her back and seemingly unable to continue.

The soldier continued on, however. Using her rifle to prop herself up, she stumbled to her feet and made it another nine steps before falling again. Other soldiers gathered around her, cheering her on. She rose again, and gritted it out another 50 feet or so until she made it across the finish line while her colleagues erupted in excitement.

Video of the April 27 effort at Fort Dix, N.J., was posted to Facebook the following day by fellow soldier Lloyd Mason, and has since gone viral. The clip has been watched more than 1 million times, and shared more than 22,000 times.

Mason said Cudd serves with Army Public Health Command at Fort Knox, Ky. The march was the last event required to earn the Army’s Expert Field Medical Badge, a decoration awarded to those who pass a rigorous battery of tests for medical professionals in the Army. Less than 25 percent of those who attempt the required course typically pass.

The Public Health Command shared the video May 1, and confirmed Cudd earned the badge. Forty-five other soldiers did the same day — but 80 percent of those who attempted the course fell short.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2015/05/04/viral-video-this-u-s-soldier-refused-to-give-up-on-an-army-road-march/>

DACOWITS conducts study on Fort Carson

Fort Carson Mountaineer, By Sgt. William Smith

The Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) visited Fort Carson April 9-10, 2015, to conduct independent research for part of its annual report to the secretary of Defense.

The Committee makes the annual report based on information gathered through installation visits, focus groups with Service members, business meetings and briefings, meetings with military leaders and review of relevant reports and survey data.

Retired Sgt. Maj. of the Army Kenneth O. Preston noted DACOWITS has been around since 1951 when it was established by then Secretary of Defense, George C. Marshall. Its recommendations have been instrumental in effecting changes to laws and policies pertaining to both male and female Service members.

“DACOWITS has been providing services for 64 years,” said Preston, now a member of the Committee. “It helps military

leaders overcome challenges they are faced with by promoting roles they are unaccustomed to.”

Working through the undersecretary of Defense for personnel and readiness, the Committee gives its recommendations and advice to the secretary of Defense. The Committee offers advice on matters and policies relating to recruitment and retention, treatment, utilization, integration and well-being of highly qualified professional servicewomen in the armed forces.

“We conduct independent, unbiased research from the military,” said Col. Betty Yarbrough, military director, DACOWITS. “It is not impacted by the Defense Department. Our research has resulted in a number of quality of life changes for all Service members. In general, we see it as the improvement of the readiness for the Services.”

Yarbrough said this year the committee will focus on gender integration, career progression of servicewomen, female accessions, quality of life and family issues for military

servicewomen who are impacted by key state and federal laws, pregnancy and postpartum policies, and facilitators and barriers to reporting sexual harassment and sexual assault. The Committee members serve without compensation and are chosen by the secretary of Defense on the basis of their experience with the military or with women's workforce issues and serve one- to four-year terms.

Report: Hazing fuels male-on-male sex assaults

(1 May) Military Times, By Andrew Tilghman

Across the military, men suffered more sexual assaults last year than women, and many of those were male-on-male assaults stemming from hazing incidents rather than sexual aggression, according to a new Pentagon report.

New research reveals that many of the estimated 19,000 military sexual assaults last year were not stereotypical situations of alcohol-fueled late-night incidents involving sexually aggressive men and female victims.

"It was new to us how much of the men's experiences were with hazing that involved a technically nonsexual context ... it was more for the intent to abuse and humiliate," said Dr. Nathan Galbreath, the Defense Department's top civilian overseeing the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office.

This year's annual SAPRO report to Congress, released on May 1, included new analysis of sexual assault reports and a recent survey of more than 100,000 service members.

On a per capita basis, military women remain far more likely to experience a sexual assault, but in terms of total numbers, there are more male victims in the predominantly male military community.

The surveys suggest about 10,500 men reported experiencing a sexual assault during the previous 12 months, compared to 8,500 women reporting the same.

"Men, relative to women, are more often experiencing multiple sexual assault incidents throughout the year. They are at the hands of multiple offenders. These occur in daytime hours in their duty locations," Galbreath said in an interview shortly before the report's release.

Sexual assaults on men are less likely to involve alcohol and men are about six times more likely than women to describe their sexual assault as a hazing incident, Galbreath said.

Male victims also view the assaults in a fundamentally different way. "Male victims who experience sexual assault during incidents of hazing or bullying may not consider reporting the experience because of the misperception that the incident is not a 'sexual' assault," according to the report.

The report cited progress on several fronts. About 4,600 service members filed reports of a sexual assault during

"They serve without pay," said Yarbrough. "Some of them are retired and this is a way for them to continue to serve. The DoD gets a lot of expertise that greatly improves the Services, that they otherwise could not afford."

<http://www.fortcarsonmountaineer.com/2015/04/dacowits-conducts-study-on-fort-carson/>

military service occurring in 2014, nearly double the total from several years ago.

Yet defense officials say that's good news because it reflects a growing confidence among victims in the military's commitment to provide support and punish offenders.

The total estimated number of sexual assaults in 2014, based on anonymous surveys, was about 19,000, down from about 26,000 when the last large-scale survey was conducted two years earlier, according to the report.

About 4.9 percent of military women say they experienced a sexual assault within the previous 12 months, compared to 1 percent of male service members, according to the 2014 survey.

About 25 percent of sexual assault victims came forward to file a report with their command, a "reporting rate" far higher than in 2012, when it was only about 11 percent, according to the report.

Military sexual assault has drawn the attention of Congress in recent years and some lawmakers have pushed for a new law that would strip commanders of their authority to prosecute serious crimes, instead transferring that responsibility to a military legal office. The measure has failed, but it has prompted the top brass to focus on the problem.

The new report also revealed new research on retaliation against victims who report sexual assault. Traditionally, concerns about retaliation have focused on professional retaliation that breaks the law and draws scrutiny from inspectors general.

But the surveys show that most people who report experiencing some form of retaliation describe it as social or cultural rejection or reprisal.

"We are actually getting more of those allegations with regard to ostracism and maltreatment," Galbreath said. "Those things happen between peers more often. ... That is really what we want to get after because that is what we saw the most of in the survey."

A third key finding from the latest research is a link between sexual harassment and sexual assaults. People who report sexual harassment are far more likely to also report a sexual assault.

6 May 2015

"They do occur together," Galbreath said. "When commanders take steps to address sexual harassment within their units, they are actually preventing sexual assault as well."

That research finding will be used to update and refine the services' sexual assault prevention and training programs, he said.

Veteran Tells Congress VA Fails at Providing Maternity Care

(1 May) Military.Com, By Bryant Jordan

When combat-wounded veteran Dawn Halfaker learned she was pregnant, she thought that the Department of Veterans Affairs would help coordinate her care and pay related bills.

But Halfaker quickly found that the VA was not much help, leaving her on her own to find a provider and pay for services.

"If the VA is going to outsource maternity care, it should be seamless and include the full range of services," she told the House Veterans Affairs Committee on Thursday.

Halfaker, an Army military police captain who lost her right arm in an ambush during the Iraq War, testified before Congress on access and quality of VA health care for women.

The VA says there are currently more than two million women veterans in the U.S., with about 400,000 using VA health care. With more women in the military serving in roles that exposed them to combat, a greater number have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan with war wounds and injuries.

More women reporting military sexual assaults have also begun seeking care for trauma.

The result has been greater numbers of women are looking for VA health care.

The VA covers maternity care, including primary care, specialty care, mental health care and more. But it provides maternity care through agreements and contracts with community providers.

The Quest For Transgender Equality

(4 May) New York Times Editorial

A generation ago, transgender Americans were widely regarded as deviants, unfit for dignified workplaces, a disgrace for families. Those who confided in relatives were, by and large, pitied and shunned. For most, transitioning on the job was tantamount to career suicide. Medical procedures to align a person's body with that person's gender identity -- an internal sense of being male, female or something else -- were a fringe specialty, available only to a few who paid out of pocket. Coming out meant going through life as a pariah. Being transgender today remains unreasonably and unnecessarily hard. But it is far from hopeless. More Americans who have wrestled with gender identity are transitioning openly, propelling a civil rights movement that has struggled even as gays and lesbians have reached

Specifically, the research about male victims may "help DoD convey a more realistic picture of male sexual assault victimization in training programs and communications to service members," according to the report.

<http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/crime/2015/05/01/sex-assaults-report/26649065/>

Halfaker said a maternity services coordinator was provided by the VA, but she was left on her own to find a doctor who would work under a VA contract based on Medicare terms. And when subsequent tests along with an echocardiogram and lab work was not paid for by the VA, she ended up fielding dunning letters threatening her credit rating.

A \$1,700 bill from Children's Hospital in Washington, D.C., was paid by the VA only after she threatened her VA care coordinator that she would speak to Congress, she said.

Patricia Hayes, chief consultant for Women's Health Services with the Veterans Health Administration, conceded that "we didn't do what we needed to do for" Halfaker.

Her care coordinator should have been in touch with her regularly and set up and scheduled the full range of services for her physical, social and psychological health during the pregnancy, Hayes said.

Rep. Phil Roe, R-Tennessee, a former Army doctor and also an obstetrician, said one of the takeaways from the testimony is that the VA has "to pay the bills."

"That's not very hard. That should be fixable today or tomorrow," he said. The lawmaker also said the VA should compile a list of health care providers it can share with expecting veterans so they do not have to go out and find one on their own.

<http://www.military.com/daily-news/2015/05/01/veteran-tells-congress-va-fails-at-providing-maternity-care.html>

irreversible momentum in their fight for equality. Those coming out now are doing so with trepidation, realizing that while pockets of tolerance are expanding, discriminatory policies and hostile, uninformed attitudes remain widespread. They deserve to come out in a nation where stories of compassion and support vastly outnumber those that end with a suicide note. The tide is shifting, but far too slowly, while lives, careers and dreams hang in the balance. Many of the heartening stories have unfolded out of sight. Some employers in the public and private sectors have begun to openly support people making the transition. At the Central Intelligence Agency, a young analyst who transitioned on the job in 2013 worried that coming out would end her career. She realized that fear was unfounded when colleagues got her a

gift certificate to Ann Taylor after she transitioned at work and senior agency officials made it their mission to ensure she could continue to thrive at her job. Yet at the same time, thousands of American troops who are transgender serve in anguish because the military bans openly transgender people from joining the service. Those who take steps to transition can be discharged under the current rules.

In several states, transgender people are courageously battling efforts to bar them from using public restrooms. In West Virginia, transgender women have been at war with the Division of Motor Vehicles because officials are refusing to give them new licenses unless they stop "misrepresenting" their gender when they have their photo taken. A recent federal government survey found that one in five transgender people reported having been denied care by a health care provider as a result of their gender.

These indignities and abuse account for the alarmingly high rates of homelessness, unemployment and suicide for transgender people. Leelah Alcorn, a 17-year-old from Ohio, wrote a harrowing suicide letter before leaping in front of a tractor-trailer last December.

"The only way I will rest in peace is if one day transgender people aren't treated the way I was, they're treated like humans," she wrote. "Fix society. Please."

Three years before a police raid of the Stonewall Inn in New York in June 1969 galvanized the gay rights movement in America, transgender women rioted after being expelled from Compton's Cafeteria in San Francisco. The restaurant had become one of the few safe gathering spots for the city's community of transgender people, who at the time were not welcome at gay bars. That same year, physician Harry Benjamin published "The Transsexual Phenomenon," a groundbreaking book that outlined how transgender people could transition medically. The two developments helped give rise to an arduous fight for societal acceptance.

Over the decades, the transgender movement has been part of the broader quest for equality for sexual minorities, but while gays and lesbians have achieved far-reaching legal and political victories in recent years, transgender people, who may be gay or straight, remain among the nation's most marginalized citizens. They face distinct challenges, including access to transition-related medical care, which have not always been a focus of the broader struggle for gay rights. Gays and lesbians are visible in all walks of life today, and many are celebrities and role models. Transgender Americans, meanwhile, remained largely unseen until fairly recently.

As prominent transgender people have come out in recent years, their revelations have been a source of fascination, much of it prurient. There was the actress Laverne Cox, the Army whistle-blower Chelsea Manning and most recently, Bruce Jenner, the gold-medal Olympian. Their stories have brought attention to the plight of a segment of the population that continues to confound many Americans. One challenge lies in semantics, a complex and fraught subject given the extraordinary diversity of experiences within the transgender community. The term transgender covers a broad range of people who do not identify with the gender listed on their birth certificate.

Scientists have no conclusive explanation for what causes some people to feel dissonance between their gender identity and aspects of their anatomy. In 2013, the American

Psychiatric Association updated its manual, replacing the term "gender identity disorder," with one that is less stigmatizing, "gender dysphoria."

The options for those who take steps to ease the distress has expanded significantly in recent years. Some opt to wear clothes typically associated with the sex they identify with, legally change their names and use new pronouns. Many also undergo hormone replacement therapy and have surgery to transform their bodies. Surgical procedures include chest reduction and augmentation as well as sex-reassignment surgery. Some people have just one type of procedure, others undergo both, and some choose to have none. While many transgender people identify with one gender, some feel their identity lies somewhere in between. The spectrum of experiences and identities is complicated, but taking basic steps to ensure that more transgender people lead healthy and fulfilling lives is not.

Expanded formal recognition is a fundamental first step. The size of the transgender community in America has always been unclear, since many people wrestle with gender dysphoria in silence. The most widely-cited figure, 700,000, comes from a 2011 study by the Williams Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles. The United States Census Bureau should give transgender Americans the chance to be formally recognized as such on forms, if they choose to. Having more detailed information about the demographics of the population is crucial to the evolution of stronger legal protections and expanded access to health care. There has been significant progress on both fronts. Last year, Medicare, which has a big influence on the industry standard for insurance coverage, lifted its ban on covering gender reassignment surgery. More states and insurance providers are following that lead, heeding the call of medical experts who say transgender-related care must be viewed as "medically necessary," rather than elective.

There have been hard-won victories on the employment front, too. The Department of Justice last year began taking the position that discrimination on the basis of gender identity, including transgender status, constitutes sex discrimination under the Civil Rights Act. That memo adds to the growing body of case law and Equal Employment Opportunity Commission rulings that have strengthened legal protections for transgender workers. Yet, many jurisdictions lack local laws that protect transgender people and discrimination remains commonplace even in places that do.

President Obama has advanced transgender rights more than any American president. But there is a glaring form of discrimination that he has the power to end. The Pentagon continues to ban openly transgender people from joining the military, even though many of America's closest allies have integrated them seamlessly in recent years.

The lack of legal protections and access to necessary care in the military system has made thousands of transgender troops extraordinarily vulnerable. Some have been discharged for being transgender, while others have opted to quit, forgoing pensions and career advancement, because delaying their transition has become unbearable.

At the Department of Defense, a handful of senior officials have quietly met with active duty transgender troops to study how that segment of the force could serve openly. The officials have become convinced that lifting the ban would

6 May 2015

unlock the service members' unfulfilled potential. Defense Secretary Ashton Carter should ask these officials to lead a swift review of the steps the Pentagon needs to take to formally integrate transgender troops. While that review is underway, Mr. Carter should instruct service chiefs to stop expelling transgender troops who are in the process of being discharged.

A generation from now, scientists will most likely know more about gender dysphoria and physicians will undoubtedly have found better ways to help people transition. This generation should be the one that stopped thinking that being transgender is something to fear or shun.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/04/opinion/the-quest-for-transgender-equality.html>