

STATEMENT OF
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NATIONAL DEFENSE INDUSTRIAL ASSOCIATION (NDIA)
BEFORE THE
HOUSE DEFENSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE
ON
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
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HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

INTRODUCTION

Chairwoman McCollum, Ranking Member Calvert, and distinguished Members of the Committee thank you for the opportunity to share my experiences and industry perspective on the challenges facing the future of the defense workforce.

Providing America's national security faces challenges, including a critical shortage of skilled, educated, and cleared personnel to work in the defense ecosystem. Many factors are causing widening gaps in our workforce with which we must contend. Without comprehensive investments in all of our nation's human capital, we won't be able to fill these gaps much less ramp up expeditiously in times of national need.

The defense sector mirrors the workforce challenges faced by the greater organic industrial base—unmet demand for STEM talent, increasing shortages in skilled personnel who can build the systems we need to stay competitive, uneven access for all of America's talent pools, and the evolving work environment the COVID crises has only accelerated.

As a trade association, the National Defense Industrial Association

represents the interests of defense companies of all sizes and sectors, with the majority of our membership comprised of small businesses. Adverse impacts to small businesses are felt throughout the supply chain. As these companies seek to transition ideas to capabilities, they face a marketplace where demand is outstripping the supply of STEM talent. Coupled with the competition for new talent, companies cannot afford to lose talented, highly skilled employees, their most coveted asset, to other sectors or to retirement.

On the vocational side, we have spent decades as a society selling a four-year degree as the ultimate path to opportunities and career success. While true this is a great path, it is not the lone path. The push for college for all has had the unintended consequence of messaging that skilled careers are somehow second class. That could not be further from the truth. For many with the talent and desire, noble, skilled careers can be both lucrative and fulfilling.

Unique to our sector is the often-required security clearance. The security clearance process can be a high and sometimes impossible

hurdle to clear for many highly qualified candidates. This barrier is particularly detrimental for small companies who find it first difficult to find the right talent and then can ill-afford to pay them while waiting the months it often takes to get them cleared to work on a classified contract. This prevents many small businesses from entering and remaining part of the defense ecosystem.

We believe being part of the solution to the defense workforce challenge is fundamental to NDIA's mission. As such, we have established the multi-year Defense Workforce Project, known as DWP, and will hold our initial Defense Workforce Summit this December.

As our Vital Signs report shows, there is a need for diversity within the defense sector; this is not just diversity of race and gender but also a diversity of thought. To increase the propensity to enter the defense sector we need to ensure more people see themselves as part of the national security enterprise. We also need to recognize the existing talent pool of veterans and military spouses who have familiarity with the defense mission and make entrance for their career pathway a more

streamlined process.

Educational opportunities are crucial to supporting our workforce today and into the future. We must address the imbalance in representation in the STEM workforce and increase the number of academically prepared students at the K-14 level in STEM.

An area too often overlooked is Career and Technical Education, known as CTE. However, we do not see many substantive national approaches.

We are identifying centers of training excellence and developing actionable recommendations on adapting and scaling programs nationally to meet production goals over the next five to 20 years.

Finally, experiences before and since the COVID crisis began have shown that the nature of work is shifting. We need to understand the current trends in that change to then implement changes in the way we develop the workforce of tomorrow.

A partnership between government and industry is necessary for generational impacts to ensure the future of the workforce.

Collaboration is underway in these very halls with the establishment of the House Defense Workforce Innovation and Industry Caucus, established with support from both sides of the aisle.

Our focus is to help ensure the defense industrial base has a robust, ready, and cleared defense workforce for 2040, capable of equipping our nation's warfighters to face both impending and unforeseen challenges.

Improving the development of the defense workforce is a work in progress, and we do not know yet what appropriations are necessary to fund these projects. We thank you in advance for recognizing this issue and for your support.