

Fellow Airmen:

Secretary Donley and I are proud of the tremendous contributions you make every day to secure our nation. We recognize and appreciate the sacrifices that are asked of you and your family. Now, the Secretary and I must make a difficult decision for the health of the Air Force family.

Air Force retention is at a 15-year high, despite an incredibly robust operations tempo. We are nearly 5,000 Airmen above our authorized, funded end strength ceiling. Career fields are overmanned in certain year groups, while at the same time, we have critical manning shortages in some of our most stressed career fields and mission areas. We must correct these overages and skill imbalances by sizing and shaping our force within our authorized, funded ceiling.

As you know, in November 2009 we offered a variety of voluntary measures aimed at reducing personnel numbers. Unfortunately, not enough people took advantage of those programs. Thus we had to make the tough decision to move forward on a plan to shrink the active duty force by almost 3 percent.

Although it will be a challenging time, our goal is to minimize the impact on Airmen currently serving. We are reducing accessions for both officers and enlisted Airmen while expanding voluntary separation and retirement programs to try and protect those currently serving. Where possible, we will cross-flow Airmen from overmanned career fields into those that are undermanned, and, where appropriate, we will implement involuntary measures.

More information on this multi-tiered force management effort is available on the Air Force Personnel Center website. Voluntary programs will allow personnel to leave the service immediately; non-voluntary programs will start this summer with departures targeted for no later than April 2011. I encourage all of you to go to the AFPC website and review the programs that may impact you and your families.

Please know the Secretary and I have carefully considered every option, but in the end, arrived at the conclusion that these force management initiatives are necessary. We must operate within our means. Our commitment - and the commitment of leadership at all levels - is that we will do everything we can to assist those transitioning to the next phase of their careers.

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