

March 28, 2005 - Pentagon Announces "No Action" On Sexual Assault Problem at Air Force Academy

Pentagon Announces "No Action" On Sexual Assault Problem at Air Force Academy

Pentagon to Congress: Issue Too Complex/Tradeoffs Necessary

Rep. Slaughter Outraged Over Announcement

Washington DC. The following are excerpts from a response letter released over the Easter holiday by Acting Secretary of the Air Force Mr. Peter Teets.

"The Acting Secretary of the Air Force has reviewed the Department of Defense Inspector General's (DoD/IG's) report and the Fowler report on sexual assault problems at the AF Academy. After considering all the facts and weighing all the interests at stake, the Acting Secretary found that no administrative action is warranted against those officers identified in those reports as bearing some responsibility for Academy's sexual assault problems.

The Acting Secretary gave significant weight to their uniformly excellent and lengthy service and to the fact they were not intentionally or willfully derelict in their duties. He also found that any mistakes or misjudgments some of them may have made are mitigated by the complexity of the issues faced, the necessity of policy tradeoffs and compromises, and the difficulty of measuring program effectiveness."

Congresswoman Slaughter reacted to the announcement by making the following statement, "It is reprehensible that the rights of sexual assault victims are so easily sidelined by the Pentagon as 'too complex' to address. This is the kind of 'head in the sand' approach we would have expected from the military in the 1950's; in 2005 it is an abomination. Where is the accountability?"

"What the Pentagon clearly doesn't want to discuss, and what all Americans should know, is that women are being sexually assaulted on an ongoing basis in the military and at our nation's military academies by their colleagues. Action must be taken. Until the Pentagon insists on accountability, there can be no real change and as a result, our women in uniform will continue to suffer. Is this the best we can do for young Americans who put their lives on the line to protect our freedom?"

According to a November 2003 article in The Denver Post: "Leniency toward sexual-assault crimes is routine. Over the past 10 years, twice as many accused Army sex offenders were given administrative punishment as were court-martialed. In the civilian world, four of five people arrested for rape are prosecuted. Nearly 5,000 accused sex offenders in the military, including rapists, have avoided prosecution, and the possibility of prison time, since 1992, according to Army records."

Background

Congresswoman Slaughter has been an outspoken advocate for changes in the military's draconian, almost nonexistent policies toward sexual assault within its ranks and at the academies.

In March 2003, Rep. Slaughter sent a letter to Secretary of the Air Force James Roche calling for a meeting to discuss the topic of sexual assault in the Air Force Academy and how to solve this problem. In the same month, she asked the leadership of the House Armed Services Committee encouraging the committee to conduct a full investigation of sexual assault of women at the U.S. Air Force Academy.

In recent years, Rep. Slaughter and the Women's Caucus have made significant progress in drawing national attention to the problem of sexual assault of women in the armed services, which was a primary focus of the caucus during the 108th Congress. In March 2004, the Congresswoman led a hearing on this issue and presented a report containing the transcript of the hearing to U.S. Department of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

Following the hearing, on May 2004, the U.S. House unanimously passed an amendment championed by Rep. Slaughter that would require the Pentagon to develop a comprehensive and uniform policy to prevent and respond to sexual assault of women in the military.

Rep. Slaughter is planning on introducing comprehensive legislation addressing multifaceted aspects of both sexual assault and domestic violence within the military in order to ensure that women are not subject to violence and assault by members of the U.S. Armed Forces.

Timeline of Congressional Briefings and Events on Sexual Assault

December 9, 2004: Women's Caucus staff briefing with Pentagon officials on the development of Department of Defense policies to address sexual assault in the military.

September 23, 2004: A Women's Caucus meeting with Department of Defense officials on sexual assault of women in the military to follow-up on the Task Force Report on Care for Victims of Sexual Assault.

September 16, 2004: A staff briefing with Department of Defense officials on sexual assault of women in the military.

May 20, 2004: The Annual Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues Wreath Laying Ceremony Honoring Women in the Military, held at the Women in Military Service for America Memorial at the Arlington National Cemetery, commemorating outstanding senior female non-commissioned officers from the Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marines and Navy.

May 19, 2004: An amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act sponsored by the Women's Caucus leadership, requiring the Secretary of Defense to develop a comprehensive policy for the Department of Defense on the prevention of and response to sexual assaults involving members of the Armed Forces, which was passed unanimously by the U.S. House of Representatives.

May 13, 2004: A briefing on "Domestic Violence in the Armed Services: What is the Department of Defense Doing to end the Crisis?" with John Molino, Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Military, Community, and Family Policy, and Deborah Tucker, Co-Chair of the Defense Task Force on Domestic Violence, who informed the Women's Caucus about the DOD's progress in implementing recommendations to address violence against women in the military.

April 28, 2004: Women's Caucus Members meeting with the Honorable Tillie Fowler, Chair of the Panel to Review Sexual Misconduct Allegations at the United States Air Force Academy.

March 31, 2004: The Women's Caucus hearing on sexual assault of women in the military, to investigate the numerous reports of sexual assault, the Department of Defense's responses to and policies concerning this problem, and mechanisms that Congress can implement to help resolve this issue.

May 22, 2003: The Annual Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues Wreath Laying Ceremony Honoring Women in the Military, held at the Women in Military Service for America Memorial at the Arlington National Cemetery, commemorating outstanding senior female non-commissioned officers from the Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marines and Navy.