

STAFF MEMORANDUM: MILITARY SERVICE



This staff memorandum does not represent official findings or recommendations of the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service (the “Commission”). Authored by the Commission’s staff, the memorandum presents preliminary summaries of research and analysis that the Commission may consider as it develops its recommendations for the Congress, the President, and the American public.

Relevant memoranda will be released in conjunction with the Commission’s public hearings. Staff encourages those with views on issues under discussion during the hearings to provide their input to the Commission at www.inspire2serve.gov and stands ready to revise its current understanding of these issues in light of new information as the Commission’s work continues.

Background

The May 16, 2019, public hearings provide an opportunity for public discussion of policy options the Commission is considering with respect to *military service*—defined in the Commission’s mandate as “active service (as that term is defined in subsection (d)(3) of section 101 of title 10, United States Code) or active status (as that term is defined in subsection (d)(4) of such section) in one of the uniformed services (as that term is defined in subsection (a)(5) of such section).” This covers military service members on active duty as well as in the Reserve Components of the armed forces.

Policy Options

This memo details a series of policy options that generally address two topics:

- (1) Fostering critical skills and creating new pipelines to military service*
- (2) Increasing awareness of military opportunities and lessening the civil-military divide*

The policy options described below identify new or priority areas for Congress, the Department of Defense (DoD), military services, and other stakeholders to consider as means of increasing awareness of and participation in military service.

(1) Fostering critical skills and creating new pipelines to military service

Improve access to critical skills

The sustainability of the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) relies not only upon generating a sufficient number of new accessions, but also upon developing critical skillsets within the military. The following options describe potential mechanisms by which the military can better access individuals with such critical skills:

- **Encourage the military services to use recently granted authorities to better develop cyber Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC) candidates.**¹ Provide scholarships to students focusing their education on areas of critical need. Although this proposal highlights cyber as one current need identified by the DoD, programs or authorities should be built and implemented with flexibility as areas of critical need evolve over time.

¹ John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019 (NDAA for FY19), Title XVI, Subtitle C, Section 1640 (Pub. L. 115-232).



- **Encourage the DoD to sponsor technical/credentialing programs.** Partner with universities and private employers to sponsor technical or credentialing programs in key fields, such as electrical or mechanical trades. The military services could use such programs to develop critical skillsets in currently serving personnel while also increasing awareness of, and eligibility for, military opportunities among those enrolled in credentialing programs of interest.

Build New Pipelines to Military Service

New pipelines to military service may encourage greater or more qualified accessions, particularly among historically underrepresented populations. Specific alternatives to build and support these pipelines include:

- **Facilitate a “continuum of service” between the military and private sector using recently-enacted personnel management authorities².** Leverage existing personnel management authorities to recruit talent from the private sector and promote and retain high-performing military personnel.³ The military services can also build on authorities related to accelerated promotion for critical skills to establish new, accessible paths for those transitioning into and out of service.
- **Establish a skills-focused educational pipeline for enlisted accessions.** Encourage specialization in critical areas of need by providing tuition grants for enlisted recruits prior to their entry into service. The amount of tuition provided could be tailored to the length of service commitment and focused on areas of critical skill or need, such as engineering specialties. A skills-based accessions mechanism would drive propensity for military service among individuals interested in gaining professional credentials while enabling the military to develop a more technically-qualified enlisted corps.

(2) Increasing Awareness of Military Opportunities and Lessening the Civil-Military Divide

Though the military as an institution enjoys broad approval, many Americans’ knowledge of the military is informed by media, television, or movie portrayals of military life.⁴ Research suggests that a more robust understanding of the full range of occupations and the intrinsic and extrinsic benefits of military service would lead more to consider participating in military service.⁵ The growing divide between the military community and broader American society means that fewer Americans without an existing connection to military service develop a robust understanding of the military and what military service means. Alternatives to increase knowledge and understanding of military service among youth and society include:

² NDAA for FY19, Title V, Subtitle A, Section 501-514 (Pub. L. 115-232).

³ Albert A. Robbert, Katherine L. Kidder, Caitlin Lee, Agnes Gereben Schaefer, and William H. Waggy, *Officer Career Management: Steps Toward Modernization in the 2018 and 2019 National Defense Authorization Acts*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2019, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2875.html.

⁴ “Confidence in Institutions,” Gallup, 2018, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1597/confidence-institutions.aspx>; Pew Social & Demographic Trends, “Chapter 5: The Public and the Military,” *War and Sacrifice in the Post-9/11 Era*, Pew Research Center, October 5, 2011, <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/10/05/chapter-5-the-public-and-the-military>.

⁵ Joint Advertising, Market Research, and Studies (JAMRS), Office of People Analytics, *State of the Market: Implications from Youth and Recruiter Data* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, April 2018).



Increase Youth Awareness

Awareness is fundamental to any efforts to increase young Americans' desire to serve in the military, driving future interest and expanding the pool of those who consider military service. Options to increase youth awareness of military service include:

- **Expand Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) participation by leveraging the Career Exploration Program (CEP).** Rebrand the ASVAB to better reflect the many options it includes in its CEP, such as career opportunities in military, national, and public service, in order to expand ASVAB participation to areas of the country where military service may be less well-known or infrequently considered as a career option.⁶ Students who have completed the ASVAB CEP may use their score for enlistment purposes for up to two years, making ASVAB participation a key way of generating and screening leads for the military.
- **Expand youth cadet programs.** Introduce more young Americans to military service and culture through participation in cadet programs, including programs both affiliated and unaffiliated with the uniform services. Expand JROTC to additional locations, specifically areas without military bases or historically underserved by recruiters, to increase awareness of and exposure to military service while also increasing civic engagement.
- **Increase base field trips.** Expand base field trips for local schools, community groups, and key influencers such as parents, teachers, and coaches. Renewed exposure to military communities might establish connections between the military and the American public that were negatively impacted in the aftermath of the most recent Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) and increased security following the attacks of September 11, 2001.

Expand Opportunities for Civilian-Military Professional Interaction

Increased interaction between the armed services and the public and private sector is important for fostering greater understanding of military culture.

- **Develop combined educational programs for military service members & civilians.** Open more military education courses to foster closer ties with professional communities of interest and increase interactions with the military community. Opening courses could further serve to encourage skill-building for participants, showcase opportunities in the military, and promote military access to private sector expertise. For example, civilians are currently permitted to attend the war colleges in certain conditions; this option would expand this authority to more military institutions.

Leverage Recruiting Practices to Increase Diversity and Reach New Markets

Aspiration has largely remained steady among American youth since 9/11, yet has become demographically concentrated within families and areas of the country with a tradition of military service.⁷ Alternatives to expand recruitment efforts to reach underrepresented populations include:

⁶ Task Force on Defense Personnel, *Building a F.A.S.T. Force: A Flexible Personnel System for a Modern Military*, Bipartisan Policy Center, March 2017, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/BPC-Defense-Building-A-FAST-Force.pdf>.

⁷ LTC James Ross Yastrzemsky, "The Propensity to Serve in the Armed Forces: An Examination Into the Factors Associated with Military Propensity During the Post-9/11 Era" Doctor of Philosophy 2016, University of Maryland.



- **Create a pilot program to invest in underserved markets.** Provide temporary additional funding for the military services to refocus efforts on areas of the country and populations with whom recruiting has historically been challenged. Such initiatives could draw on elements of the Army’s recent efforts to increase recruiting in historically underrepresented metropolitan areas in the Northeast and the Pacific Northwest.⁸ Though perhaps fielding fewer initial accessions, such efforts aim to establish new markets for recruiting.⁹
- **Expand the hometown recruiter program.** Leverage current service members and veterans by investing in opportunities where they can serve as role models and influencers, such as the hometown recruiting program, which sends personnel to their schools and communities as ambassadors for military service. Though this program already exists, it is generally authorized in the form of permissive temporary duty. DoD may consider, particularly for service members whose hometown is underserved by recruiting efforts, providing additional funds and travel authorities to increase access to this opportunity. Similarly, increasing support for the “Troops to Teachers” program would place veterans in classrooms as key influencers to increase awareness and dispel myths about the military.
- **Pass multiyear appropriations for military marketing.** Enhance funding flexibility for marketing contracts by appropriating multi-year funding. This budget-neutral approach offers a consistent, reliable funding stream for advertising and marketing campaigns and allow the military to use funds as needed over several years. This funding mechanism would counter budget instability over the previous decade which has limited the ability of military marketers to efficiently purchase marketing products.
- **Establish a pilot program to solicit innovative approaches to branding and marketing.** Exempt military marketing from certain regulations surrounding federal contracting to enable the military services to explore innovative, time-limited approaches to branding and marketing. This could enable the military services to work with smaller marketing firms and hear a variety of innovative pitches for how to best approach the evolving recruiting market through advertising.

Issues to Consider

Many priorities and challenges should be considered when evaluating these policy options, including:

Eligibility for military service

The military faces significant challenges in recruiting new service members, as less than one-third of Americans ages 18-24 meet baseline eligibility requirements.¹⁰ Medical issues, weight, body art, a history of drug use, educational attainment, or a criminal record may disqualify a person from military service. With even fewer eligible youth indicating propensity to serve, only a small number of young Americans remain both interested in and eligible for military service. Some argue that standards are too focused on aesthetics or irrelevant characteristics, thereby creating an unintended consequence of disqualifying

⁸ Meghann Myers “Army recruiting is heading to the big cities, looking for Americans who’ve never considered joining up,” Army Times, October 9, 2018, <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2018/10/09/army-recruiting-is-heading-to-the-big-cities-looking-for-americans-whove-never-considered-joining-up/>.

⁹ Amy Schafer, “Generations of War: The Rise of the Warrior Caste & the All-Volunteer Force,” Center for a New American Security, May 2017, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/generations-of-war>.

¹⁰ Office of the Undersecretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness), “2013 Qualified Military Available,” Department of Defense, 2013.



potentially successful candidates. Others advocate for the necessity of current standards and urge a population-wide effort to promote societal changes, particularly among youth.

Civil-military divide

Military recruiting efforts have been hindered by the narrowing of service to a small segment of society. The professionalization of military service that followed the shift to an AVF in 1973 ushered stark improvements in quality and effectiveness, but also limited the traditions of service to those communities most closely connected to the military. At the same time, policy decisions over the past forty years increasingly concentrated military bases in the South and West, producing geographic disparities in the composition of the force. These trends isolated military service from the nation, with many young Americans never considering military service.¹¹ Without renewed efforts, such isolation insulates the American people from both the responsibilities of military service and engagement with military communities, and may make voluntary recruitment unsustainable over time.

Sustainability of the All-Volunteer Force

Despite challenges, the military has generally met its recruiting goals over the life of the AVF. However, signing bonuses and other monetary benefits have frequently been leveraged to promote accessions in challenging recruiting environments, such as times when the nation is experiencing an economy with low unemployment.¹² As future conflicts will require the military to meet unknown end-strength goals—including by accessing individuals with both known and yet-to-be-determined critical skills—sustainability of the AVF will remain a concern.

The May public hearings of the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service is intended to generate discussion of issues surrounding national service in America. Feedback can be shared at www.inspire2serve.gov/content/share-your-thoughts.

¹¹ JAMRS, “State of the Market: Implications from Youth and Recruiter Data,” Office of People Analytics, April 2018.

¹² Beth J. Asch, Paul Heaton, James Hosek, Paco Martorell, Curtis Simon, and John T. Warner, *Cash Incentives and Military Enlistment, Attrition, and Reenlistment*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG950.html>.