

Statement of Testimony¹

In support of the Commission on Military, National, and Public Service

Military Service Hearing: Increasing Awareness Among Young Americans
and Lessening the Civil-Military Divide

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All opinions expressed here are those of the author and do not represent the position of the US Naval War College, the Department of Defense, or any other US Government organ.

Chairman Heck, distinguished Commissioners and panelists, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important work. My background is as a PhD Political Scientist who studies, among other things, labor market structure and military recruitment and manpower management across developed democracies, and the civil-military relationship more generally. I was asked here to speak to you primarily about how to improve and sustain high quality military recruitment, so I will focus my statement and recommendations on those issues. However, I do have some broader comments that pertain to the larger purpose of the Commission, which I will come to at the end.

The good news is that the US has many advantages when it comes to recruiting high quality personnel to our military, and we already do a fairly good job. The military we have today is reasonably representative of the US public,² and is the most representative armed force the US has ever had.³ While the South (and West) are slightly overrepresented, it is not by much,⁴ and it doesn't seem to be a growing problem.⁵ The military pays much better at entry level than comparable jobs in the private sector (for those with less than an Associate's Degree), it offers benefits normally available only to upper-middle class white collar workers, and it bears little to no stigma – as it does in other countries and used to in this country. While the Army sometimes misses recruiting goals due to operational stress, the Navy, Air Force, and USMC rarely do, standards stay fairly high, and the force is high quality.

¹ I would like to thank Dr. Doyle Hodges for his valuable feedback.

² David Segal and Mady Wechsler Segal, 2004, "America's Military Population", *Population Bulletin* 59(4); DMDC records.

³ With the possible exception of the height of World War II. It is important to note that the volunteer force is in fact more representative than the draft force ever was, largely because the US has never used conscription with the aim of creating a representative force. It is not the case that the post-WWII draft force was more inclusive than the current volunteer force.

⁴ "Population Representation in the Military Services: Fiscal Year 2016 Summary Report" by CNA Corp for the Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 21f.

⁵ see Morris Janowitz, 1960, *The Professional Soldier: a social and political portrait*, New York, NY: The Free Press, for a discussion of precisely the same demographic and regional concerns that we see discussed today as "resulting from" the end of the draft.

That being said, there are potentially problematic trends, and there are indications that current approaches will not meet future demands. We will need to do better. On the one hand, as Jacquelyn Schneider has argued,⁶ the future force will need people who are both highly skilled “technologists” and flexible, creative, strategic thinkers. On the other, the general population is changing in terms of its cultural, ethnic, and ideological make-up, and the armed forces can no longer rely on the groups that have traditionally shown the highest propensity to join the military. The competition for the right people will be stiffer, and the right people will be in many ways very different from the current typical member of the military.

I approach this as a labor market puzzle, which may surprise those who focus on the selflessness or greater good aspects of military service. My argument is not that those aspects are unimportant, but rather that the US recognized a long time ago that relying purely on intrinsic motivation (e.g., a desire to serve the public) undersupplied the military in both quantity and quality. Indeed, of the types of service this Commission is examining, the military is the *only* one where we, as a society, have recognized the need to incentivize people with adequate pay and benefits. That recognition is overdue for other forms of public and national service.

Thinking of the military as an employer competing on a market for labor allows us to identify more accurately where the problems of supply are likely to be and how to structure incentives to ameliorate them. Because service inherently involves both tangible and intangible compensation, we must think of incentives not only in terms of increases in benefits—the tangible portion—but also in terms of changes in military culture to improve the intangible attractiveness and rewards of service. For this we must understand how the competition is likely to be structured, what different types of workers will expect/demand for their skill sets, and what environment they want to work in.

The Commission’s categories of eligibility, awareness, and propensity, can all be thought of as either facilitators or obstacles in this competition for labor.

My recommendations can be summarized as: increase the flexibility of military accessions and career paths; broaden and increase the flexibility of scholarship-style benefits to attract more people at different points in their lives and to respond to urgent needs; reform recruiting to focus less on quantity and more on quality – specifically aptitude, skills, and diverse background; and make a conscious, leadership-intensive effort to re-invent the services’ organizational cultures to be more inclusive of significantly more difference and to foster creativity, flexibility, and adaptive thinking.

Whom Do We Need in the Military?

⁶ Jacquelyn Schneider, 2018, “Blue Hair in the Gray Zone”, *War on the Rocks*, 10 Jan 2018; Jacquelyn Schneider, 2019, Testimony for the Record, 24 April 2019.

Answering this question requires us to make educated guesses about what missions the military will likely be engaging in for the foreseeable future. In this section, I assume that large-scale conventional great power war is fairly unlikely, but not impossible. I assume, also, that the U.S. will continue to prefer capital- and technology-intensive approaches to manpower-intensive ones, and that much conflict will take place below the level of high-intensity kinetic engagement, manifesting especially as contests for influence and narrative dominance. Deterrence strategies will need to expand to include more denial-based elements, particularly societal and economic resiliency and systems redundancy.

All this implies that the military organization will continue to need fighters – infantry, artillery, pilots – but will either need those people to be competent in the technologies and systems they are using, or will need people accompanying them who are so skilled. The military will also need significant numbers of people dedicated to the above-mentioned influence, narrative, resiliency, and systems management tasks.

The introduction of crossbows and then breech-loading weapons significantly changed the type of person who could be in the military, with major social and political implications. The introduction of artillery created massive social and political upheaval by necessitating the acceptance of non-nobility into the officer corps as engineers. In the same way, it is possible that the military and U.S. society will have to experience some significant turmoil in order to adapt the armed forces to future needs.

In specific terms:

Declining Need for Low-Skilled Labor⁷

In the past, for combat purposes militaries have needed large numbers of people with only basic numeracy, literacy, and physical fitness to enlist or commission and stay for between two and ten-fifteen years of service. These people were then trained, within the military context, primarily in military-specific skills – particularly combat skills. This training was valuable to the military, but not to the wider labor market. These individuals would then leave the military anywhere between the ages of 20 and 35 and need to enter the labor market. Their value would depend primarily on their general aptitude and the fact that they had some work experience and the sorts of general skills (e.g., time management, self-discipline, teamwork) that most employers would value.

While the military will continue to need such people to serve, it is likely that the military in the near to mid-term future will need fewer of them than before. Many of the tasks they do may be automated, and the political will to use humans in large-scale ground combat appears to have declined significantly. This implies a declining need for those with only a high school degree or

⁷ “Low-skilled labor” is used here to mean labor requiring upon entry only basic general skills such as literacy and numeracy, which are presumably possessed by those with only a high school degree; skills that can be learned on the job. It is not meant to imply lower aptitude.

some post-secondary work short of a degree or certification, as well as a declining need for all military members to meet certain physical standards/be fungible labor. One of the challenges of smarter recruiting is that low-skilled people are significantly easier to recruit than the more desirable skilled labor.

Increasing Need for Occupationally-Skilled/High-Skilled Labor⁸

The corollary to the above is that the military will increasingly need to attract personnel who have or can acquire occupational or high-level skills – the technologists.⁹ The military will need programmers, data scientists/managers, cryptologists, electrical engineers, computer engineers, and more. These are people with post-secondary training and education at the Associate, Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral levels. Their labor will also be in high demand in the private sector and other government sectors.

The way the military usually gets these people is either to subsidize their training/education in return for a guaranteed period of service (which prevents the military from losing its investment to poachers), or to appeal to the intrinsic interest of military service. While the latter is important and should continue to be emphasized, it is not enough. It must be supplemented by incentives. In this case: subsidized training and education, and the flexibility and rewarding career path that such high-demand workers will want.

Increasing Need for Adaptive, Flexible Thinkers

Along with those who know how to use technology, the military will increasingly need personnel who are capable of seeing situations from different angles, thinking creatively and strategically about responses, detecting meaningful trends or changes in the situation, and responding quickly. These are things the military already desires and likes to think it has, but first, multiple high-level officers (e.g., former Secretary of Defense Mattis, former CJCSs Dunford, Dempsey, and Mullen) have lamented the lack of flexibility they see in the officer corps. Second, there has been almost no focus on ensuring that the “strategic corporal” or strategic staff sergeant has been cultivated; we must recognize the need for creativity and adaptability in the enlisted ranks. Third, as future conflicts expand into domains like space, cyberspace, and media, and as hypersonic and stealth technologies shrink kinetic timelines, the need for such flexibility, creativity, and adaptability will only increase.

Adaptive, flexible, creative, strategic thinking come partly from aptitude and education, but are also significantly shaped by organizational environment. This need implies not only the need for non-technologists with post-secondary degrees, but the critical need for diversity – particularly cultural diversity of various kinds. This is not a platitude about diversity as strength. It is a

⁸ “Occupational Skills” are those that are highly transferable in the labor market and usually require training/education beyond the high school level. Examples include computer programming, medical tech work, electrician, etc. “High Skill” in this document is used to refer to those specialized skills that require extensive post-secondary training/education such as physician, engineer, lawyer, statistician, etc.

⁹ Schneider 2018; 2019.

scientifically-grounded argument that organizations dominated by generally like-minded people do not and cannot foster creative, adaptive thinking. For such thinking to happen, people need to be in an environment in which their assumptions are constantly challenged rather than reinforced; in which they are encouraged to become conscious of their own value systems and how they compare to the value systems of others. Humans in general tend to think of themselves as typical and to caricature difference; these are dangerous biases for an organization designed to compete with culturally-external actors. The best antidote to this is to increase diversity of all kinds and to loosen assumptions about how “military people” look, act, and think.

Who is Available?

Demographic Trends

The United States is becoming significantly more diverse in terms of race/ethnicity and religion. Immigration has slowed somewhat, but that could change. Immigrants are more and more likely to be from Asia.¹⁰ The population is becoming more urban and less rural. Obesity continues to increase, and lower socio-economic and minority populations are seeing declining health outcomes. The percentage of the population with a veteran close friend or family member is still quite high, but will decline over time.

All of these trends pose problems for traditional military recruiting. The military will need to make an effort to appeal to a more racially, culturally, regionally, and religiously diverse pool, as its traditional source populations shrink. Certain measures to maintain some level of familiarity and comfort with the idea of military service-members may be appropriate. There are some problems, however, such as overall health trends, that the military can do very little about.

Labor/Economic Trends

Older Americans are staying in the workforce longer, making job market tighter for younger people. Younger people are less likely to enter the work force directly out of high school and more likely to go to post-secondary education. The costs of post-secondary education, health care, and child care are rising. The “gig economy” increases what social scientists call “precarity” – the number of people who are working but unreliably, without benefits, and at or about poverty level. There is increased demand for tech, health care, and data skills. There is an increase in the rate of change in the labor market, which brings with it a need for frequent re-training.

Some of these trends are problematic for the military, but in general, all these trends present significant opportunity for the military to incentivize joining. A tighter job market, more desire to attend post-secondary schooling but at higher cost, and a need for re-training, are all areas where the military can offer potential employees something valuable. The only real down-side

¹⁰ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/03/31/10-demographic-trends-that-are-shaping-the-u-s-and-the-world/>

is that the private sector and the military will be in increased competition for skilled workers, which may pose a serious challenge for retention.

Cultural Trends

As mentioned above, the US is becoming more religiously diverse, but one overall trend is generally decreasing religiosity, of any kind.¹¹ The US population is also becoming more liberal both socially and economically, particularly in terms of accepting marijuana use, a wider range of grooming standards (e.g., tattoos, piercings, hair color/style), and gender non-conformity.¹² Younger generations are also less trusting of institutions¹³ and less likely to agree with the statement that “The U.S. is better than all other countries in the world”.¹⁴

Some of these trends are fairly easy to deal with: many commentators have long pointed out that military grooming standards can be reasonably loosened so long as the mission is not impeded,¹⁵ it would be fairly simple to change the rules on past marijuana use, etc. Other trends will require significant cultural change in the military. While the growing diversity of the population is good in the sense of meeting the need to have a more diverse and therefore more flexible organization, it will require military culture to adapt, and military advertising to make a conscious effort to convince a wider variety of people that they can, indeed, belong in the armed forces.

How Do We Compete for Those We Need?

What types of incentives will appeal to the people in this labor market that the military wants?

- Job security (but not too much inflexibility)
- Someone else to pay for their skills training/re-training
- Flexible career paths
- Benefits (health care, education, paid vacation, child care, retirement)
- Challenging, meaningful work
- Inclusivity

Fortunately, the U.S. military already capitalizes on several of these things, but some can be improved and expanded, and others need significant reform.

¹¹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/03/31/10-demographic-trends-that-are-shaping-the-u-s-and-the-world/>

¹² <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2019/01/17/generation-z-looks-a-lot-like-millennials-on-key-social-and-political-issues/>

¹³ This may be partly attributable to the greater racial/ethnic diversity: in the US, racial/ethnic minorities have lower trust in institutions, largely because they view the institutions as not serving or including them. <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/03/07/millennials-in-adulthood/>

¹⁴ <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2019/01/17/generation-z-looks-a-lot-like-millennials-on-key-social-and-political-issues/>

¹⁵ Schneider 2018; 2019.

Recommendations

To Expand Eligibility

- **Recruit immigrants/non-citizens more widely**, not just for languages, but for higher-level technical skills and cultural diversity. Consider creating a pathway to officer status. All options should offer citizenship. This is a pool of potentially highly-skilled, highly-motivated personnel, and the U.S. military has a very long history of welcoming non-citizens into its ranks.
- **Revise medical and physical fitness requirements to be more flexible** and based on specific job requirements (as opposed to an historical standard of service-member fungibility for operational purposes). Right now the medical guidelines are fairly strict and do not allow for much medical judgment; they could be made more flexible (e.g., someone might have scoliosis or even prior surgeries, but be athletic, active, and judged fit by a competent medical professional. Why not accept them? Why not accept people with mild and correctable sleep apnea?).¹⁶ I would go further and argue that there is no particular reason that certain specialties cannot be carried out by persons with disabilities. The military should consider accessing people with disabilities if they are also able to bring highly sought-after skills. Since the services already employ unique screening based on functional employment (e.g., for aviation or diving), this would simply constitute a mindset change about where the lines should be drawn and how much fungibility is still necessary. Furthermore, there is precedent in terms of the military finding ways to accommodate service-members who have become disabled through their service.
- **Age limits on enlistment and commissioning should also be made more flexible** and based more on the needs of specific jobs (less on the need to make military labor fungible). Not only is age less of a barrier to certain specialties, this move would also improve diversity and capture older workers who may be both diligent and high aptitude but rendered obsolete by market change. The military can either be their second career or can subsidize their re-training in exchange for skilled labor. This could go along with increased opportunities for lateral entry.
- **Change regulations on past drug use** to be less stringent about marijuana, without relaxing current prohibitions on use while in uniform.
- **Study whether different types of moral waivers for criminal record have different outcomes.** While some research indicates that those with moral waivers have higher disciplinary problems and attrition rates, other studies indicate that this is too great a level of aggregation, and that certain types of criminal backgrounds are not necessarily

¹⁶ Joe Schuman, 2018, "Department of Disqualified: Fixing the Broken Military Medical Accessions Process", *War on the Rocks*, 20 Nov 2018

associated with worse performance or attrition.¹⁷ It would be worthwhile to study this more, potentially allowing the military to grant certain waivers more freely (or remove restrictions altogether).

- **Re-consider the ban on transgender personnel.**

Two of the most important eligibility issues – educational outcomes and health/obesity – are not problems the military can or should solve. They are larger, societal problems. Not only is the military not in a position to “fix” either the health care system or the education system, there are serious ethical and moral concerns attached to offering better health and education only to those willing and able to serve in uniform. Thus, these are problems U.S. society must grapple with for many reasons, and their relevance to national defense should simply be one among many considerations in their solution.

To Increase Awareness

Fundamentally, the U.S. military does not suffer from a lack of public awareness. It is one of the most salient institutions in society, one of the largest single employers in the country, one of the largest providers of scholarships,¹⁸ and enjoys a good reputation. Whatever problems military recruiting may face, they are generally not problems of simple awareness. We should note that the parts of DOD recruiting that suffer real awareness problems are civilian employment and the flexibility and breadth of Reserve Component employment options.

This being said, it is never bad to increase awareness where possible. While many lament that the military is too small to create awareness through social connections, it is important to note that there are other ways to increase awareness/familiarity, and that expanding the size of the military is not likely to be a feasible course of action barring a massive (and undesirable) war.

One of the most successful and effective modes of spreading awareness of the military as an employer is **JROTC/ROTC programs**.¹⁹ **These should be expanded, especially to areas of low military presence.**

The DOD spends a lot of its recruiting budget on patriotic displays at sporting events, but it is likely this is an inefficient use of money. The crowds at such events (and even the TV audiences) tend to be much older than the DOD’s target audience. That money would be better spent on **targeted internet advertising and on helping to educate school guidance counselors.**

To Increase Propensity

To understand propensity to serve, it is important to recognize that there is some small pool of people for whom the intrinsic value of military service is a sufficient draw. These are what we

¹⁷ M. Shayne Gallaway et al., 2013, “The Association Between U.S. Army Enlistment Waivers and Subsequent Behavioral and Social Health Outcomes and Attrition From Service”, *Military Medicine* 178(3): 261-266.

¹⁸ MGen John Evans, 2019, Testimony for the Record, 24 April 2019.

¹⁹ Evans 2019.

would think of as high-propensity; they are the ones who seek out the recruiters and think about joining the military all through high school.

But this is a fairly small percentage of the population, and for the pool of people who are NOT already high-propensity, the military will have to increase propensity largely through incentivization.

- The DOD needs to be **less “efficient” with recruiting efforts.**
 - o **Increase recruiter presence in low-yield areas** to increase visibility and improve overall force representativeness.
 - o **Revise recruiter guidance and performance evaluation** away from quantity and toward specific types of diversity (e.g. urban-suburban-rural; regional; gender; race/ethnic; ideological)
 - Traditional recruiting evaluation is done on: 1) how many contracts per recruiter per period? 2) Of those, how many high quality? 3) Percentage by which the station exceeded/fell short of recruiting targets (overall and high quality); 4) how often did the station make its targets?
 - These put significant stress and pressure on recruiters, which leads to burnout and job dissatisfaction (likely to hurt recruiting), and potentially pressures recruiters to use unethical methods (e.g., dishonesty). They should be revised to include more qualitative and flexible means of evaluation.²⁰

- **Increase recruiting/accessions directly into the Reserves.** The Reserves provide an extremely cost-effective source of skills for the military, in that the DOD has to pay for them only when they are activated and the DOD controls who can activate when and for how long. Reserve service is also capable of much more career flexibility, and thus more attractive to those who may wish to serve but find Active Duty careers too structured. This may require a rationalization of Reserve force structures, but would almost certainly be worth the effort.²¹

- **Advertising should emphasize both intrinsic and extrinsic appeals.** On the one hand, extrinsic appeals tend to counteract intrinsic appeals; on the other, as advertising becomes more targeted, this is less of a problem, as the same people are less likely to see the same ads.

²⁰ James N. Dertouzos and Steven Garber, 2008, “Performance Evaluation and Army Recruiting”, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG562.html>

²¹ I am not discussing the National Guard, as they are not under DOD organization, but obviously the National Guard is another important form of service, and many of the points made here apply equally to Guard issues. Currently, the Guard is one of the best ways to keep some high-demand skills available to the military by serving as a repository for people who have left active duty for higher-paying private sector jobs, but who care about service and want to stay connected (e.g., pilots). This flexibility is good and should be managed more deliberately.

- **Advertising should emphasize both the diversity of jobs and career paths in the military, and the diversity of the people doing them.** Most people don't want to be pioneers; they may not even consider military service if they think it's something that "people like them" don't do. If we are concerned about the decline in direct family and social connections leading to a decline in propensity, one way to counteract that is to be more welcoming of people who are demographically less likely to have such social connections.
- Create something **like ROTC but for enlisted ranks and to include Associate's degrees and other technical training**; include options for **lateral entry** OR create **technical tracks not predicated on command.**
 - o Consider scholarship programs that allow individuals to get a **guaranteed branch assignment at the beginning**, have a matrix with which majors can logically serve which branches, allow students to study those things. This will help both with talent management within the military and with job satisfaction, both significant factors for organizational performance. Some may argue that it is too difficult to anticipate branch needs three, four, or five years out, but the services have decades' worth of good data they can use to reach rough estimates, and if the other career flexibility recommendations here and in the Force of the Future initiative are implemented, then the military will be more able to handle temporary bulges and deficits.
 - o For urgent needs, consider **scholarship programs that focus on repaying student debt in return for OCS and a specified term of service.**
- **Examine ROTC v OCS for which is more efficient** – perhaps expand programs in which students get scholarships but don't do ROTC, just go to OCS, but focus those in high-propensity areas; focus ROTC in low-propensity areas for more visibility
- **Reform the GI Bill** for more flexibility. For example, it could allow people to take time off to do an Associate's (e.g.), then continue to serve enlisted for a certain period, then go back to civilian college for a BA/BS, then have the option to do OCS or WOCS to move up in that specialty (i.e. demonstrate clear career arcs).
- **Revise the current Warrant Officer age requirements to make WO accession more flexible**
- The **promotion system has to be overhauled** in general, but particularly to improve people's career/job satisfaction, allow more career flexibility, and improve talent management. That is the best way (and cheaper than bonuses) to improve high quality retention and get the most out of the people the military has.

- Former Secretary of Defense Ash Carter’s **Force of the Future initiatives** were good and should be revisited – adjustments to make promotion/up-or-out more flexible, lateral entry, command and non-command tracks, etc. Many of these practices are in place in Allied and partner militaries and the U.S. can study them.
- **Military culture must be intentionally re-designed to be more flexible, more heterogeneous, and more creative.** Now, especially in a military context, many might argue that homogeneity is good because cohesiveness is necessary for morale and effectiveness. The second half of that statement is true, but the first is not. Cultural homogeneity makes cohesiveness easy, because it provides default norms and default social sanctions, based on the dominant culture. But it is not necessary. Heterogeneous groups can have the kind of task cohesiveness necessary for military effectiveness; the key is to *create* a culture – i.e., create a new set of norms and sanctions appropriate for that group/organization, NOT simply default to the norms and sanctions of the dominant cultural group. There are many aspects of what we think of as “military culture” that are not necessary to the military mission; they were simply the default behaviors and beliefs of the largely young, white, Christian, middle-class men of the 1950s-1980s.

For example, when the military decided to allow women to participate more fully, it recognized that a culture based primarily on male-bonding behaviors would no longer be appropriate or effective. What it failed to do was recognize that the old culture cannot simply be suppressed (this will lead to backlash); it must be deliberately reformed/replaced with an alternative. People in the military would still need to bond, they would just need to do it with a different set of norms than those involved in male bonding. They needed an alternative set of norms; the most obvious alternative is a family- or sibling-bonding model, but this was never consciously and deliberately created. While such cultural reform is always difficult and uncomfortable, it is significantly better to do it deliberately and decisively; if left to happen on its own, the result is likely to be messy and sub-optimal or even maladaptive.

Changing culture is not easy, and requires significant leadership effort and engagement. In this case, the military will need to do the hard work of examining its behavioral and structural norms/sanctions to determine which really serve *all* the missions, which serve inclusiveness, flexibility, and adaptive behavior, and which are simply there because they were the norm for what was the long-time dominant cultural group and therefore got embedded and institutionalized. Certainly, the military requires a culture of self-discipline, but the contents and extent/limitations of that self-discipline can change with the times, and sometimes over-prescriptiveness can stifle both real discipline and real innovation.

Concluding Remarks

From an economics perspective, what this Commission is discussing is how to get an adequate provision of public goods. The Interim Report defines “service” as “a personal commitment of time, energy, and talent to a mission that contributes to the public good by protecting the nation and its citizens, strengthening communities, or promoting the general social welfare.” Public goods, by definition, will be under-provided by the market. Put another way: if society depends on people’s intrinsic motivation to provide public goods, it will not be enough. In order to get public goods in sufficient amounts, *the public must pay for them*. Part of the difficulty of the Commission’s task is that, of the three types of service it is examining, the military is the only one on which Americans have some consensus that they’re willing to pay for it. To get more national and public service, society must either pay for them (with adequate salaries and benefits), or coerce them (i.e. mandatory national service of some kind at below-market wages). The good news for military service is that U.S. society is currently willing to pay for it, but we must be careful to maintain the health of the civil-military relationship, or that willingness – already in decline – may crater.

We must also recognize the true nature of the opportunities and limitations on us in this task. What we have right now is not a crisis; it’s fairly historically normal – even fairly good in many ways. But clearly evident trends into the near future will challenge our old ways of doing things. It is tempting but problematic to romanticize the period of WWII and the following decade or so as an ideal or a norm to “get back to”. In the larger context, however, that was probably the weirdest, most unique period in U.S. history. Popular notions of a time when “everyone knew someone who had served in the military” or “everyone felt like it was important to serve their country”, etc., are based on nostalgia for a time when the U.S. was in the biggest war the world had ever seen, and was the only major power not to have its people and economy shattered. That left us as the world’s manufacturer, researcher, and banker, with more jobs and money than we knew what to do with. Those are unusual circumstances unlikely to be repeated.

The U.S. is designed to be decentralized and competitive, with a culture focused on the prime value of individual liberty. Much of what the Commission is trying to do will be difficult to implement precisely because we have so few truly national mechanisms or systems (e.g., education). Greater civic education, greater coordination of the education system with the labor market, etc., these would all help enormously. They are, however, highly unlikely to happen.

Military personnel and recruiting are only going to get more expensive (pay, benefits, scholarships/incentives, etc.), and American willingness to spend so much on the military versus infrastructure, health, and other domestic concerns is declining. We must therefore focus not just on improving the pool of available recruits, but on improving the organization such that that wider pool is interested in serving, the people are used to best advantage, and the organization itself is better at what it does. This means the military will have to become

significantly more culturally inclusive to attract the right mix of people,²² more responsive to the demands of a more highly-skilled workforce, and more capable of approaching challenges from multiple perspectives.

Finally, I cannot emphasize enough that we will never be able to get sufficient numbers of the right people to volunteer to serve in any capacity if we do not cultivate the health of our political system. People will not serve a system if they feel excluded or unserved by it; the corollary is that only those who see the system as benefiting them are likely to want to serve in it. The more our system excludes or appears to exclude certain types of people, the more narrowly we define “community”, the more homogeneous and isolated our service communities will become.

One of the worst civil-military relations problems a democratic society can have is a military that is clearly identified with a particular sub-set of society, whether in terms of class, region, race/ethnicity, or religion/ideology. As the U.S. population changes and grows more diverse, the military must do so, as well. That will require significant leadership and will probably involve major bumps along the way, but if the U.S. wants to field a force that can compete in a rapidly evolving world, and maintain the health of its political and social institutions, it should put in the effort.

²² In particular, the military will have to work harder to root out extremism and white supremacist members. Even a handful of such people can damage both the organizational culture and the public perception of the institution.