

Testimony before the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service  
May 16, 2019 | Washington D.C.

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

Statement by Mr. Ernie Gonzales

Madam Vice Chair and members of the Commission, I am honored to have been asked and appear before you today to provide some comments on the staff memorandum regarding military service, specifically on increasing awareness among young Americans and lessening the civil-military divide. Having spent the last 25 years of my public service managing several youth outreach programs that connect and re-connect the Department of Defense with America's youth, both in-school and out-of-school, I believe those programs have made some difference in lessening the civil-military divide and increasing awareness of military opportunities. After reviewing the considerations in the staff memorandum, I believe those options would only continue small incremental changes because the recommendations are making minor adjustments to existing policies, budgets, and initiatives. There is much more that can be accomplished if the Commission considers youth outreach as a primary/core mission, not a non-traditional/non-core mission of the Department of Defense. For this mission to become a reality and effective, the Commission should consider some out-of-the-box efforts that will require the support of Congress and the Administration. Certain legislative and funding barriers, along with, old bureaucratic organizations would need to be removed by Congress, the DoD Leadership, or both in order to enhance the outcomes of the two objectives being discussed today.

As I mentioned, I am only able to inform this Commission about anecdotal belief that the youth outreach programs, specifically authorized in either Title 10 or Title 32, made some difference in lessening the civil-military divide among our nations communities and youth. This is based on some individual local studies conducted on some individual programs. However, a comprehensive study was recently initiated and currently being conducted by the Department to ascertain the effectiveness of three

authorized youth outreach programs, the DoD STARBASE Program, the National Guard Youth Challenge Program, and the Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps. The results of this study will help establish a baseline for a future long-term study requiring additional data gathering to fully evaluate how these programs are meeting these objectives.

Under the subject Increase Youth Awareness, the staff memorandum identifies three options to consider. They are Expand Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery participation by leveraging the Career Exploration Program, Expand youth cadet programs, and Increase base field trips. I would like to comment on two of these options.

First, Expand youth cadet programs by introducing more young Americans to military service and culture through participation in cadet programs, including programs both affiliated and unaffiliated with the uniform services. The memo specifically states expand JROTC to additional locations, specifically areas without military bases or historically underserved by recruiters to increase civic awareness of and exposure to military service while also increasing civic engagement. It appears that the staff reviewed the recent RAND study on JROTC "Geographic and Demographic Representativeness of JROTC". However, the staff memo failed to include a recommendation in the study that would allow the Department to effectively implement this option. The recommendation the Commission should consider from that RAND study is dedicated funding for all JROTC programs. The Commission should also consider this dedicated funding be in a centralized managed OSD account similar to the accounts that fund the National Guard Youth Challenge Program and the DoD STARBASE Program. By combining policy with resources in a centralized location, the Department would be able to develop a strategy that effectively places and sustains programs in both metropolitan and rural areas. The RAND study also recommended that the Department consider flexibility in instructor requirements for rural areas and small schools. However, the study did not correlate an important data point which is the number of retirees residing in rural areas and qualified to be JROTC instructors. To be

more effective in placing JROTC units in rural areas, the qualification criteria to be a JROTC instructor should be expanded to include Reserve and Guard personnel. This action would require a legislative change but would leverage DoD personnel that may also be employees of the public school system or could be employees of the public school system through participation in the Troops to Teacher Program. With regards to youth cadet programs affiliated and unaffiliated with the uniform services. The staff may have reviewed existing youth cadet programs such as the Naval Sea Cadet Corps, the Young Marines, the Civil Air Patrol, however, the Commission should consider a recommendation to closely work and partner with state cadet corps programs such as the California Cadet Corps. The program is operated and funded by the California State Military Department. The California Cadet Corps' curriculum is similar to the JROTC. The military services offer recruits who participate in the JROTC program some benefits, such as a higher entry level paygrade. The Commission should consider this option of offering the same type of recruiting benefits to students participating in state programs such as the California Cadet Corps.

Second, increase base field trips. Although expanding base field trips for local schools, community groups, and key influencers will help reconnect the military to the American public it only expands what is currently being done. A more radical approach would be to support initiatives that have multi-day contacts with the public, such as, expanding the DoD STARBASE Program to more locations. This program was initially considered by school districts as a 5 day field trip. Now school districts and communities consider this program a collaborating partnership that is enhancing their relationships. This five day program brings local school students and teachers, mostly from Title I schools, onto military facilities. The program enabled military commands to re-establish connections with students, teachers, parents, and community leaders to the military community. Local studies conducted by the Wilder Research at St. Paul, MN and the University of New Mexico at Albuquerque, NM provided some evidence of enhancing this connection. If a five day program can have some positive impact on youth then this far-reaching approach of expanding and establishing magnet schools, such as STEM Academies or JROTC Academies, on military installations for DoD and

non-DoD dependents to attend should be considered by the Commission. This type of collaboration would leverage resources from both the school district and DoD while increasing exposure and civic engagement through academic, vocational, and athletic activities.

These affiliated and non-affiliated youth outreach programs can address the issue of eligibility requirements for military service while closing the gap on the civil-military divide. The in-school and after-school programs, such as STARBASE, JROTC, Naval Sea Cadet Corps, Young Marines, Civil Air Patrol, and California Cadet Corps provide increase opportunities to educate the public about military service and the eligibility requirements. For out of school youth, the National Guard Youth Challenge Program, through a cost share with the State, is able to assist these young men and women who ceased to attend secondary school. The five and a half month quasi-military residential phase followed by a 12 month post residential phase addresses education, physical fitness, and juvenile delinquency issues. The programs have partnered with local and state education offices to offer these youth challenge cadets either a high school diploma or high school credit to allow them to return to high school and graduate. A job skills training component is being piloted with the Department of Labor to offer job skills training. By redirecting the lives of these youth through education and job skills training, they become employable. Conducting a more comprehensive evaluation of all these youth outreach programs and interagency partnerships should be considered by the Commission.

The DoD invests approximately \$500 million on three youth outreach programs to enhance learning, employability, relationships and awareness. However, these programs are not centrally managed or funded which is a barrier to establishing an appropriate logic model and strategic plan. It hinders the ability of the organization to effectively execute programs to achieve suitable long term outcomes. As identified in the RAND study of the JROTC program, the Commission should consider whether dedicated funding for all youth outreach programs and initiatives that are managed

centrally would be effective in implementing the recommendations of the Commission to increase youth awareness and lessen the civil-military divide among our nations youth.