

PREPARED STATEMENT

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(PERSONNEL & READINESS)

REGARDING

THE WIDENING MILITARY CIVILIAN DIVIDE

BEFORE THE

NATIONAL COMMISSION ON MILITARY, NATIONAL, AND PUBLIC SERVICE

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Chairmen Heck, Vice Chair Wada, members of the Commission, thank you for inviting me to speak about a very pressing topic. The widening Military-Civilian divide is an issue that has been on the Department's mind for some time. Our ability to sustain the All-Volunteer Force is predicated on consistently achieving our annual recruiting goals, regardless of the recruiting environment. Today, a widening Military-Civilian divide increasingly impacts our ability to effectively recruit and sustain the Force. This disconnect is characterized by misperceptions, a lack of knowledge, and an inability to identify with those who serve. It threatens our ability to recruit the number of quality youth with the needed skill-sets to maintain our advantage over any near peer competitor. A variety of circumstances contribute to this growing Military-Civilian divide including, a shrinking Military footprint, a declining Veteran presence across society, and uninformed and often misguided influence of Military-related messaging by external organizations. These external messages emotionally highlight the risks of Military service, which keep the inherent physical and psychological risks foremost in the minds of today's youth and influencers (such as parents, teachers, and coaches). Combined, these factors have led to a youth market which is less interested in the Military and does not appreciate the social worth or intrinsically-motivating elements of Military service.

Our survey results reflect this increasingly disconnected youth market and their declining positive associations about Military service. Today's youth are plagued with significant misinformation or limited knowledge about the basics of Military service. For example:

- Only 12% of youth (ages 16 to 21) reported they believe that they share a lot in common with people in the U.S. Military.¹
- In 1995, 40% of youth had a parent who had served, and by 2017 that number had dropped to 15%.²

¹ DoD Youth Polls, Spring 2017

² Youth Attitude Tracking Study, 1995; DoD Youth Polls, Fall 2017

- 51% of young adults (ages 17 to 35) rate themselves as having little to no knowledge about active duty service.³
- Only 27% of young adults (ages 17 to 35) can name all five of the active duty Services.⁴
- The majority of youth believe someone separating from the Military will have some form of psychological or emotional issues (56%), difficulty readjusting to everyday life (58%), or some form of physical injury (47%).⁵

A period of prolonged conflict and reports of repeated deployments have essentially hidden the positive and motivating aspects of Military service. Fifteen years ago approximately two-thirds of our recruiting market (youth ages 16 to 21) thought it was likely they could have a fulfilling job and an attractive lifestyle if they served in the Military – critical elements for fostering intrinsic motivation and the social worth of a profession. In 2017, only about one third of the recruiting market felt the same way.⁶ Today, when asked how likely it is they will be serving in the Military in the next few years, 87% responded ‘definitely not’ or ‘probably not.’⁷

While the American public has faith in the efficacy of our Military, they feel little to no personal connection with it. In fact, today the active component of the military is comprised of about 1.30 million men and women or, less than 0.4 percent of the total U.S. population⁸. Both Gallup and Pew Research indicate Americans view our Military as effective and well-run; the Military has an important role; Military leaders are courageous and professional; and the Military contributes to our society. Yet, this general support has not translated into increased service by youth or support for enlistments by their influencers. In fact, a significant proportion of our nation believe joining the Military is a good choice for someone else. Less than 41 percent of

³ Military Ad Tracking Reserve Study, April – June 2018

⁴ Military Ad Tracking Reserve Study, April – June 2018

⁵ Military Ad Tracking Study, April – June 2018

⁶ DoD Youth Polls, 2004 – 2017

⁷ DoD Youth Polls, Summer 2018

⁸ <https://www.census.gov/popclock/> and DMDC, Active Duty End Strength by Service, Pay Grade, Month Report

fathers and 32 percent of mothers⁹ would be likely to recommend Military service to their sons or daughters.

The likelihood that a young person will identify as inclined or propensed to serve is even lower than the likelihood a parent will recommend service to a young person. Since the early 1990s, youth who state they will definitely or probably serve in the Military has consistently ranged between 12 and 15 percent, notably lower than the 16 to 18 percent propensity we experienced in the 1980s.¹⁰ Even among youth who indicate they are propensed for Military service, many see the Military as a fallback option. Today's youth often state, "I have not taken any steps of joining the Military because I want to [pursue my primary job choice or see if I get accepted to...] first and see how that works out," and, "my backup plan is always to go into the Military," or, "I hope I do well enough to not join, but it's always been in my gut that if I don't succeed, I will at least serve my country."¹¹ For most, joining the Military is seemingly not compatible with their education or career plans. All too often, it is perceived as the option of last resort. Today's youth have options. Improvements in the American and global economy further widen the Military-Civilian gap and exacerbate a challenging recruiting environment. Lower unemployment rates negatively impact Military recruiting. Historically, the economy has a strong impact on the quality of recruits coming into the Military. As the unemployment rate for 16-24 year olds drops the percentage of high-quality enlistments generally does too. Today's youth unemployment is 10.7 percent, a decrease of nearly 4 percentage points over the last five years. This translates to more job opportunities across the entire employment spectrum for today's youth, with Military service being just one option.

⁹ DoD Youth Polls, Summer 2018

¹⁰ DoD Youth Polls, Summer 2018

¹¹ JAMRS Propensed Youth Qualitative Diary Study

The perceived value of Military service by individuals and their influencers and an improved employment environment are two of several factors impacting propensity for Military service. Current world events and media exposure, including combat wounded campaigns, are also negatively impacting propensity to serve. Naturally, lower propensity makes the recruiting environment significantly more challenging. Furthermore, the quality of the American youth market is generally lower. Today, only 29 percent of youth are eligible for Military service without requiring some form of standards waiver. Recruiting high-quality youth with narrowly-focused critical skills is more of an imperative today given the smaller size of our Military force and technological advances. This focus on high-quality critically skilled youth inherently limits the pool of recruits. In fact, only about 2 percent of the 20.6 million 17 to 21 year olds in the United States are eligible, propensed to serve, and of high academic quality.¹² As a result of lower youth propensity and quality, recruiters must work harder to find qualified youth wanting to serve. In recent years, the Military Departments have reported difficulty in not only finding sufficient numbers to make their annual recruiting missions, but also ensuring sufficient quality. This is also the reality for this fiscal year. Unfortunately, the Military Departments will continue to face significant challenges as we expect the recruiting environment to remain difficult for the foreseeable future.

The selective nature of Military service not only results in a small pool of qualified recruits, but puts us in competition with other employers and higher education. The significant rise in college attendance has shrunk the Military recruiting pool as high-quality high-school graduates targeted by the Military Departments seek opportunities in higher education.

¹² DoD Youth Poll (2017 Annual Data Set)

Despite fewer individuals being interested in serving, the Department remains unequivocally committed to accessing a force that is reflective of our nation. While the Military Services are closely representative of the cross section of America in regards to race and ethnicity, we believe additional emphasis on the Asian and Hispanic communities, as well as on female propensity is warranted. Additionally, we continue to struggle with geographic diversity. Today 42% of those who join the military come from just 6 states. Most ROTC and academy graduates come from northern states, while the vast majority of our enlisted force comes from southern states. The Department must continue to work to improve the acceptance of Military Service by all communities as a valued career choice for their sons and daughters. We must also create opportunities for all young Americans to be able to visualize themselves serving as part of the All-Volunteer Force in the United States Military. The lack of knowledge of the broad range of career fields or the opportunities that military service provides often confounds our ability to increase the diversity of the force more substantively. Veterans tend to be great ambassadors when telling the story of the many opportunities in the military. But in areas where we need the greatest help our veteran populations are decreasing the fastest. States like New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Michigan saw a 23 to 35 percent decrease in veteran population between 2000 and 2015 while Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia have seen up to a 6 percent increase during the same period¹³. The veteran population itself is rapidly declining, between 2000 and 2015 overall, nationwide, the veteran population decreased 17 percent¹² and by 2040 it is projected to decrease another 38 percent (20.8 million veterans in 2015 to 12.9 million in 2040)¹⁴.

¹³ https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/QuickFacts/QuickFactsMaps_Slideshow.PDF

¹⁴ https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/QuickFacts/2017_Veterans_Profile_Fact_Sheet.PDF

Another contributing factor to the widening Military-Civilian divide is simply our inability to reach today's youth, particularly on the mass scales of previous years. This shift is a result of changes in the way youth receive media and interact with others. First, the media landscape today is markedly different from that of the late 1970s, when three broadcast networks accounted for more than 90 percent of prime-time viewership.¹⁵ Today's digital savvy youth have given rise to expanded use of internet-based streaming services which bolsters the cultural divide, and further fragments the reachable market. Advertisers must now consider that although some youth will watch a program live, many others will record it or stream it later without viewing commercials. As a result, a previously large audience is now broken into smaller, more fragmented markets, making a targeted approach to marketing and recruiting much more difficult.

Furthermore, centralized shopping/gathering spaces (such as malls) that once provided broad exposure for recruiters and advertisers are less prevalent. Much like its impact on the way youth consume media, the internet has changed the way youth shop and, as a result, their potential exposure to recruiters in public consumer venues has significantly decreased. This challenge is anticipated to continue, with nearly 25% of malls expected to close by 2022.¹⁶ Today, it is increasingly more difficult for organizations to reach youth via the telephone because of the marked decline in the number of households with landline phones. In 2017, only 43.8% of American household had a landline.¹⁷ The growing reliance on cell phones presents several challenges: cell phone numbers are not typically listed in public directories; and youth with cell

¹⁵ Webster, J. G. (2005). Beneath the veneer of fragmentation: Television audience polarization in a multichannel world. *Journal of Communication*, 55(2), 366-382.

¹⁶ Making Sense of Softlines Following A Tumultuous Twelve Month; https://research-doc.credit-suisse.com/docView?language=ENG&format=PDF&sourceid=csplusresearchcp&document_id=1075851631&serialid=0H35FD75wQHBUjm3x51kvUaUWAN03QsDSMQWFvss5x4%3D

¹⁷ Wireless Substitution: Estimates from the National Health Interview Survey; <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis/releases.htm#wireless>

phones routinely screen their calls, rarely answering calls from unknown or unrecognized numbers. Consequently, as the market has become more fragmented, with youth less likely to gather in public spaces, and less responsive to telephone calls, the Services must spend more resources to recruit in this environment.

Taken together, the economic conditions, increased focus on quality, increased college attendance rates, and the fragmented market contribute to a challenging recruiting environment and continued disconnect between the civilian population and the Military.

The Department, as well as national leaders, must proactively take steps to close this widening Military-Civilian gap. We are realizing it is nearly impossible to financially incentivize disengaged and uninterested quality youth to Military service with enlistment bonuses and other benefits. Our need to continue fielding a ready and lethal force requires proactively addressing the factors underlying this market disconnect. We know today's youth are not only looking for a good-paying job and attractive lifestyle, but they seek meaningful work. Breaking through to the youth market, requires us to speak to what youth are seeking. However, focusing on compensation and fulfillment is not enough. A messaging strategy must highlight the intrinsic value of Military service and how the Military can help today's youth achieve their goals. The Military must have both a competitive employment package and be able to communicate that message.

Advertising and outreach efforts have been moderately effective in messaging the rewarding aspects of Military service, but nothing can fully replace personal connections with current Service members or veterans. Unfortunately, the shrinking veteran population is directly correlated with a decrease of individuals with first-hand knowledge of the Military, especially in various regions of the U.S. with lower percentages of those who serve. Outside of formal

recruiting functions, current Service members and veterans serve as brand ambassadors for the Military. It is important we recognize the positive impact a visible Service member and veteran population has within a community. Providing Service members and veterans with information and opportunities to share their experiences can help grow a network of brand ambassadors who help reconnect the American public with the Military.

Over the last few years, the Department has taken a strong stance through proactive marketing and outreach designed to bridge knowledge gaps, correct misperceptions and provide a consistent, positive message in the market that raises the esteem of joining the Military beyond the option of last resort. We have developed a joint marketing campaign targeted at broadening awareness of Military opportunities, building advocacy for Military service, and overcoming misperceptions of the Military among adult influencers and youth. Initial results of the campaign are very promising as evidenced by influencers who have seen the marketing materials are more likely to recommend Military service than those who have not seen the ads (54% vs 41%).¹⁸ Furthermore, during the initial run of the campaign, website traffic increased 183% (968K vs. 342K visits same time last year). In addition to the paid media campaign, the Department also deployed a public outreach program, “Know Your Military,” which is designed to inform and educate the American public on who is serving in the Military today. Other outreach initiatives paying dividends include Services’ social media engagements, development of a Joint cyber-game to attract individuals to cyber opportunities in the Military, as well as targeted marketing to critical segments of the market with limited awareness of Military opportunities (such as parents in New England states or STEM teachers).

¹⁸ Military Ad Tracking Study Oct – Dec 2018 (Influencer Market)

The Department recognizes successful engagement of potential applicants and their influencers can only be achieved through active multimedia campaigns and information that bridge knowledge gaps and reinforces a consistent, positive message about Military service. Personal engagement in concert with these multi-media campaigns is critical to creating awareness of the many opportunities the Military offers and closing the Military-Civilian divide. It is imperative to recognize that the Military-Civilian divide is detrimental to our national security and this issue must remain on the national agenda with involvement from leaders across the Nation. I thank you for the opportunity to share our views on this important issue and look forward to answering your questions.