

**PREPARED STATEMENT
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**BEFORE THE
NATIONAL COMMISSION ON MILITARY,
NATIONAL, AND PUBLIC SERVICE**

**CREATING AN EXPECTATION OF
SERVICE HEARING: AN
INFRASTRUCTURE TO SERVE AMERICA**

JUNE 20, 2019 | HYDE PARK, NY

Chairman Heck, Vice Chair Wada, distinguished members of this committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony and appear before you to talk about the importance of service to our great nation.

As you have heard from the past testimony of Mr. Tony Kurta, the knowledge the American public has about our Air Force, and the military in general, is decreasing every year. The unfortunate effect this is having on the future generations of youth in America is that they are less likely to serve. This alone is an important reason that the Department of Defense continues to advocate for a service database of individuals on which to draw from in case of a national emergency.

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 rapidly changing technological environment. Our 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 old citizens in the United States are eligible, propensed to serve, and of high academic quality. As a result of lower youth propensity, recruiters must work harder to find qualified youth who desire a future in military service. 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 economy to remain

strong and 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 reduced the Military recruiting pool as high-quality high-school graduates targeted by the Military Departments seek opportunities that come with higher education. Despite fewer individuals being interested in serving, the Air Force remains unmistakably committed to accessing a force that is reflective of our nation.

The Air Force understands that the whole of government cooperation can lead to a stronger nation. That is why our Air Force components--Active Duty, Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve—are moving toward a total-force recruiting model as we speak, understanding that combining our recruiting efforts can be additive and not competitive in this tough recruiting market. We realize “a rising tide lifts all ships” and a total-force recruiting model will get us to that goal. Also, we want America’s youth to understand they have options to serve their country. They can choose to serve full or part time, officer or enlisted, in or out of uniform. When our total-force recruiting efforts are operating as envisioned, we will strive to place those who visit a recruiter in the right place, doing the right job in the correct status for the person.

While we would like to motivate youth to serve their country in the military, we realize the importance of all Americans serving in some form as vital to our nation’s interests and overall success as a society.

Many Americans have very limited interactions with the military and are unaware of the range of career and service options offered. Because only 14 percent of today’s youth have a parent or

grandparent who has served in the military, our recruiters, on average, have to make contact with 100 potential applicants to be able to get one recruited into the Air Force. Further, specifically 71 percent of our target demographic of 17-24 years of age, are not eligible for military service. Thus, we realize military service cannot be the only option our youth can choose. This is why it is important that they are informed of other ways to serve the nation.

Serving as an Air Force Civil Servant is an option but one very few choose to seek. Navigating the hiring process can be confusing and frustrating. The Air Force has more than 204,000 civilian employees stationed around the globe, including combat zones. These civilians, working in over 600 occupations and professions, share the same responsibility to our nation as the men and women in uniform. At home and abroad, to include deploying all over the world, our civilian members work shoulder to shoulder with their military counterparts. Having a high-quality force and being able to recruit and compete for top civilian talent is an essential aspect of our total force and critical to our readiness. As such, we are thankful for all the previously granted Congressional authorities for civilian hiring. They have recently enabled us to bring on talent in critical career fields much faster than before. However, legislative relief has resulted in 66 different civilian personnel systems within the Department of Defense, more than 60 classification systems, and more than 45 new hiring and related authorities since FY10. This complexity drives administrative burdens and costs and adds difficulty understanding which hiring authority our applicants should use. This forces the Air Force to focus on being compliant instead of selecting the best civilian talent.

Probably most importantly, civic and service knowledge, while critical for our democracy, is not given the emphasis it needs in our public schools, thus many young people are not receiving the effective civic education our youth and society so desperately needs. It is imperative that service

recruiters have access to youth in schools, not just relegated to the counselor's offices or administrative areas, but access allowing active engagement in more prominent school settings such as classrooms and assemblies. Invite our military personnel to be mentors in courses where their technical skills can give students exposure to someone with real-world subject matter expertise. These military members can talk about real life and experiences in the military, and discuss the more than 270 officer and enlisted career opportunities, as well as the 600 civilian careers, the Air Force has to offer. It would be an easy, almost instant way to begin to bridge that knowledge gap about the military and the benefits of serving in or out of uniform.

The question becomes how can we fix our nation's need for service understanding by today's youth? Perhaps a grass-roots effort beginning in our education system should be considered.

- Incentivized curriculum in the education system that focuses on the importance of service and the opportunities that are created because of that service.
- Build awareness/increase education on all opportunities for service—civil, military, USAID, AmeriCorps (education/youth services, public safety, healthcare and environmental protection), etc.
- Motivate the youth of today with compelling reasons to serve such as providing loan/debt forgiveness based on service provided directly proportionate to the amount forgiven.
- States (or perhaps federal level)—each state has a course about their state history, there should be credit-earning, required courses about public service.
- When taught effectively, it can equip students with the knowledge, skills, and character necessary to become engaged citizens.

One of the most tangible things we can do as a nation to instill pride and a sense of service into our youth is to modify our selective service process—youth can register, not just for military service but for all types of service. With a small change to the selective service process, there is much to be gained for all of society based on individual talent and qualifications.

- Change Selective Service from a punitive registration system to one that is incentivized
- Institute a National Service registration for all youth—one that allows a call to action to use individual talents and knowledge for military, national or public service
- Youth can serve in an area where they are qualified, best suited, and motivated to serve

We are supportive of an all-inclusive registration system, however it should not replace the recruiting efforts of the Department of Defense. The military must be able to continue our robust marketing and recruiting so we can continue to access the best and the brightest into our ranks to secure the United States' security and sovereignty well into the future.

We must ensure that the national conversation continues to promote the acceptance of Military Service, and all other forms of service, as a valued career choice for our youth. 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.

With better education for our youth, as well as incentivizing service to our nation, our younger citizens could use their talents for the greater good. Allowing our youth an opportunity to serve

would give them a vested interest in our nation and its success. It gives them a purpose, experience and it broadens their outlook on the world. Also, allowing our military recruiters better access in our schools, ensures our youth and their influencers understand the opportunities of service.

I feel strongly about qualified youth serving in our military. When people serve their country, no matter which way, it does not just benefit us individually, it benefits all of us. Regardless of how they choose to serve, full-time or part-time, in or out of uniform, there are numerous benefits to service:

- Serving furthers the public good
- It provides valuable work experience for the individual
- Youth gain exposure to multiple career opportunities
- Those who serve accomplish work that feels meaningful and rewarding
- They benefit from mentoring and networking opportunities
- When someone serves, they experience personal fulfillment and growth
- They have an opportunity to make a difference, in their community, nation and world

These benefits, for our military and our nation, are important and we are pleased this bipartisan committee is focusing on the issue of service. We appreciate the in-depth look you are providing with the holistic and comprehensive review of the Selective Service System as well as other forms of service our youth of today might be able to seek. Thank you.