

## Statement to the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service

Meroe Park, Executive Vice President of the Partnership for Public Service

June 7, 2019

---

On June 7, 2019, staff of the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service (the “Commission”) spoke with Meroe Park, Executive Vice President of the Partnership for Public Service, regarding federal public service reform. Ms. Park formerly served as a senior official with the Central Intelligence Agency (“CIA”), including as Acting Director, as Executive Director, and as Chief of Human Resources. Ms. Park has reviewed the following memorandum for accuracy and has agreed that this memorandum may be made public and included in the record of the Commission.

### **1) What hiring or other personnel practices does the intelligence community (IC) do well that the rest of the government should emulate, especially as they may relate to attracting people with critical skills or attracting the next generation of public servants?**

*It's important to note up front that my answers will be based primarily on my experience at the CIA, and though there are similarities across the 17 agencies in IC, there are also differences. In my view, four main elements drive the CIA's success in recruiting and retention. First, the Agency focuses on putting its mission at the forefront of its recruiting strategy. The mission is, in fact, the greatest selling point for both the IC and federal civil service writ large. Second, at the CIA, recruiting is not a delegated function, and the people who do the recruiting tend to come from all of the occupations across the agency. Therefore, recruiters can speak authoritatively as to what the job is like and what is needed, allowing for a more compelling conversation and a better ability to identify talent who are the best fit for the job—also a key aspect of retention. Third, the agency invests significantly in training new recruiters, as well as “hiring advisors,” who assist with recruitment on a part-time basis, while still performing their primary jobs. Finally, recruiting is centrally managed, allowing for a much more cohesive operation. There are competing views on this, but in my experience, when different components of a single organization recruit separately and have processes that are not integrated, it can promote a disjointed or confusing image for colleges and potential recruits.*

### **2) Are there recruiting or retention issues unique to the IC (vis-à-vis the federal government at large) that would benefit from the Commission's attention as it makes recommendations to Congress?**

*I recommend that you reach out to people in the IC who are in hiring roles now since they are actively using the various authorities and will have a much clearer sense of issues as they exist today. I come from an organization that had a very low attrition rate, and I attribute that retention success relative to peer organizations in government and the private sector to a number of factors. The CIA has a very strong onboarding program. For instance, regardless of your occupational discipline, almost all new employees attend seven or eight weeks of initial training with a cross-sectional cohort. Through the team-building exercises, historical studies, and mission orientation, individuals generate strong integrative bonds to coworkers from across the organization and employees develop a better shared understanding of the shared mission, as well as each other's roles in the organization. From this initial training, individuals then advance into very intensive tradecraft training for their specific occupational specialty. This experience promotes the idea that every member of the organization is a careerist contributing to the same mission, and the significant initial investment engenders a feeling among new employees that they are special and valued members of the organization. I've found this level of initial investment to be very unusual, despite it being so important to early retention. The agency also does a few things which drive long-term retention. For instance, throughout one's career, each employee is tethered to a career service, which helps manage his/her/their growth and development within the organization. There also is relatively*

*strong permeability between different functions and structures, so employees are expected to move around every two-four years to learn new skills and build their knowledge about the organization's functions. This culture encourages people to move around within the organization rather than leaving, keeping work fresh, which is particularly important with the next generation of workers, who demonstrate great interest in service opportunities and continuous learning.*

**3) What issues or approaches would you recommend that the Commission prioritize regarding public service?**

*Most of the government is quite restricted in how it can hire. Human resources professionals' hands are tied by policies and regulations that were well-intentioned but have had secondary and tertiary impacts on implementation that may not have been considered at the time. The patchwork of different authorities granted in competitive civil service legislation makes the system less uniform and practical. This is a place where the Office of Personnel Management ("OPM") could play a positive role charting a path for reforming the competitive hiring process with a whole-of-government approach. But OPM as well as other stakeholders have been reticent to dive in—I think the complexity of the problem disincentivizes action and promotes the "kick the can down the road" approach. I think it is important to broaden authorities across the government rather than granting "carve-outs" to certain agencies. Patchwork solutions are not optimal because even as they solve a specific hiring problem for one agency, they add unnecessary complexity and create endemic problems to the system. An example of the hiring process and regulations getting in the way of talent recruitment is most evident in the inability of agencies to hire Pathways interns. There is a current push right now to work with Congress to implement direct hire authority for students and recent graduates. Internships offer one of the best ways to find and vet good candidates, but agencies continue to struggle hiring them. The clearance process also is frequently blamed as a barrier to effective and efficient hiring. There is no doubt that it is a problem for those positions that require a clearance, but in my view, it is not the only issue that needs to be addressed. For instance, there are a whole set of rules that agencies must follow from the Delegated Examining Operations Handbook that slow down hiring, whether a clearance is required or not.*

**4) Do you have views on the feasibility or advisability of a public service or cyber reserve corps in which (a) individuals receive and keep their security clearance for a period of time to expedite hiring or assist the government in times of need, or (b) former government employees maintain their clearance and receive other benefits (such as early access to retirement pay) in exchange for being available to return to government service in times of need?**

*I agree with the overall reserve concept to have people ready when needed. In some ways, we already have something similar, when you consider the number of cleared individuals in private companies who are currently working with the government. Similarly, there is a fair number of cleared retirees who are already involved with or interested in government work. It would be a relatively light lift to bring these individuals back, but we often do not think of these people as a reserve corps, and it is not codified in law so that individuals have a protected pathway to return to service. A recommendation should address this issue and promote a more coordinated method to track individuals with high-demand skills who leave the government but retain a clearance.*

*I also like the secondary approach of identifying people who don't currently have ties with the government, though this would likely be a much harder lift. However, I do not think providing clearances is the right aspect to focus attention on. In a time of emergency, there are ways to accelerate the clearance process. Pre-clearing individuals would require a significant monetary investment and invasion into personal lives for an event which may never occur. I'm reluctant to think that that is where the investment should be made—it is not a good use of government funds and it would*

*exacerbate the existing clearance backlog. Instead, the most significant investment should be in identifying individuals and reaching agreements with their employers to generate buy-in for when an event occurs. During a crisis, the first population you would go to is the already cleared pool, but then you could move down the list to the secondary pool—and at that point the clearance process can be accelerated; the bigger problem will be getting them to agree to help and negotiating administrative challenges with their employers. There are many other areas that would need to be thought through—such as conflict of interest and pay—but overall, I think this concept could have value.*