

**Statement to the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service**  
**SOS America (Service over Self)**  
**September 2019**

**The Military Service Option**  
A New White Paper

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The National Commission on Military, National and Public Service has entered its intensive writing phase focused on producing a report and recommendations to the Congress and the President in March of 2020. SOS America believes that the report will be as comprehensive as the views and opinions garnered over the past months. Service, in its many, forms will be showcased.

That said, the intent of all this effort is to provide finite recommendations, a distillation that will generate public policy to encourage, even increase 'service' for the betterment of the nation. It is that axiomatic: More service, better citizens, better America.

SOS America (Service over Self) contends that the Commission's work represents a singular opportunity to find 'service wisdom.' Wisdom according to Eric Hoffer 'is the art of discovering the known'. We urge translating 'the known' into policy for the good of the nation.

If agreed that the objective is "for the good of the nation", then advocating a mechanism or process should emerge as 'task one' mindful of economics and the need for public support. It would be helpful to employ an American institution that enjoys huge popular respect and support. That institution could provide structure to attract and enlist broader societal representation. Fortunately, that institution exists: the U.S. Military

Unfortunately, only a small percentage (less than 25%) of American youth qualify physically and mentally for service in the All Volunteer Force (AVF). Indeed, the Services struggle to attract those qualified young men and women to serve in the increasingly expensive and, in terms of numbers, reduced AVF. Even if successfully accessed to the AVF, a substantial wash out rate, or failure to complete first enlistment, is discouraging.

SOS America advocates a new program of military service for one year to augment the AVF and make the military more accessible and attractive to a broad segment of America's young adults. It advocates this one year program of military service, on a volunteer basis, with qualifications being based on 'desire to serve' and the ability to 'take care of oneself' mentally and physically.

Importantly, the program is meant to be 'on demand' and respond to the needs of the military and those federal and state agencies that would request such augmentation.

Accepted social identity principles and national polling support this initiative. Despite, its voluntary nature, there is broad support by large segments of the population to make this proposed service option mandatory. Earlier SOS policy iterations, with generous exemptions, supported a 'mandatory' year of choice service approach for young men with women accessed on a volunteer basis. Reassessment resulted from in depth consultations with its National Board and key public executive and legislative leadership. Continued polling, as well as a sense of the contemporary 'art of the possible' from the National Commission on Service also contributed to this policy adjustment.

For the record, however, there is broad support (70%+) in the age cohort 50 and above for the mandatory program. When the demographic pool is widened (indeed weighted toward coastal geography and age 35 and under), the support metrics drop to the 36% range. While still encouraging, Congressional realities make 'mandatory' too steep a hill for most elected officials. The voluntary nature of the program appeals. In sum, there is broad public support for widening access to a tailored, one-year, voluntary, small unit, military service experience.

Given budgetary and real world military limitations, these policy recommendations apply. Given approved legislation, with the DOD the identified executive agent, the military services (plus requesting federal and state agencies) would forecast their need for augmentation by 'the United States Military Service Corps' (working title). This USMSC would utilize, in part, existing structure and tracking and assessment mechanisms of the Selective Service System (SSS). Specifically, the targeted age range is 18-25 although waivers for service to age 30 can be envisioned. Recruits would be accessed, train and serve in small, company sized, units (100 recruits). Mixing geography and ages (very important) and socio-economic and educational backgrounds is essential. The unit's command structure (sourced from active, guard, reserve and retired personnel) would entail two company grade officers and four experienced Sergeants. The recruits would man the rest of the positions in the organization. The equipment would be basic with emphasis on utility. The requesting service/agency would be responsible for providing basic quarters and rations. Pay would be at a reduced enlisted (E1) rate. The Uniformed Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) would apply. Again, small unit identity is a key factor.

The program should generate significant profit and, further, cause accessions to rise in the current AVF. While not a draft, the existence of this program will be a motivator for the regular military with its expanded choice, pay and benefits. The USMCS personnel will undertake important support duties such as transportation, civil engineering tasks, supply, billeting and the like allowing the AVF and agency forces to focus on more demanding operational duties. The continuation and use of the SSS in its current pre-mobilization registration form is deemed essential. It is viewed as an essential, national insurance policy to deal with historical and unanticipated surprises, military and otherwise, that can cripple, the nation, or worse.

The American youth cohort at greatest risk and the resource to employ for personal and national benefit is, principally, young men (ages 18 to 25). Objective remembrance and even casual observation attest to the transition rigors from late 'teen hood' to being functioning adult citizens. Responsibility and self-esteem factors are critical and must be earned. Group association, meaningful work, recognition, mutual and societal reliance plus trust are desired outcomes. No other institution brings these factors into play better than the U.S. military. Respected by the vast majority of our population, the military provides an attractive option if made more accessible. The expression "I wish I had spent some time in the military" is a common, largely male, sentiment closely followed by a rendition of family members who served. Family military service is a source of pride, indeed, justification or worth.

Given successful program completion, benefits could include: Citizenship and earned GED (if needed), partial Student Loan forgiveness (eliminate interest and provide forgiveness after paying 2/3 of debt), expunging criminal records, personal hygiene, discipline, job readiness and preference, enduring group identity, pride and the reality that 'I served'. Earned self-esteem and confidence have no substitute.

SOS America urges the inclusion of its policy recommendations in the final report of the National Commission on Military, National and Public Service. It's all about Nation Building in America.

Thank you. John Borling (Major General USAF-ret, Founder/Chairman)  
[www.sosamerica.org](http://www.sosamerica.org) Washington DC, September, 2019