

RECORD VERSION

STATEMENT BY

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BEFORE THE

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**ON RECRUITING SHORTFALLS AND GROWING MISTRUST:
PERCEPTIONS OF THE US MILITARY**

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**NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

Chairman Banks, Ranking Member Kim, distinguished members of this Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you on behalf of the men and women of the U.S. Army to discuss the multi-faceted root causes of our recruiting challenges, as well as the data driven plan that the Army is implementing to address those root causes and to transform our recruiting enterprise.

The all-volunteer force, established 50 years ago in 1973, has made the American military the greatest the world has ever seen. The shift from compulsory to volunteer service has made our force more professional, educated, and proficient at warfighting. While its success should be lauded and cherished, we have much work to do ensure it remains viable and sustainable.

Since I was confirmed in late December 2022, recruiting has been one of my primary concerns. In my prior position as a researcher and strategist at the RAND Corporation supporting the Department of Defense (DoD) for 16 years, I watched the recruiting challenge build over my career and have been concerned that the fight for talent and new recruits will only get harder - especially given the sharp decline in birth rates following the 2008 Great Recession that continues today and will begin to impact the U.S. labor market in the next few years, leading to a smaller labor pool.

While the efforts of the Army's recruiting workforce and initiatives over the last 18 months (such as the Future Soldier Prep Course and the Be All You Can Be Campaign) have ensured that our Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 recruiting numbers were better than FY 2022, there is still work to be done. In the early summer of 2023, the Secretary of the Army and the Chief of Staff of the Army established a team to conduct a 90-day study to identify ways to transform and modernize the Army's recruiting enterprise in order to sustainably recruit the quality and type of talent that the Army requires to meet operational needs, maintain end strength, and maintain a healthy Delayed Entry Program (DEP). As part of this effort, the team engaged the Army's Office of Economic and Manpower Analysis (OEMA) at West Point, an interdisciplinary organization comprised of labor economists, historians and other experts that was originally stood up

in 1983 to help find solutions to the Army's last major recruiting challenge. The 90-day study looked at 25 years' worth of Army recruiting data (approximately 3 million applicants, 2 million contracts, 1.5 million accessions, and 70 thousand recruiters); identified external and internal root causes of the current recruiting challenges; examined the recruiting structure and performance of our sister services as well as best practices of many large firms in the private sector; and developed recommendations for how the Army could transform its recruiting enterprise to address those root causes and better position the Army as an employer of choice in the labor market. The study team found that the current recruiting challenge has been building over the last 20 years; causes of the current recruiting challenge are multi-faceted; and that it will require multi-faceted solutions to address the challenge.

The study team identified the following external causes of the current recruiting challenge, many of which factor into propensity to serve:

- **Declining Familiarity with Military Service:** Fewer youth have a relationship with someone who has served in the military and there are large portions of the country where there are no Army installations, which also inhibits familiarity with military service. The need to reconnect the country to its military is one of my main concerns regarding recruiting.
- **Declining Eligibility:** A higher share of the youth population is ineligible to enlist without a waiver.
- **Lower Propensity to Serve in the Military:** There has been a decline in general propensity for military service since 1984, particularly since the early 2000s. Recent Army and DoD survey data indicate that the main barriers to service are: 1) The possibility of physical injury or death and 2) being away from family and friends for an extended period of time.
- **Gen Z is Delaying Decision-Making:** Youth are making life decisions later, including decisions related to education, employment, marriage, and having children
- **Declining Labor Force Participation:** This is especially the case among high school graduates, men, and White persons.

- **Higher Immediate College Enrollment Rates after High School:** 62% of high school seniors are going immediately to college; that rate used to only be 30%.
- **COVID-19:** COVID-19 caused lower productivity for recruiters due to loss of access to schools. It also caused learning loss for students, which decreased eligibility.
- **Declining Trust in Institutions:** Surveys indicate that confidence and trust in all institutions, including the military, has declined over the last 5 years
- **Strong Civilian Labor Market:** The low unemployment rate, more job openings than unemployed workers, and increases in benefits in private sector (e.g., work from home, tuition benefits).

The study team also identified the following internal causes of the current recruiting challenge:

- The focus and practices of Army recruiters have not adjusted to fundamental shifts in the US labor market (supply), or Army talent needs (demand). Recruiting practices have not oriented on occupational choice; they have focused on a volume approach; and they have engaged only a small fraction of the prospect market.
- Currently, Army recruiters are not selected, incentivized, managed, developed, or employed in alignment with labor market characteristics or proven workforce management practices.
- The Army recruiting enterprise has historically prioritized meeting current year production targets at the expense of adapting to fundamental trends in the labor market. This has inhibited the development of new markets, methods, and technology to compete for talent.
- Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA) has historically not incorporated data collection and program evaluation design into recruiting policy, planning, and implementation. This is something that I have been working to change since I was confirmed as the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Manpower and Reserve Affairs).

- The Army's current recruiting enterprise contains multiple levels of hierarchy and lacks a single point of accountability for recruiting and marketing. U.S. Army Recruiting Command commanders also have relatively short tenures, which makes it harder to innovate.

Finally, based on the study team's findings and recommendations, in October 2023, the Secretary of the Army and the Chief of Staff of the Army announced their decision to transform the Army recruiting enterprise in five key areas:

- **Transform How the Army Prospects:** The Army will expand the prospect market that it focuses on and adjust the methods used to engage with prospects.
- **Transform the Army's Recruiting Force:** The Army will transform how it selects, trains, and manages recruiters by beginning a multi-year transition from a predominantly borrowed "special assignment" workforce, to an increasingly permanent and specialized talent acquisition workforce, with opportunities for advancement
- **Create an Experimentation Capability Within USAREC:** The Army will create an experimentation capability within U.S. Army Recruiting Command (USAREC) to drive innovation, generate evidence-based insights, and scale successful innovations across USAREC.
- **Enhance the Evidence Base for Recruiting Policy Decisions:** The Army will establish an evidence-based learning capability in HQDA that will incorporate more data collection and program evaluation design into accessions policy planning and implementation.
- **Align Army Recruiting Leadership and Structure:** Marketing functions and the entire recruiting enterprise will need to be consolidated and re-aligned.

The Army is leaning forward to better posture itself as an employer of choice in the broader labor market. Our retention remains exceptionally high- once people join the Army, they often want to stay beyond their first contract. We also need your help. I remain very concerned about the increasing knowledge and culture gap between the

country and its military. You can help us bridge that gap by talking to your constituents about the benefits of military service, and by telling them your individual stories if you have served yourself.

Chairman Banks, Ranking Member Kim, distinguished members of this Subcommittee, thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to our discussion and your questions, as well as continuing this conversation in the future.