

STATEMENT OF  
THE HONORABLE JOSEPH J. HECK, CHAIRMAN  
NATIONAL COMMISSION ON MILITARY, NATIONAL, AND PUBLIC SERVICE  
BEFORE THE  
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE  
ON  
THE FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS AND REPORT OF THE NATIONAL COMMISSION  
ON MILITARY, NATIONAL, AND PUBLIC SERVICE  
MARCH 11, 2021

Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, and Members of the Committee, my colleagues and I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today on behalf of the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service (the Commission) and its eleven Commissioners to discuss the findings and recommendations contained in the Commission's final report. We would also like to thank the leadership of the late Senator John McCain for supporting the Commission's work.

Congress created the Commission in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 as a bipartisan body with members selected by congressional leadership and the President. This is the first time that Congress asked a body to look at all three critical legs of the service stool—Military, National and Public Service—as an overall system. Congress charged us to “conduct a review of the military selective service process” and to “consider methods to increase participation in military, national, and public service in order to address national security and other public service needs of the Nation.” Throughout our work, from the fall of 2017 through the fall of 2020, we embraced and fulfilled both parts of this mandate.

Almost one year ago, on March 25, 2020, we were honored to submit to Congress, the President, and the American people the culmination of our work—*Inspired to Serve*—along with legislative proposals designed to implement many of the recommendations. The release of the report corresponded with lockdown orders and other measures taken to combat the ongoing public health crisis—a global pandemic that has disrupted nearly every aspect of life and the effects of which will remain with us for years to come. It is the Commission's ardent belief that service is integral to responding to COVID-19 and the clear inequities the pandemic has exposed in health care, education, the environment, and more. Many of the recommendations included in *Inspired to Serve*, if acted on, will create a more resilient nation, better prepared to

meet the next national emergency, regardless of what form it takes. With 164 recommendations, *Inspired to Serve* contains a bold vision and comprehensive plan to strengthen all forms of service -- military, national and public service -- to address critical national and domestic needs, invigorate civil society, unite our people in common purpose and strengthen our democracy. The Commission is united behind this report as a consensus product, and every recommendation has the support of a bipartisan supermajority of the Commission.

The recommendations we propose are based on extensive research and an equally expansive effort to learn from a wide spectrum of the American public. We traveled across the nation to learn firsthand about Americans' views on and experience with service, visiting 42 cities in 22 states across all nine census districts. The Commission conducted interviews with individuals from over 530 organizations that have a connection to service, including those who participate in, lead, or study activities included in the Commission's mandate. From experts and leaders with decades of experience in their fields, to mid-level managers who are implementing policies at the state and local level, to program participants who are just beginning to explore what it means to serve, the insights offered by these individuals shaped the Commission's understanding of what service looks like today. In addition, the Commission held 11 public meetings and forums, analyzed more than 4,300 public comments, leveraged multiple surveys with partner organizations, and convened 14 open hearings with 68 policy experts to discuss and analyze a wide variety of policy proposals.

We found that, as was the case over 225 years ago during the earliest days of the republic, America's extraordinary and longstanding spirit of service continues to shape the life of our nation. As our report details, we heard inspiring stories of dedicated military, national and public service everywhere we went. We also heard a clear desire for dramatically more

opportunities to serve and needs to be met. It became clear to us, in a country of 329 million Americans, the full potential for service remains largely untapped. *Inspired to Serve* offers a bold and inclusive vision to significantly strengthen the culture of service in our nation, beginning with comprehensive civic education and service learning starting in kindergarten through high school, service opportunities so ubiquitous that a year of national service becomes a rite of passage for millions of young adults, and new and revitalized service options for adults of any age, background, or experience. By the year 2031—the 70th anniversary of President Kennedy’s “Ask Not” call for Americans to serve our nation—we envision five million Americans will begin to serve in military, national, or public service each year. Our long-term goal is to cultivate a *culture* in which service is a common expectation and experience for all Americans—when it is the norm, rather than the exception—when every American is inspired and eager to serve. By igniting the extraordinary potential for service, our recommendations will address critical national security and domestic needs, expand economic and educational opportunities, unite people from different backgrounds in common cause and strengthen the civic fabric of the nation.

### **Strengthening Emergency National Mobilization**

Throughout the history of the United States, Americans have proven their willingness to defend the country through military service. The Commission embraces the American tradition of first seeking volunteers for military service to meet national needs. The Commission has identified a need for a continuum between the routine recruiting mechanisms of the U.S. military and the activation of the draft and believes the nation must develop policy options across that continuum.

Nevertheless, the Commission ultimately concluded that the United States should maintain a draft contingency mechanism for mandatory military service in order to organize and mobilize Americans in the event of a national emergency. The Commission has also recommended that ongoing, active registration with a modernized version of the Selective Service System is the best and most feasible way to draw on the talents, skills, and abilities of Americans to meet evolving national security needs and support the common defense.

The United States faces threats to vital national security interests and the potential for existential threats, natural or manmade, persist. As the National Defense Strategy Commission explained in 2018, “given the differing needs for forces across theaters, the challenges of projecting power over great distances, and the fact that the United States has rarely been able to predict precisely where or how adversaries will challenge its interests, the U.S. military will surely experience unanticipated force demands in coming years.”<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the Department of Defense noted in its 2017 report to Congress that the Selective Service “is not a theoretical capability,” but “*is the only* proven, time-tested mechanism by which to expand the [U.S. military] in the event of a national emergency.”<sup>2</sup>

The Commission determined the Selective Service System remains an essential component of the nation’s military preparedness and serves a function that cannot be replaced through other identified methods. The Commission shares the view of the Department of Defense that the Selective Service System is a necessary low-cost insurance policy against a

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<sup>1</sup> National Defense Strategy Commission, *Providing for the Common Defense: The Assessment and Recommendations of the National Defense Strategy Commission* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, November 2018), 21, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2018/11/providing-common-defense>.

<sup>2</sup> Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (OUSD (P&R)), Report on the Purpose and Utility of a Registration System for Military Selective Service (Washington, DC: DoD, July 2017), 10 (emphasis in the original).

shortage of military personnel as well as a symbol of U.S. resolve to mobilize the nation to meet commitments to its armed forces, allies, and partners.

The Commission also determined, however, that the broader emergency national mobilization system requires significant modernization in order to be fully prepared in the event of a national emergency. The ongoing pandemic has laid bare that agility and effectiveness in government response requires advanced planning and continuous stress testing. Ensuring that the Selective Service System can serve as an effective insurance policy requires improving the readiness of the entire national mobilization process, not just the Selective Service System, by holistically reviewing institutional and organization functions and roles that have not been exercised in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Department of Defense's focus on resource-informed planning and immediate demands on the force have come at the expense of planning for a national mobilization and regularly testing those plans and concepts. The Commission urges the National Security Council and the Department of Defense to review and revise plans for responding to national emergencies that might necessitate a draft; specifically, the Commission proposed that the government formalize mechanisms to encourage additional volunteers and develop approaches to test existing plans and coordinate among key organizations responsible for national mobilization.

The Commission's recommendations seek to empower agencies and leaders to take the steps required to enhance this system, educate the public regarding their solemn and civic responsibilities to help defend the nation if called to do so, and ensure the government can call up the most qualified Americans to meet the national security needs of the nation if Congress and the President determine a draft is required.

Likewise, the Commission has determined that the Selective Service System itself—a system created over one hundred years ago in 1917—must modernize in order to achieve the objectives set forth above. Among these, the Commission recommended broader awareness of the purpose of registration and the function of the Selective Service System. While maintaining the Selective Service System is critical to ensuring national preparedness, the Commission found that few young Americans have a deep understanding or even awareness of the system’s basic requirements. A survey conducted by the Department of Defense’s Joint Advertising, Market Research and Studies (JAMRS) revealed that only 35 percent of young Americans could correctly identify the current registration requirement for young adult men. The Commission believes that Selective Service System registration deserves a moment of earnest reflection and our report includes several ways to help every registrant understand the purpose and potential implication of their civic duty.

The Commission also considered, at the request of Congress, potential mechanisms to draft individuals with critical skills. The changing nature of warfare, including rapid technological advancements and the increased specialization required to address global security issues, has certainly heightened the need for individuals with critical skills necessary to maintain a military advantage. However, the Commission ultimately concluded the best way to leverage individuals with critical skills would be through innovative new voluntary mechanisms, such as the creation of an individual ready reserve focused on critical skills and a national roster of volunteers.

The Commission also considered whether women should register with the Selective Service System. More than any other topic within the Commission’s mandate, the question of expanding Selective Service registration to all Americans, regardless of gender, evoked a range

of passionate and deeply held moral, legal, and practical views. The Commission listened to diverse perspectives from the American people, consulted with experts from a wide variety of disciplines and groups, and examined the available evidence surrounding the issue. After extensive deliberations, the Commission ultimately decided that it is in the national security interest of the United States that all Americans, men and women, register for Selective Service and be prepared to serve in the event a draft is enacted by Congress and the President.

The core function of the Selective Service System is to deliver individuals qualified for induction into military service to meet a wide range of Department of Defense personnel needs in the event of a national emergency, which includes non combat and combat positions.<sup>3</sup> Throughout American history, unanticipated force demands have occurred and most conflicts have persisted longer than initially projected. In times of unmet personnel needs, the Department of Defense has regularly resorted to reducing quality standards, harming our armed forces' ability to respond to national security threats.<sup>4</sup> Should circumstances necessitate a draft, including women in the pool of individuals eligible for selection would improve the military's ability to maintain higher military standards. Of the 17 to 24 year old cohort, equal proportions of women and men meet initial military accession standards – an estimated 29.3 percent of

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<sup>3</sup> For example, 16 million men – 10 million of whom were conscripted – served during World War II. Over half of all enlisted personnel in the U.S. military worked in just three occupations: mechanics, administrative and clerical workers, and providers of services to the force. See The President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force, The Report of the President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force, 44, <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monograph/MG265/images/webS0243.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> "Project 100,000: New Standards Program" (Washington, DC, RAND, September 1966), <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/MG265/images/webG1318.pdf>; Arnold Isaacs, "Book Review: McNamara's Folly," review of McNamara's Folly: The Use of Low-IQ Troops in the Vietnam War, by Hamilton Gregory, Modern War Institute, August 18, 2016, <https://mwi.usma.edu/book-review-mcnamaras-folly/>; and Jerry D. Morelock, "McNamara's Folly: Lowering the Standards to Fill the Ranks," Vietnam Magazine, December 2016, <https://www.historynet.com/mcnamaras-folly-lowering-standards-fill-ranks.htm>.



women versus 29.0 percent of men.<sup>5</sup> Women have served in every war throughout American history, and more than 224,000 serve in the U.S. Armed Forces today. Since the decision by the Department of Defense to open combat roles to women starting in 2016, thousands have proven they are qualified to serve in combat. Therefore, the Commission has found that women and men are equally capable of performing duties that meet the needs of the Department of Defense in a national emergency.

Furthermore, eligibility for the draft has historically centered on the contemporary judgement of Americans regarding who was fit for military service, and registration for the Selective Service System is premised on the notion of a common obligation to provide for the defense of the nation. It is the equal obligation of all Americans to defend the nation if called to do so. Registering women for Selective Service, and if necessary, including women in a draft, acknowledges the value women bring to the U.S. Armed Forces, and the talents, skills, and abilities women would offer in defending the nation in a national emergency.

### **Advancing Military, National, and Public Service**

Service has been a part of the nation's core values and social fabric since its founding. Together, military, national, and public service shape almost every aspect of American life and help meet the nation's many critical needs. The men and women serving in the armed forces provide for the common defense of the United States; national service members use their time and talents to enhance government capacity and meet national and local needs; and civil servants provide critical functions for the common good. While great work is being done across the nation in each of these areas, cultivating a culture of service in the United States requires immediate

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<sup>5</sup> JAMRS estimates that 29.3 percent of women in the 17- to 24-year-old bracket are eligible for military service, versus 29.0 percent of men. See Office of the Undersecretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness), *Qualified Military Available Report* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2013).

action and continued attention as well as a frank discussion of how to increase awareness of, aspiration for, and access to service.

### *Advancing Military Service*

The defense of the nation depends on the continued success and strength of America's military. We must ensure the military is strong, sustainable, and capable of meeting new and emerging threats. Since the United States ended the draft in 1973, it has relied exclusively on the All-Volunteer Force to fulfill the nation's military personnel needs. Yet three trends currently pose challenges to the long-term sustainability of the All-Volunteer Force. First, because only a small percentage of Americans – less than 0.5 percent – currently serve on active duty, gaps in understanding and interaction between civilian and military communities have grown. Second, enlisted recruiting remains uneven across the United States, with select geographic regions furnishing a disproportionate share of recruits; in fiscal year 2017, for example, 70 percent of new enlisted accessions came from the South and West. Third, an increasing percentage of American youth are ineligible to join the military without a waiver and even fewer are interested in military service. For example, an estimated 71 percent of youth are ineligible for military service and a mere 14 percent of youth expressed interest serving in the armed forces.

The Commission's recommendations and legislative proposals would address these trends by increasing awareness of the realities of military life and full range of occupations available and enhancing the military's ability to attract and retain qualified personnel critical to the long-term success of the All-Volunteer Force. This includes investing more recruiting resources in underrepresented markets and hometown-recruiting programs to help meet recruiting goals and ensure the U.S. military reflects the nation. The Commission further proposes expanding youth programs such as Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps and

encouraging broader utilization of tools such as the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery Career Exploration Program. The Commission also offers recommendations designed to strengthen educational pathways to military service, including offering pre-service education opportunities for enlisted personnel conditioned on a military service commitment.

These expanded youth pathways and outreach efforts will significantly increase engagement between the military and the broader American public, provide a new generation of Americans with firsthand information about military life, and promote an acceptance of military service by all communities as a valued career choice. These outcomes are essential to strengthening the resiliency of the U.S. military, and securing our nation.

### ***Advancing Public Service***

Securing our nation extends beyond military service; public servants are vital to the well-being of the nation and increasingly important to national security in an era of great power competition. With integrity and impartiality, civil servants implement the decisions of elected officials and administer programs that fundamentally enhance our national security and improve the lives of Americans in countless ways.

The Commission found significant challenges within federal civil service personnel systems. With just six percent of the federal workforce under age 30 and more than a third soon eligible to retire, agencies must attract the next generation to public service employment. Yet, basic hiring processes have become dysfunctional. Most agencies do not have effective internship programs—hires of student interns dropped by 90 percent, from 35,000 in 2010 to 4,000 in 2018. Benefits are not competitive with the private sector, especially for those who do not seek careerlong government employment. Congress and the President have granted direct-hire authority to address critical hiring needs, but the personnel system has not been

updated with sustainable solutions. The Commission would address these near-term problems so agencies can function better now while building toward a modern talent-management system, so the federal government is a competitive employer in the long term.

To fix federal hiring, the Commission proposes to transform processes for recruiting applicants and assessing the qualifications of job candidates, such as by eliminating self-assessments, engaging subject-matter experts and hiring managers with subject-matter expertise to rate candidates, and utilizing advanced online assessment tools. The Commission also proposes setting competency standards and improving training for human resources employees and encouraging agencies to make full use of existing hiring authorities, such as by creating new tools to connect qualified applicants eligible for noncompetitive hiring with agency hiring managers.

Bold action is also needed to revitalize the hiring pipelines to federal agencies for students and recent graduates. At minimum, the federal government needs robust internship and recent graduate hiring programs. The Commission proposes reforming and expanding these programs as well as creating new pathways, such as a Public Service Corps that grants college scholarships in exchange for a 4-year public service commitment at a federal agency. Further, the Commission proposes a new Federal Fellowship and Scholarship Center, which would enhance developmental programs for students with critical skills and leadership potential.

The Commission also considers it crucial to modernize how veterans' preference works within the government's standard hiring process of competitive examination. Veterans' preference is not working well for younger veterans seeking to transition to civilian careers nor for agencies that need to hire highly qualified workers. The current preference does a disservice to veterans. Many veterans receive little or no benefit, and the preference routinely advances

candidates with weak qualifications, because some veterans who are assessed as minimally qualified based on their skills and experience are automatically moved to the top of the best qualified list. As a result, hiring managers are often presented with two suboptimal options: hiring a veteran to a position for which they are not a strong fit, doing a disservice to that veteran; or, having received a list of unqualified candidates, return it without making a hire—which is now done on more than half of all competitive service postings. At the same time, noncompetitive hiring options, like the Veterans Recruitment Appointment, are underutilized. The Commission proposes a comprehensive overhaul that would make veterans' preference a tiebreaker between equally qualified candidates and refocus the preference on recently discharged veterans who are transitioning to civilian employment, while expanding eligibility for the Veterans Recruitment Appointment from 3 years to 10 years after discharge. The Commission also proposes to expand noncompetitive eligibility for national service alumni and participants in federal internship, fellowship, and scholarship programs to leverage the skills of, and taxpayer investment in, these individuals.

To attract and retain public servants with critical skills, the Commission has recommended modernizing personnel systems for federal health care professionals, expanding special personnel systems for cybersecurity professionals, piloting a Civilian Cybersecurity Reserve, and investing in the skills of current federal employees.

To foster long-term competitiveness of federal personnel systems, the Commission would offer federal employees more benefit choices, including an option with fully portable retirement benefits, and would expand OPM's demonstration authority to test, refine, and adopt changes to federal agency personnel systems. These changes would help build the evidence base for broader

improvements to federal personnel systems that increase competitiveness while preserving a merit-based civil service.

### *Advancing National Service*

Each year, the federal government supports more than 300,000 national service positions through the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), the Peace Corps, and programs at other federal agencies, such as YouthBuild. National service improves the lives of participants and recipients, provides much-needed support for local and nonprofit organizations, and creates more united, civically engaged communities. Most importantly perhaps, national service members and volunteers roll up their sleeves and help meet critical needs of the nation, such as providing disaster relief, combating the opioid crisis, preserving parks and public lands, teaching and tutoring public school students in low-resource communities, and more. Already, national service is playing a critical role in how our nation responds to COVID-19. We believe growth of national service opportunities can and should be an integral part of a sustained solution, as communities across the country deal with the adverse impacts of this threat for years to come.

Despite the known positive impacts to individuals and communities, public awareness is one of the most significant barriers to expanding and promoting greater investment and involvement in national service. Most Americans do not know what national service is or how to get involved, and new efforts are needed to boost awareness and recruitment. The Commission's recommendations include means of promoting awareness of CNCS opportunities, including AmeriCorps and Senior Corps, and linking recruiting efforts between military and national service, such that aspiring Americans who are ineligible for either service can learn about other opportunities to serve the country.

Americans who do aspire to dedicate themselves to a national service program face challenges in finding available opportunities and affording the experience. To make national service more accessible, Congress should enhance existing infrastructure and grow national service to 1 million annual participants by the year 2031. As one step to achieving this goal, the Commission proposes to create a new national service fellowship program administered by CNCS that would let individuals choose where they want to serve – thus allowing more community, faith-based, and other nonprofit organizations, especially those in rural, tribal, or under-resourced areas, to benefit from the commitment and energy of young Americans. As proposed by the Commission, the fellowship program would be equitably distributed across congressional districts and would ensure inclusion of young Americans from tribal and low-income communities.

The Commission also found that the current living allowance can be a barrier for Americans who want to participate in national service. The Commission believes that every American should have the ability to consider and experience the positive impacts of service. As such, the Commission has recommended the AmeriCorps living allowance and Senior Corps stipend should be increased to more accurately reflect geographic cost-of-living expenses and rising inflation. Enhancing the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award by making it tax exempt, increasing flexibility in how it can be used, and matching it to the average cost of annual in-state tuition at a public university will provide greater choice and serve as a stronger, more attractive incentive as Americans struggle to meet rising tuition costs and student loan debt.

### **Elevating All Forms of Service**

The Commission's review of military, national, and public service illuminated the need for better coordination of service efforts among the various disjointed agencies and organizations

that perform management and oversight. Despite the critical role of service in our country, currently there is no single entity responsible for advancing and coordinating service initiatives across the federal government—no focal point for valuable cross-service initiatives, including ways to attract individuals with critical skills to serve their communities and the nation. Establishing an interagency council within the Executive Office of the President, chaired by a presidentially appointed, Senate-confirmed official, would elevate all streams of service and provide a forum for encouraging coordination, communication, and promulgation of best practices across military, national, and public service as well as advancing joint efforts to promote service.

The Commission also recognized that many service organizations, across all forms of service, face challenges identifying candidates interested in or eligible for service. As a result, the Commission believes there is significant value in creating a platform that can function as “one-stop shop” for service opportunities—a virtual clearing house that could connect service organizations with potential talent. After exploring several existing and previous models, the Commission proposes an interactive online platform that would consolidate opportunities in military, national, and public service. This approach will expose Americans to a wider range of opportunities and encourage them to explore different ways to serve their country. In addition, the Commission has recommended that this platform incorporate a mechanism for Americans to indicate their willingness to perform military, national, or public service, generally as well as in emergencies, and upload their qualifications. This would provide service organizations a national roster to recruit from, allowing for more proactive recruiting.

Finally, as the Commission traveled the country in search of ways to engage more Americans in service, nearly every conversation or meeting included a passionate call to improve



civic education. Leaders in military, national, and public service, as well as Americans from all walks of life, stressed civic education's ability to increase Americans' awareness of, aspiration for, and access to service and recommended that the Commission develop ways to enhance and expand civic education throughout the United States. The Commission also believes it is necessary to significantly expand the practice of service-learning—a teaching method that integrates classroom teaching with community service. Research suggests that students who participate in service-learning demonstrate better academic performance and a deeper understanding of civic responsibility. To that end, the Commission recommended that Congress make a significant financial commitment to jump-start a nationwide revitalization of civic education and service learning. The Commission believes that by appropriating these funds, the federal government will lay the foundation to ensure that students at all levels have access to high-quality civic education and service-learning opportunities—from kindergarten to 12th grade, and beyond.

Three and a half years ago, Congress charged our Commission with something never done before: conduct a comprehensive and holistic review of all forms of service to the nation. In doing so, we saw firsthand how service is a fundamental part of who we are as Americans, and how we meet our challenges. COVID-19 represents one of the most all-encompassing and unprecedented challenges in the history of the United States. Yet the potential for service is currently untapped. By igniting the extraordinary potential for service, our recommendations will address critical national security and domestic needs, expand economic and educational opportunities, unite our people in common purpose, strengthen the civic fabric of the nation, and establish a robust culture of service. Bold action is needed. Incremental changes and small improvements are not enough.

We call on Congress and the President to invest in the American people and the security of the nation by taking action. Now is the time—and *Inspired to Serve* is the plan—to strengthen service and achieve the vision of every American, inspired and eager to serve.