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UNTIL RELEASED BY THE
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT OF
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REGARDING
RECRUITING AND RETENTION
BEFORE THE
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
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Introduction

Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Wicker, and distinguished members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you to discuss the current and future state of recruiting and retention within the Department of the Navy.

The Department of the Navy's most important asset is our people. To maintain a combat-ready Navy and Marine Corps, we focus on informing, attracting, influencing, recruiting, and retaining young men and women from America's diverse talent pool. All Sailors, Marines, and civilians in the Department of the Navy operate as one team to protect the American people and our interests in the most effective and efficient ways possible, with our actions guided always by our core values. We invest in the health, readiness, capability, and leadership of our force. We maintain forward maneuverability, build our maritime advantage, and are strengthening partnerships across government, the joint force, industry, and around the world.

Our high-quality force provides us with a competitive warfighting advantage in relation to our strategic competitors. In accordance with the National Defense Strategy and the Secretary of the Navy Guidance, the Department of the Navy (DON) is modernizing programs to better recruit, retain, and develop our force to attain warfighting advantage, increase lethality, and develop intellectual competencies to confront the many dangers of a complex world.

Accessing a pipeline of high-quality and motivated workforce, is essential to meet today's needs and our future mission, particularly for our future Sailors and Marines and their families. In January, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the All-Volunteer Force. Yet never before have we been as challenged to recruit and retain Sailors and Marines as we are today. The residual impacts of COVID, a competitive labor market, a shrinking pool of eligible candidates, a low propensity to serve, and a fragmented advertising environment have made it

increasingly difficult to rebuild recruiting momentum and recruit a steady stream of young men and women into your Navy and Marine Corps.

You have no doubt heard many of these challenges discussed before. So instead, today I would like to focus on what the Department of the Navy is doing to ensure that we can continue to support our critical national security missions. In June 2022, Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro directed an organized recruiting campaign to identify and address short- and long-term issues facing recruiting. I am pleased to highlight some of these efforts today.

Expanding Community and School Outreach

The best sustainable market for recruiters is the high school setting. While there is no current report of noncompliance with recruiter access laws, the Department of the Navy recognizes the importance of having strong relationships with high schools and school districts in fostering robust, diverse, and strong forces, and is exploring additional ways to engage and reengage high school partners.

We are also working closely with the Department of Education to connect with federal and state education officials and non-profit organizations, promoting the value of military service and military-connected recognition programs. Our recruiting commands also invite education leaders to witness how military training prepares Sailors and Marines to be successful, high-quality citizens. These efforts are just one component of a much-needed whole-of-government approach to promote public service overall.

Enhancing Marketing to Youth and Influencers

Secretary Del Toro frequently engages with media and other key stakeholders about the importance of positive portrayals of military service. At the same time, today's fragmented advertising environment means that television ads do not have the same impact as in the past. Instead, we must employ creative and more personal approaches that directly appeal to our audience and convey the military's tangible and intangible benefits to youth and those who influence them, such as educators, family members, and community leaders.

Market research indicates that today's youth aspire to a lifestyle that maximizes work-life alignment, where a job and the organization they work for are not just a means to an end but an expression of their values. Among the most powerful reasons for joining the military are the intangible benefits: a feeling of patriotism, a sense of duty, honor, selfless service, camaraderie, purpose, character development, and a real contribution to our nation through military service.

As we find more American youth disconnected from or unfamiliar with the military, they may also be unaware of the many tangible benefits of military service. From a compensation perspective, a review of the most recent Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation found that the earnings of enlisted Service members with fewer than 10 years of service were at approximately the 90th percentile as compared to their civilian peers with a high school diploma and the same amount of work experience. The list of benefits goes on, ranging from stable employment in any economy; a competitive benefits package, including a portable retirement program; housing; full medical coverage; full- or part-time opportunities; extensive travel opportunities; education benefits, both during and after service; loan repayment programs; college credit for completed training; and leadership experiences.

Secretary Del Toro has challenged all senior leaders to be recruiting force multipliers, sharing the Navy and Marine Corps story in their regular engagements, particularly to those who

influence young people. In a recent article, the Commandant of the Marine Corps General Berger encouraged family members to have candid conversations with their young loved ones about the potential value of military service. These influencers can play an outsized role in the decision-making process of a young person considering the military.

While in-person interactions are paramount to re-engaging communities and combating an increasingly disinterested youth market, changing the narrative requires involvement from Members of Congress, Veterans, teachers, coaches, family members, and other influencers, to reclaim our story, highlight our significant investments in taking care of our people, and create positive associations of military service.

Serving in the military provides an unmatched opportunity for life skills, leadership development at every career milestone, and a well-earned sense of pride that sets them up for life, professionally and personally.

Attracting a Diverse and Skilled Talent Pool

Attracting a diverse and skilled talent pool is critical to our long-term success. We must redouble opportunities to share our story with young Americans of diverse backgrounds, such as through an iconic flyover by four female pilots at the Super Bowl last month, representing a legacy of 50 years of women in Navy aviation. There are young Americans who may have never heard the Navy or Marine Corps story, or never thought military service was for them, but just need to hear more. These are the individuals we must pursue.

The Navy and Marine Corps have implemented community outreach within under-represented communities to increase the pool of qualified diverse accessions. The Department continues to assess where our Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps (NROTC units are

established and how we are leveraging cross town affiliates at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) in communities with large minority populations. Recruiters also seek diverse and innovative STEM talent by visiting magnet schools, specialized high schools, and career and technical education programs.

We are also seeking creative ways to expand the pool of eligible applicants. Just this month, the Navy launched the Future Sailor Preparatory Course, which provides physical fitness training for high potential recruits who do not quite meet body-composition standards. Participants who meet standards within 90 days will transition to boot camp.

We also must ensure that we can recruit and retain individuals to fill our high skill and specialist positions, which face significant competition from the private sector. I thank the Congress for the recent increases in these authorities. We will continue to target these increases to fill critical skills and ensure parity across the Military Services.

Responsive personnel policies help the military remain relevant in the minds of today's young employees, who expect flexibilities such as parental leave to be the norm, especially when compared to employers in the tech or corporate sectors. While we recognize the challenges Service members and families face throughout the military lifecycle, we continue to address these head on. We cannot shy away from making the Department of the Navy a model employer that welcomes and values the contributions of individuals of all backgrounds and experiences. Any qualified and willing American should be able to serve their country.

Last October, Secretary Del Toro joined his colleagues, Secretary Wormuth and Secretary Kendall in a Wall Street Journal op-ed conveying the value of military service, and particularly highlighting opportunities for skilled individuals who are critical to our emerging

needs, particularly data scientists, coders, and engineers. As they wrote, “Our goal is to recruit and build a force that looks like America.”

Conclusion

We face a significant challenge, but we see great opportunity as well. We remain inspired by the exceptional work of our Navy and Marine Corps Recruiting Commands, our recruiters on the ground, and all our Sailors, Marines and civilian employees who work tirelessly to share positive experiences of military service with applicants and influencers. Just last month, Secretary Del Toro met with more than 200 Navy and Marine Corps recruiters from across the country to hear directly about the challenges they face and their ideas for improvement. These dedicated professionals are passionate about finding future Sailors and Marines. But their mission is staggering, and we cannot fully overcome these challenges without your continued support.

On behalf of Secretary Del Toro and the senior civilian and military leadership of the Navy and Marine Corps, I want to thank this committee for its help in addressing these challenges, which will likely continue for the foreseeable future. The Department of Navy is very focused on these issues. We are committed to working with this committee and all Members of Congress to recruit a ready and lethal force. I look forward to your questions.