

# National Security Update: The Veteran's Role in Supporting the Military

## **Issue Summary:**

Without a strong, competent, and capable military, no national security exists. The Department of Defense is experiencing its worst recruiting performance since the inception of the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) over 50 years ago. Four of the six services missed their recruiting goals in FY 2023. Much of the issue can be traced to a degradation of the relationship between the American people, service members, and the veteran community. The result is an American youth unfamiliar with the value of military service, the military lifestyle, and the benefits of donning the uniform. To bridge this divide and improve America's national security posture for the future, Legionnaires should take a proactive approach to addressing the issue. Recent polls continue to demonstrate trust in the military has declined and this has also contributed to degraded military quality of life amongst members of the military.

During meetings with military branches and the US Coast Guard, the American Legion (and the veteran community as a whole) has been asked to weigh in and help educate Americans on the value of military service by telling their story. As America's most prominent wartime veteran and military support organization, we have led discussions involving the national call to service. Additionally, reduced access to high schools for military recruiters, mainly post-COVID, has decreased recruiting opportunities that previously existed.

## **Actions Taken:**

The National Security Division has conducted extensive research, met with senior members of the services, and attended House and Senate Armed Services Committee meetings on this issue. National Security Staff (NS Staff) wrote a white paper and exchanged ideas with think tanks such as the Center for the Study of the Presidency & Congress.

During the 2023 National Convention, the National Security Commission hosted a Service-level Senior Enlisted Panel where military quality of life, the recruiting crisis and other important topics were discussed, and Legionnaires were asked to help find solutions for the recruiting issues. Additionally, The American Legion recently hosted the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps for a round-table discussion during February 2024, where veterans and leaders from America's largest VSOs discussed recruiting and retention issues. One of the most significant issues identified being the need for mutually supporting efforts and resources between American Legion posts, local bases, recruiters, and the local community.

NS Staff held the first of several meetings with Department / Post Commanders and thought leaders in the national security space. The discussion centered on veterans' role in bridging the Civil-Military divide. Participating Legionnaires represented every conceivable demographic of the organization's membership and were able to share challenges and best practices they engage in to support the local military and their efforts.

Currently, the NS Staff is working toward building a "tool kit" comprised of helpful information designed to assist Departments in developing relationships with local bases, recruiters, and their communities. Participating Legionnaires and members of the Legion family will have access to current, accurate information they can convey to America's youth and adult influencers regarding the value of serving their nation.

## **Applicable Resolutions:**

Resolution No. 85: Support for Military Quality of Life Standards

Resolution No. 48: Rebuilding the U.S. Defense Industrial Base

Resolution No. 30: Modernization of the Armed Forces

## **What can Congress do:**

Prioritize passage of legislation that funds housing, barracks and infrastructure which supports military quality of life.

Pass legislation that elevates and rewards schools which host JROTC, ROTC and civic education programs.

Encourage members of Congress to support revitalization of civilian-military relations in their home districts.

Ensure military compensation is competitive with the private sector to make military service more attractive.

Implement legislation that optimizes transition programs to assist service members returning to their communities.