



**Testimony Before the U.S. House Subcommittee on National Security, the Border, and Foreign Affairs (Committee on Oversight and Accountability)**

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Chairman Grothman, Ranking Member Garcia, and members of the committee, it is a privilege to be here today both personally and professionally.

My name is Dr. Meaghan Mobbs, and I am the daughter of two former Army officers. My mother was one of the first women to go to Airborne school and deployed to Grenada. My father served for over 30 years, deployed and was decorated for valor numerous times, and was in the Pentagon on 9/11 when I was a sophomore in high school. It was their footsteps I followed when I chose to serve and accepted an appointment to West Point. I was the first in my family to attend the Academy. My little brother eventually followed me and did the same. My nuclear family has served in support of every major conflict from Vietnam to the present day.

I am now the mother to two exceptional little girls and the aunt to two energetic nephews. As it stands today, and it pains me to say, I would not recommend military service to any of them.

Understandably, our military cannot function as a "family business" with children of service members as the predominant source for the force. However, it was, until recently, a reliable pool of candidates—with the Army reporting in 2019 that 79% of recruits have a family member who served.<sup>1</sup> That number is likely to rapidly decrease as I am not alone in my hesitation to recommend military service to the next generation.

The Military Family Advisory Network found in its 2021 Military Family Programming Survey that 62.9% of military and veteran families would recommend military life, down from 74.5% in 2019.<sup>2</sup> Such a precipitous drop in such a short period of time is alarming.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Army Recruiting Command, "Facts and Figures," available at [https://recruiting.army.mil/pao/facts\\_figures/](https://recruiting.army.mil/pao/facts_figures/).

<sup>2</sup> Military Family Advisory Network, "2021 Military Family Support Programming Survey Results," available at <https://www.mfan.org/research-reports/2021-military-family-support-programming-survey-results-2/>.

Unfortunately, it will be many years before the full effect of such a decrease will be known, and it will take at least a generation to fix.

Deficits in recruitment potential from military families are just one facet of the broader crisis in military recruitment and overall retention in our armed forces. During the last fiscal year, the Army missed its recruiting goal by 15,000 active-duty soldiers, 25% of its target acquisition.<sup>3</sup>

This insufficiency forced the Army to downsize its planned active-duty end strength by 10,000. The current fiscal year is likely to be worse with projected active end strength shrinking by as much as 20,000 soldiers by September 2023.<sup>4</sup> As a result, our nation's primary land force, which contains critical joint, cross-branch enablers, could crater by 7% in only two years. This comes at a time when operational rotations to Europe and the Pacific are on the rise and the world is increasingly unstable.

The Army is not alone in its struggle. While the other services met their recruiting goals last year, it was predominantly due to the acceleration of their delayed-entry applicants. That success will be difficult, if not impossible, to replicate in 2023. In fact, earlier this month Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall voiced the struggle to recruit airmen and projected a 10% shortfall across the active Air Force for 2023, with a greater deficit in the Guard and Reserves.<sup>5</sup>

## Eligibility to Serve

Facing such a shortage of personnel, there have been widespread Department of Defense efforts to increase recruitment with targeted messaging campaigns, changes in slogans, and broad adjustments in overall strategy to include the Army's shift of \$1 billion to recruiting programs.<sup>6</sup>

However, even with this seemingly comprehensive effort, results are likely to be limited as the number of young Americans eligible to serve is at a catastrophic low of 23%.<sup>7</sup> This is

<sup>3</sup> Lolita C. Baldor, "Army misses recruiting goal by 15,000 soldiers," ArmyTimes (October 2, 2022), *available at* <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2022/10/02/army-misses-recruiting-goal-by-15000-soldiers/>.

<sup>4</sup> David Barno and Nora Bensahel, "Addressing The U.S. Military Recruiting Crisis," War on the Rocks (March 10, 2023), *available at* <https://warontherocks.com/2023/03/addressing-the-u-s-military-recruiting-crisis/>.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Novelly, "Air Force Will Likely Miss Recruiting Goals, Service Secretary Says," Military.com (March 7, 2023), *available at* [https://www.military.com/daily-news/2023/03/07/air-force-will-likely-miss-recruiting-goals-service-secretary-says.html?utm\\_source=sailthru&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=mil-ebb&SToverlay=de88742f-46f7-4f2c-819d-3b36a47d6a7e](https://www.military.com/daily-news/2023/03/07/air-force-will-likely-miss-recruiting-goals-service-secretary-says.html?utm_source=sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=mil-ebb&SToverlay=de88742f-46f7-4f2c-819d-3b36a47d6a7e).

<sup>6</sup> Ben Wolfgang, "Army to shift \$1 billion to recruiting, retention efforts; rely more on reserves as ranks shrink," The Washington Times (July 21, 2022), *available at* <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jul/21/army-shift-1-billion-recruiting-retention-efforts-/>.

<sup>7</sup> Courtney Kube and Mosheh Gains, "The Army has so far recruited only about half the soldiers it hoped for fiscal 2022, Army secretary says," NBC News (August 11, 2022), *available at* <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/military/army-far-recruited-half-soldiers-hoped-fiscal-2022-rcna42740>.

for a number of reasons:

- COVID-19 exacerbated already-rising adolescent mental health challenges with 58% of those aged 18 to 29 experiencing high levels of psychological distress at least once between March 2020 and September 2022.<sup>8</sup>
- School closures and remote instruction caused test scores to decline dramatically<sup>9</sup> and scores on the ASVAB, the military's standardized test for potential recruits, declined by as much as 9%.<sup>10</sup>
- Youth obesity rates increased from 19 to 22%.<sup>11</sup>

Most concerning, the desire to serve is only at 9%.<sup>12</sup> This devastatingly-low number means we are presently unable to effectively field an all-volunteer force capable of meeting the demands of our current threat picture. This is one of the greatest national security threats facing our nation.

## Decreasing Pride in our Nation

Just yesterday, the Wall Street Journal reported their poll, conducted in partnership with NORC at the University of Chicago, demonstrating the priorities that helped define our national character for generations are declining in importance—it included patriotism.

The decline was again precipitous, falling from 70% who reported it being “very important to them,” in 1998, to 38% today.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Giancarlo Pasquini and Scott Keeter, “At least four-in-ten U.S. adults have faced high levels of psychological distress during COVID-19 pandemic,” Pew Research Center (December 12, 2022), *available at* <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/12/12/at-least-four-in-ten-u-s-adults-have-faced-high-levels-of-psychologica-l-distress-during-covid-19-pandemic/>.

<sup>9</sup> Donna St. George, “American students' test scores plunge to levels unseen for decades,” The Washington Post (September 1, 2022), *available at* <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/09/01/student-test-scores-plunged-pandemic/>.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Army Public Affairs, “Transcript: Army Recruiting Media Round Table July 26, 2022,” U.S. Army (July 27, 2022), *available at* [https://www.army.mil/article/258809/transcript\\_army\\_recruiting\\_media\\_round\\_table\\_july\\_26\\_2022](https://www.army.mil/article/258809/transcript_army_recruiting_media_round_table_july_26_2022); David Barno and Nora Bensahel, “Addressing The U.S. Military Recruiting Crisis,” War on the Rocks (March 10, 2023), *available at* <https://warontherocks.com/2023/03/addressing-the-u-s-military-recruiting-crisis/>.

<sup>11</sup> Scott Neuman, “Children And Teens Gained Weight At An Alarming Rate During The Pandemic, The CDC Says,” NPR (September 17, 2022), *available at* <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2021/09/17/1038211236/weight-gain-obesity-children-teens-pandemic>.

<sup>12</sup> Dontavian Harrison, “Secretary of the Army Christine Wormuth's Remarks to the 2022 AUSA Opening Ceremony (October 10, 2022)(As Prepared),” U.S. Army (October 10, 2022), *available at* [https://www.army.mil/article/260969/secretary\\_of\\_the\\_army\\_christine\\_wormuths\\_remarks\\_to\\_the\\_2022\\_ausa\\_opening\\_ceremony\\_october\\_10\\_2022as\\_prepared](https://www.army.mil/article/260969/secretary_of_the_army_christine_wormuths_remarks_to_the_2022_ausa_opening_ceremony_october_10_2022as_prepared).

<sup>13</sup> Aaron Zitner, “America pulls back from values that once defined it, WSJ-NORC poll finds,” Wall Street Journal (March 27, 2023). *available at* [https://www.wsj.com/articles/americans-pull-back-from-values-that-once-defined-u-s-wsj-norc-poll-finds-df8534cd?mod=us\\_more\\_posl](https://www.wsj.com/articles/americans-pull-back-from-values-that-once-defined-u-s-wsj-norc-poll-finds-df8534cd?mod=us_more_posl).

As it stands, Republicans' pride in being American has consistently outpaced Democrats' and Independents' since 2001 and continues to do so today. However, Republicans' extreme national pride (58%) is now at its lowest point. Likewise, Independents' extreme pride, at 34%, is the lowest on record. After hitting a 22% low point in 2019, Democrats' extreme pride rose to 31% in 2021 at the start of Biden's presidency, but it is down this year to 26%.<sup>14</sup> All three major party groups show double-digit declines in pride compared with 2013, with Democrats' 30-point decline the largest.<sup>15</sup>

Pride is an imperative human emotion, particularly pride in the self. Feelings of pride reinforce positive, social behaviors like altruism and lead to adaptive behaviors such as achievement.<sup>16</sup> Conversely, people who are deliberately shamed—even over a modest violation of social norms—are at much greater risk for depression and anxiety disorders.<sup>17</sup> Worse, those who are repeatedly shamed are significantly less likely to possess the risk-taking habits necessary for success in adulthood with some permanently impacted by feelings of inferiority, hopelessness, and helplessness.<sup>18</sup>

While pride in self and pride in nation may not necessarily be related, it is highly likely both are contributing factors in the decision-making process to join the armed forces.

It is for this reason that curricula or instruction that hyper-focus negatively on our immutable characteristics are destructive to teams and esprit de corps. Moreover, a consistent focus on what divides us rather than what unites us is particularly pernicious to the aforementioned pride in nation.

This is not to call into question the necessity of grappling with the complexity of the historical past. It is the manner in which it is currently being done in many educational settings, organizations, and lamentably in the Department of Defense and at our service academies.

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<sup>14</sup> Megan Brenan, "Record-Low 38% Extremely Proud to Be American," Gallup (June 29, 2022), available at <https://news.gallup.com/poll/394202/record-low-extremely-proud-american.aspx>.

<sup>15</sup> Megan Brenan, "Record-Low 38% Extremely Proud to Be American," Gallup (June 29, 2022), available at <https://news.gallup.com/poll/394202/record-low-extremely-proud-american.aspx>.

<sup>16</sup> Jessica L. Tracy and Richard W. Robins, "The Psychological Structure of Pride: A Tale of Two Facets," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (2007), available at [https://ubc-emotionlab.ca/wp-content/files\\_mf/pridefacets.pdf](https://ubc-emotionlab.ca/wp-content/files_mf/pridefacets.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> Annette Kämmerer, "The Scientific Underpinnings and Impacts of Shame," *Scientific American* (August 9, 2019), available at <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-scientific-underpinnings-and-impacts-of-shame/>; Lewis M. Andrews, "

The Other Problem with Woke Schooling: It's Psychological Child Abuse," *RealClear Policy* (April 6, 2021), available at [https://www.realclearpolicy.com/articles/2021/04/06/the\\_other\\_problem\\_with\\_woke\\_schooling\\_its\\_psychological\\_child\\_abuse\\_771388.html](https://www.realclearpolicy.com/articles/2021/04/06/the_other_problem_with_woke_schooling_its_psychological_child_abuse_771388.html).

<sup>18</sup> Patrizia Velotti, Carlo Garofalo, Federica Bottazzi, and Vincenzo Caretti, "Faces of Shame: Implications for Self-Esteem, Emotion Regulation, Aggression, and Well-Being," *The Journal of Psychology* (November 18, 2016), available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00223980.2016.1248809>; Lewis M. Andrews, "

The Other Problem with Woke Schooling: It's Psychological Child Abuse," *RealClear Policy* (April 6, 2021), available at [https://www.realclearpolicy.com/articles/2021/04/06/the\\_other\\_problem\\_with\\_woke\\_schooling\\_its\\_psychological\\_child\\_abuse\\_771388.html](https://www.realclearpolicy.com/articles/2021/04/06/the_other_problem_with_woke_schooling_its_psychological_child_abuse_771388.html).

These programs do not build teams, they destroy them. They can also create a culture of fear of reprisal in which leaders feel incapable of providing corrections or addressing failings for fear of being labeled with an -ist or -ism.

Moreover, there is a unique danger in telling those who are called to fight our nation's battles that the very nation that they are expected to sacrifice and potentially die for is inherently bad. Or the people who make up that nation, and our military ranks, are irredeemably flawed.

In short, if we cannot defend our nation rhetorically, we will be unable to do so kinetically.

### **Multi-Factor Problem Set**

The sole function of our military is to deter our nation's enemies and, if that fails, to fight and win our nation's wars. Our once "big stick" is fast becoming a twig only capable of poking our enemy in the eye rather than deterring or defeating. Accounting for inflation, the Administration's proposed Department of Defense budget would again be cut for the third year in a row despite the rising aggression of China and the continued threat of Russia in Ukraine.<sup>19</sup> This is in direct contrast with China and their announced 7.2% increase in their defense budget, its fastest growth in four years.<sup>20</sup>

We are no longer in competition with either nation, we are in conflict. A failure to recognize and reorient towards these demands will be disastrous.

This necessary reorientation will require a close examination of the last twenty-two years of policy and leadership decisions which have resulted in multiple military failures with little to no accountability and poor command climate and culture which is decimating our ranks.

Some of the most detrimental decisions have been the casual disregard of data in favor of a political agenda. One such example was the out-of-hand rejection by then-Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus of a 2015 Marine Corps study concluding that gender-integrated combat formations did not move as quickly or shoot as accurately as all-male formations. Or that women were twice as likely as men to suffer combat injuries.

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<sup>19</sup> Bryant Harris, "GOP blasts 'inadequate' Biden defense budget as it vows spending cuts," DefenseNews (March 10, 2022), available at <https://www.defensenews.com/congress/budget/2023/03/10/gop-blasts-inadequate-biden-defense-budget-as-it-vows-spending-cuts/>.

<sup>20</sup> Bloomberg News, "China Defense Spending to Rise 7.2%, Fastest Pace in 4 Years," Bloomberg (March 4, 2023), available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-03-05/china-defense-spending-to-rise-7-2-fastest-pace-in-four-years#xj4y7vzkg>.

At the time, many of these disparities were dismissed and reframed as opportunities to train women more comprehensively with a push towards equal fitness standards between men and women. Neither the Marine Corps nor the Army followed through. To date, across the services, there are differences in physical fitness standards between men and women.

This is not helpful to women and makes it more difficult for them to earn trust and the confidence of those they serve alongside. In fact, broad low standards can have negative effects on unit morale and worse impacts on combat effectiveness.

According to Kristen Griest, one of the first women to graduate from Army Ranger school, "it is wholly unethical to allow the standards of the nation's premiere fighting units to degrade so badly, just to accommodate the lowest-performing soldiers."<sup>21</sup>

She further argues, "the intent [of a single standard] was not to ensure that women and men will have an equal likelihood of meeting those standards. Rather, it is incumbent upon women who volunteer for the combat arms profession to ensure they are fully capable and qualified for it."<sup>22</sup>

Make no mistake, none of this is to say women cannot fight or contribute. In fact, it is often when we recognize the biological differences between men and women that we increase lethality. An example is the heroic and lauded efforts of the Cultural Support Teams and Female Engagement Teams in our most recent conflicts. Their conceptualization was rooted in the recognition that women and womanhood are unique and thereby would allow access to places, people, and resources which would be denied to men.

It is the frequent Department of Defense denials of reality and their unwillingness to confront hard truths which ultimately places lethality at risk. The military must be a pacesetter, not a trend follower.

It is therefore unsurprising that American confidence in our military is dropping. While confidence in almost all major institutions is on the decline, the military has long been a hold-out of American faith and trust. It is for that reason the recent 8 percentage point

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<sup>21</sup> Stephen Losey, "Pioneering Female Ranger School Grad: Lowering Fitness Standards for Women Is a Bad Idea, (25 February 2021), available at <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2021/02/25/pioneering-female-ranger-school-grad-lowering-fitness-standards-women-bad-idea.html>

<sup>22</sup> Stephen Losey, "Pioneering Female Ranger School Grad: Lowering Fitness Standards for Women Is a Bad Idea, (25 February 2021), available at <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2021/02/25/pioneering-female-ranger-school-grad-lowering-fitness-standards-women-bad-idea.html>

drop in two years, from 2020 to 2022, is remarkable.<sup>23</sup> The Reagan National Defense Survey found a more precipitous drop with confidence decreasing from 70% in 2018 to just 45% in 2021.<sup>24</sup>

Such perilous numbers cannot be ignored. While it is difficult to assess with certainty the weight of each factor individually, it can be stated with confidence there are certain drivers of the current challenge.

- Operation Iraqi Freedom and the falsehoods that launched the conflict have produced a portion of the veteran population which struggles to make meaning of the sacrifices they made alongside the failed outcomes and destabilized nation.<sup>25</sup>
- Operation Enduring Freedom resulted in 69% of Americans believing the U.S. failed in achieving its goals.<sup>26</sup>
- These two conflicts—how they were fought, covered by the media, and concluded—are likely part of the reason many potential recruits cite fear of death, worries about post-traumatic stress disorder, and leaving friends and family as their primary concerns for not joining the military.<sup>27</sup>
- Both during and after the troop withdrawal, large majorities of Americans expressed negative views of the Biden administration’s handling of the situation in Afghanistan.<sup>28</sup>
- A 2021 survey found 30% of Americans aged 16 to 24 said that the possibility of sexual harassment or assault was one of the main reasons why they would not consider joining the military.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Jeffrey M. Jones, “Confidence in U.S. Institutions Down; Average at New Low,” Gallup (July 5, 2022), *available at* <https://news.gallup.com/poll/394283/confidence-institutions-down-average-new-low.aspx>.

<sup>24</sup> Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation & Institute, “2022 National Defense Survey Executive Summary,” (November 2022), *available at* <https://www.reaganfoundation.org/media/359966/reagan-survey-2022-charts-112822.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> Murtaza Hussain, “‘Trauma Never Goes Away’: As America Forgets, Iraq War Stays With U.S. Veterans,” *The Intercept* (March 16, 2023), *available at* <https://theintercept.com/2023/03/16/iraq-war-veterans/>.

<sup>26</sup> Katherine Schaeffer, “A year later, a look back at public opinion about the U.S. military exit from Afghanistan,” Pew Research Center (August 17, 2022), *available at* <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/08/17/a-year-later-a-look-back-at-public-opinion-about-the-u-s-military-exit-from-afghanistan/>.

<sup>27</sup> Lolita C. Baldor, “Army sees safety, not ‘wokeness,’ as top recruiting obstacle,” *AP News* (February 12, 2023), *available at* <https://apnews.com/article/afghanistan-politics-military-and-defense-race-ethnicity-6548adcb0fee590f3427771d1e1eeea7>.

<sup>28</sup> Katherine Schaeffer, “A year later, a look back at public opinion about the U.S. military exit from Afghanistan,” Pew Research Center (August 17, 2022), *available at* <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/08/17/a-year-later-a-look-back-at-public-opinion-about-the-u-s-military-exit-from-afghanistan/>.

<sup>29</sup> Office of People Analytics, “Fall 2021 Propensity Update,” *JAMRS* (August 9, 2022), *available at* <https://jamrs.defense.gov/Portals/20/Documents/YP51Fall2021PUBLICRELEASEPropensityUpdate.pdf>.

- Major General Alex Fink, head of Army marketing, states young people don't see the Army "as relevant in their lives,"<sup>30</sup> exacerbating a "knowledge gap" that has prevented the Army from reaching many Americans and an "identity gap" that keeps potential recruits from seeing themselves in the service or understanding its culture.<sup>31</sup>
- The top three factors decreasing confidence in the military are performance and competence of presidents as Commanders-in-Chief (34%), military leadership being politicized (34%), and "woke" practices undermining military effectiveness (30%).<sup>32</sup>

Regarding the latter there is, in fact, clear data that the military faces a profound political problem though perhaps not in the manner in which it is most frequently conceptualized.

Every year since 1975, the [Monitoring the Future \(MTF\) survey](#) collects large, nationally representative samples of 12th-grade students.

One question on the survey asks, "Suppose you could do just what you'd like, and nothing stood in your way. How many of the following things would you WANT to do?" Service in the armed forces is one of the options.

- In 2015, for example, 18.1% of white Republicans expressed a desire to serve in the military. In 2021, that number was 18.9%.
- Similarly, the percentage of white Southerners who wanted to serve in the military remained unchanged between 2015 (16.2%) and 2021 (16.6%).
- The same story applies to whites living outside of large metropolitan areas, with 16.5% wanting military service in 2015 and 16.6% wanting it in 2021.
- In 2015, 18.6% of young, white Democratic men expressed a desire to serve in the military. By 2021, that number had dropped to only 2.9%.
- Young black men (12.1% young Hispanic men (14.3%) and young, white Republican men (25.3%) were all at least four times more likely than young, white Democratic men in 2021 to "want" to serve in the armed forces.

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<sup>30</sup> Lolita C. Baldor, "Army sees safety, not 'wokeness,' as top recruiting obstacle," AP News (February 12, 2023), *available at* <https://apnews.com/article/afghanistan-politics-military-and-defense-race-ethnicity-6548adcb0fee590f3427771d1e1eaa7>.

<sup>31</sup> Ben Wolfgang, "Army to shift \$1 billion to recruiting, retention efforts; rely more on reserves as ranks shrink," The Washington Times (July 21, 2022), *available at* <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jul/21/army-shift-1-billion-recruiting-retention-efforts/>.

<sup>32</sup> Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation & Institute, "2022 National Defense Survey Executive Summary," (November 2022), *available at* <https://www.reaganfoundation.org/media/359966/reagan-survey-2022-charts-112822.pdf>.



- Young Democratic white men were also significantly less interested in military service than young black women (9.5%) and young white Republican women (10.9%).

There seems to be pretty clear data that suggests a potential precipitous decline in the desire to serve in uniform amongst progressive whites.<sup>33</sup> By contrast, there is no current evidence that white Republicans, Southerners, or rural inhabitants have, so far, been disincentivized from being recruited into the service.

However, it is highly likely the current tone and tenor of service are leading to a disproportionate number of them leaving the service. For example, the current Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Michael Gilday, placed Ibram X. Kendi's book, *How to Be an Antiracist*—one of the leading sourcebooks on critical race theory—to his list of recommended readings.<sup>34</sup> Or an example from my alma mater, the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, in which problems of “whiteness” were described to cadets with one training slide that read: “in order to understand racial inequality and slavery, it is first necessary to address whiteness.”<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, President Biden signed an executive order in 2021 requiring all organizations in the military, as well as in the rest of the federal government, to create Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) offices. These offices are in structure to produce strategic DEI plans and to create bureaucratic structures to report on progress towards DEI goals. The overarching goal being “advancing equity for all.”<sup>36</sup>

There is no equity in combat and there should not be a push for it in our society. Forced “equality,” which is equity by definition, leads to a lack of competition. This does not level playing fields for the positive, it flattens capability.

## Conclusion

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<sup>33</sup> Kevin Wallsten, “What the Data Says About the Military Recruitment Crisis,” RealClearDefense (February 23, 2023), available at [https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2023/02/23/what\\_the\\_data\\_says\\_about\\_the\\_militarys\\_recruiting\\_crisis\\_883427.html](https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2023/02/23/what_the_data_says_about_the_militarys_recruiting_crisis_883427.html).

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Spoehr, “The Rise of Wokeness in the Military,” (September 30, 2022). available from <https://www.heritage.org/defense/commentary/the-rise-wokeness-the-military>.

<sup>35</sup> David Propper, “US Army teaching Critical Race Theory to West Point cadets: report,” (June 20, 2022). available from <https://nypost.com/2022/06/20/west-point-cadets-being-taught-critical-race-theory-report/>.

<sup>36</sup> President Joe Biden, “Executive Order On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government,” (January 20, 2021). available from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-order-advancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal-government/>.

There are no easy solutions. The problem with recruitment and retention in our military are long in the making, and it will be long in the fixing. However, if not addressed rapidly and with clear-eyed commitment, the all-volunteer force will reach a breaking point and cease to exist in a manner capable of meeting the demands of our nation.

There must be comprehensive consideration of ways to expand eligibility and increase desire and willingness to serve without compromising the capabilities of the force. In fact, we must be looking to expand capability and capacity. "Business as usual" is no longer an option as we look to the pacing threat of China. We need creative solutions both internal and external to the Department of Defense to address shortfalls and shortcomings.

Importantly, there must be a reconsideration of the diversity, equity, and inclusion framework being utilized in theory and in practice both in our education system and in the Department of Defense. No good leader would say diversity is a bad thing. Diversity of all types, to include those often not considered such as cognitive diversity (i.e. diversity of thought) and diversity of experience, builds strong teams.

And the military should, and must be, standards-based and a meritocracy.

The world is an increasingly dangerous place. For now, warfare remains a predominantly human endeavor. It is Americans who fill our ranks and operate our weapon systems. Even many of our "unmanned" systems have a "manned" component. Our current and future men and women in uniform need legislators willing to hold the Department of Defense accountable for its failings and demand results. As they say, words without actions are meaningless.

There's a phrase often used in the military, "getting left of bang." It means you have accurately observed pre-event indicators or warning signs of what's to come and acted proactively to prevent it or meet it head on. Being on the opposite end of the timeline is referred to as being "right of bang."

We are now "right of bang," and headed to a much louder one if we fail to heed the alarm bells ringing. We must directly address ongoing challenges within the Department of Defense and find ways to reach our youngest generations currently unfit, unready, and disinterested in service to our nation.

Thank you.