



NATIONAL COMMISSION ON MILITARY, NATIONAL, AND PUBLIC SERVICE

Minutes of March 2020 Commission Meeting

The National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service (the Commission) held a meeting on March 23, 2020, at its offices in Arlington, VA, with further sessions on March 24-26, 2020. The entire meeting concerned pre-decisional and deliberative matters and was closed to the public pursuant to Public Law 114-328, section 554(b)(3). The Commissioners agreed to make a separate version of these minutes available to the public.

Attendance

Commissioners present in person:

- The Honorable Dr. Joseph Heck
- Mr. Thomas Kilgannon
- Ms. Shawn Skelly
- The Honorable Debra Wada

Commissioners present telephonically (as indicated herein):

- Mr. Edward Allard
- Mr. Steve Barney
- The Honorable Mark Gearan
- The Honorable Avril Haines
- Ms. Jeanette James
- Mr. Alan Khazei

Commissioners absent:

- The Honorable Dr. Janine Davidson

Staff present:

- Paul Lekas, General Counsel
- Peter Morgan, Director of Operations
- Jill Rough, Director of Research and Analysis (by telephone)
- Sandy Scott, Director of Government Affairs and Public Engagement
- Other Commission staff

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March 23, 2020

Business Meeting

Chairman Heck convened the Commission at 0900 ET. Also present in person were Vice Chair Wada, Mr. Kilgannon, and Ms. Skelly. Present by telephone were Vice Chair Gearan, Mr. Allard, Mr. Barney, Ms. Haines, and Ms. James. Staff members attended the meeting in person and telephonically.

Chairman Heck provided an overview of the week, noting that each meeting would occur telephonically and that an all-Commission debrief would occur telephonically at 1700 ET on Monday through Thursday.

Vice Chair Wada moved to approve the public and internal minutes for the February 2020 meeting. The motion was seconded and the Commission voted unanimously to adopt the minutes subject to technical edits and clarifications.

Sandy Scott, Director of Government Affairs and Public Engagement, led a discussion of the meetings scheduled for the week. He noted that the public event originally scheduled for March 26 would occur instead on June 25 at the Department of the Interior due to restrictions required by the COVID-19 pandemic. Jeff McNichols, Deputy Director of Government Affairs, reviewed the week's agenda, including telephonic meetings with three agencies and two congressional offices on March 23, three federal agencies and eight congressional offices on March 24, seven congressional offices on March 25, two congressional offices on March 26, and three congressional offices on March 27. He noted that the schedule remains subject to change and the Commission would be notified of any changes.

Mr. Scott explained that the Commission would adhere to its plan to release the final report on March 25 and would hold a telephonic rather than in-person press conference. Members of Congress, including Senators Inhofe and Reed and leadership of the For Country Caucus, would participate in the press conference. He noted the difficult media environment and highlighted staff's focus on earned media, including an exclusive with the *New York Times*. Staff is also pitching an op-ed by Chairman Heck, which ties the Commission's work to the COVID-19 pandemic, and a separate one by Mr. Barney that addresses public service. Mr. Scott encouraged other Commissioners with available time to prepare their own op-eds and said that staff is working on several articles to publish under Commissioner bylines.

Mr. Scott explained that the Commission would hold four stakeholder briefings on March 26 with policy and thought leaders in discrete topic areas. He noted that further briefings with stakeholders on different topic areas are being scheduled for April.

Turning to the Commission's legislative proposals, Mr. Scott explained that the For Country Caucus remains intent on introducing a comprehensive bill based on those proposals and timing would depend on when they receive a draft from the Office of Legislative Counsel in the House of Representatives. He explained that Senator Reed plans to introduce the comprehensive bill in the Senate but is looking to identify an appropriate cosponsor before he does so.

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Several Commissioners unable to travel expressed interest in helping the effort from afar. Chairman Heck explained the intent for Commissioners present in the offices to participate in the meetings due to logistical challenges.

Mr. Scott then reviewed the material provided to the Commission to prepare Commissioners for briefings with agencies, members of Congress, media, stakeholders, and the public. He focused the Commission on top-line messages and briefly reviewed other items.

Mr. Barney requested staff to prepare a counsel-approved response to questions the Commission may receive about how to engage with elected officials on the Commission's proposals.

Commissioners also requested information regarding costs and how to respond to questions regarding the cost of various proposals. Chairman Heck explained that staff had prepared material on this topic and requested that it be shared with the full Commission.

The full Commission meeting concluded at approximately 0948 ET.

Thereafter, those Commissioners present in person discussed roles and responsibilities for the day's meetings and the feasibility of other Commissioners joining specific telephonic meetings where their presence would be critical. This discussion concluded at 1010 ET.

Commission Debrief

The Commission reconvened from 1700 to 1735 ET to review the meetings that occurred during the day. Present in person were Chairman Heck, Vice Chair Wada, Mr. Kilgannon, and Ms. Skelly. Present by telephone were Mr. Barney, Ms. Haines, Ms. James, and a representative for Dr. Davidson. Vice Chair Gearan, Mr. Allard, and Mr. Khazei did not attend. Staff members attended the meeting in person and telephonically.

Vice Chair Wada led the meeting, as Chairman Heck was delayed at the start.

Vice Chair Wada reported on a meeting with the Department of Defense (DoD), represented by William Bushman, Performing the Duties of Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel & Readiness, and his senior staff. Mr. Kilgannon noted that Mr. Bushman asked whether the Commission studied national service practices in China and Russia through a lens of great power competition and whether the Commission's work might help to understand what is going on in those countries; Commissioners said that they did not research that specific issue. Mr. Bushman also asked questions about the recommendation to expand Selective Service registration to women and whether women would be considered for combat roles. The DoD representatives also inquired about funding for civic education and JROTC programs and whether the Commission believed that investments in these programs would reduce recruiting costs over the longer term. Vice Chair Wada described the meeting as overall positive and noted that conversations with DoD would continue as they have more time to digest the report.

Chairman Heck joined the meeting at this point.

Vice Chair Wada reported on a meeting with Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-VA 11) focused on public service. Ms. Skelly noted that Rep. Connolly displayed a depth of immersion in the issues around

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public service. He asked about veterans' preference, hiring practices, the proposed Council for Military, National, and Public Service, the federal fellowship and scholarship center, and other Commission recommendations. M. Kilgannon added that Rep. Connolly complemented the Commission on its work and was drawn to the recommendations on improving critical skills in the federal government and ways to attract young people to federal service.

Vice Chair Wada reported on a meeting with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the White House Domestic Policy Council. She described the conversation as positive overall and Mr. Kilgannon concurred, noting that they seemed in agreement with and appreciative of the Commission's recommendations. They asked targeted questions about veterans' preference and conveyed their view that the preference is not working as intended; the Commission explained that the proposal is intended to enhance the preference and make it work better.

Vice Chair Wada reported on a meeting with Barbara Stewart, the Chief Executive Officer of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). Ms. Stewart is wholly supportive of the Commission recommendations and inquired about the Commission's priorities and what CNCS can do to further those. In the discussion, Chairman Heck focused on the need to increase national service positions through the fellowship proposal and the need to increase the living allowance or stipend. Mr. Kilgannon noted that Ms. Stewart expressed compliments about the Commission's work on civic education. She also said she would need more time to digest the fellowship proposal to understand how it would work.

Ms. Skelly reported on a meeting with staff for Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI). Sen. Johnson's staff came prepared and well informed about issues covering the Commission's mandate. The meeting covered the breadth of the Commission's recommendations. They expressed particular interest in civic education, efforts to make national service available to ex-offenders, and growing JROTC.

Thereafter, Commission staff provided updates on the March 24 schedule.

March 24, 2020

Commission Debrief

The Commission reconvened from 1700 to 1740 ET to review the meetings that occurred during the day. Present in person were Chairman Heck, Vice Chair Wada, Mr. Kilgannon, and Ms. Skelly. Present by telephone were Mr. Allard, Mr. Barney, Ms. Haines, Ms. James, and a representative for Dr. Davidson. Vice Chair Gearan joined at approximately 1720 ET. Mr. Khazei did not attend. Staff members attended the meeting in person and telephonically.

Chairman Heck remarked on the productive discussions held throughout the day and recognized Commissioners for participating in them.

Chairman Heck reported on a meeting with Jody Olsen, Director of the Peace Corps. Ms. Olsen discussed the effort to repatriate Peace Corps volunteers in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. She expressed support for the Commission's efforts to expand service and increase awareness, which she felt would have a collateral positive effect on the Peace Corps. She did not have concerns with any of the Commission recommendations.

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Chairman Heck reported on a meeting with Don Benton, Director of the Selective Service System (SSS). Mr. Allard joined this meeting. Mr. Benton was very supportive of almost all Commission recommendations and appreciated the Commission's request that SSS receive funds necessary to execute expanded requirements. He expressed opposition to recommendation 38, which would provide a "cure period" for individuals to register belatedly and retain eligibility for certain federal benefits. Mr. Benton felt that recommendation would encourage people not to register and he said he would be vocal in opposing this recommendation.

Vice Chair Wada reported on a meeting with Sen. Chris Coons (D-DE). Sen. Coons is a very strong proponent of national service. The Commission will follow up to arrange a briefing with the full National Service Caucus when able to do so.

Staff reported on a call with approximately thirty representatives from the federal government interagency, many of whom had participated in previous briefings about the Commission's work. Interagency representatives expressed most interest in public service, cross-cutting, and civic education recommendation and overall were impressed at the comprehensiveness of the report.

Mr. Kilgannon discussed a meeting with a staffer for Rep. Lloyd Smucker (R-PA 11). Rep. Smucker has interest generally in education, both K-12 and higher education, and was interested in how the Commission addressed the concerns of the Amish community, in which he was raised. He expressed interest in the Commission's work and willingness to send a representative to a townhall or other event to discuss the Commission's report.

Chairman Heck reported on a meeting with Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-TX 13). Although Rep. Thornberry had not yet read the report, he was laudatory about the Commission's efforts and thanked the Commission for its work. Ms. James, who also participated, noted Rep. Thornberry's remarked that the Commission recommendations go beyond the jurisdiction of the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) and, within HASC, go beyond the purview of the Military Personnel Subcommittee. He said that he would be interested in holding a hearing of the full HASC once the COVID-19 challenges have passed. Chairman Heck noted that earlier in the day, Rep. Thornberry issued a press release regarding the Commission.

Chairman Heck reported on a meeting with Rep. Jack Bergman (R-MI 1), a retired lieutenant general in the Marines. He has interests that span the Commission's report including national service and military service. He also sits on the House Veterans Affairs Committee. He also expressed interest in civic education and asked about how the Commission's recommendation for the federal government to encourage civic education could be distinguished from the controversial encouragement of Common Core standards, which raises concerns for many Republicans. Rep. Bergman was satisfied with Chairman Heck's response to this question and

Chairman Heck discussed how he differentiated between the Commission's civic education proposal and the Common Core effort. He explained, first, the disparity in funding by the federal government for civic education (about \$5 million) versus STEM education (about \$3.2 billion). He then explained that unlike Common Core, which was incentivized through the Race to the Top program, the Commission's approach is to provide best practice guidelines and would not mandate adoption of specific features of a civic education curriculum, noting that civic education

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can be weaved throughout coursework. The approach is to provide federal funds to support local school districts adopting best practices, at their discretion, to further civic education. Chairman Heck recommended that staff develop talking points to assist other Commissioners in addressing similar lines of inquiry.

Mr. McNichols reported on a meeting with staff for Rep. Michael Kelly (R-PA 16). Rep. Kelly is the ranking member on the HASC Military Personnel Subcommittee. Rep. Kelly's staffer indicated the Congressman's interest in Selective Service and national mobilization issues, as well as recommendations focused on military service. Mr. McNichols reported that he was receptive to policy proposals focused on narrowing the civil-military divide and recommended more information about the Commission's recommendations.

Ms. Skelly reported on a call with staff for Rep. Rick Allen (R-GA 12). Rep. Allen has interest in the Commission's national service fellowship proposal because it might help to bring national service to smaller communities.

Chairman Heck reported on a call with Stephanie Barna, General Counsel on the Senate Armed Service Committee (SASC), who stood in for Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-OK), who was unavailable. The discussion focused on how Sen. Inhofe can help to amplify the Commission's message.

Following additional discussion about the meetings scheduled for March 25, the Commission concluded its meeting for the day.

March 25, 2020

Commission Debrief

The Commission reconvened from 1700 to 1720 ET to review the meetings that occurred during the day. Present in person were Chairman Heck, Vice Chair Wada, Mr. Kilgannon, and Ms. Skelly. Present by telephone were Vice Chair Gearan, Mr. Barney, Ms. James, Mr. Khazei, and a representative for Dr. Davidson. Mr. Allard and Ms. Haines did not attend. Staff members attended the meeting in person and telephonically.

Chairman Heck praised the Vice Chairs for their presentations during the morning press conference. Several other Commissioners provided positive feedback about the press conference and the statements by members of Congress.

Mr. McNichols reported on a call with staff for Rep. Lori Trahan (D-MA 3). He noted that Rep. Trahan is a member of the HASC and has interests that span the Commission's work. She has interest in championing some Commission recommendations for the FY21 NDAA and Mr. McNichols said that staff would follow up with Rep. Trahan.

Mr. McNichols reported on a call with staff for Rep. Ralph Abraham (R-LA 5). Like Rep. Trahan, Rep. Abraham is a member of the HASC. He is also a member of the Military Personnel Subcommittee. The meeting focused on military service and national service. Rep. Abraham has a strong interest in the National Guard Youth Challenge program, having served in the National guard.

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Chairman Heck reported on a call with Rep. Susie Lee (D-NV 3), who holds the seat that Chairman Heck once held. She serves on the House Foreign Affairs Committee and on the Education and Labor Committee. She is active in K-12 education and was receptive and liked the Commission's recommendations on civic education and the idea of a Public Service Corps. She also expressed eagerness to contribute to the Commission's work.

Mr. McNichols reported on a call with staff for Rep. Elissa Slotkin (D-MI 8). Rep. Slotkin is a member of the HASC Readiness Subcommittee. The discussion covered a broad range of topics and focused on Selective Service, military service, and federal hiring. Rep. Slotkin may have interest in introducing proposals as part of the FY21 NDAA process.

Chairman Heck reported on a meeting with Rep. John Garamendi (D-CA 3). Rep. Garamendi is a member of the HASC and serves as chair of the Readiness Subcommittee. He expressed significant interest in the Peace Corps. He also expressed interest in getting many of the Commission recommendations into the FY21 NDAA.

Mr. McNichols reported on a meeting with staff for Sen. Ben Sasse (R-NE). Sen. Sasse, who serves as well as a member of the Cyberspace Solarium Commission, has significant interest in cyber-related recommendations for military and public service as well as in modernization of Selective Service.

Chairman Heck reported on a call with Rep. Susan Davis (D-CA 53), with whom the Commission met during its visit to San Diego. Rep. Davis offered to do as much as possible to support the Commission's recommendations this year. She is not seeing reelection and as a former member hopes to focus on many of the issues that the Commission has addressed.

Chairman Heck reported on a meeting with Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-WI). She is very interested and supportive of the Commission's recommendations and expressed interest in remaining engaged with the Commission's efforts.

Thereafter, Commission staff provided updates on press coverage, statements issued by stakeholder organizations, and meetings scheduled for March 26.

March 26, 2020

Commission Debrief

The Commission reconvened from 1700 to 1730 ET to review the meetings that occurred during the day. Present in person were Chairman Heck, Vice Chair Wada, Mr. Kilgannon, and Ms. Skelly. Present by telephone were Mr. Allard, Mr. Barney, Ms. Haines, Ms. James, Mr. Khazei, and a representative for Dr. Davidson. Vice Chair Gearan did not attend. Staff members attended the meeting in person and telephonically.

Ms. Skelly reported on a meeting with staff for Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL). Sen. Duckworth's staff felt the Commission's report would resound with her and noted her interest in many of the different issues covered by the report.

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Chairman Heck reported on interviews held with National Public Radio and Federal News Network.

Mr. McNichols reported on a meeting with staff for Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT). The meeting focused on recommendations relating to veterans, including veterans' preference, the Veterans Recruitment Appointment authority, and the Veterans Health Administration.

Mr. McNichols reported on a meeting with Rep. Jamie Raskin (D-MD 8). Mr. Khazei and Ms. Skelly also joined the meeting. The meeting focused on public service and national service.

Staff and Commissioners then reported on four stakeholder briefings held in the afternoon. Those briefings were held with stakeholders representing interests in (a) national service, (b) opportunity youth, (c) civic education and service learning, and (d) Selective Service.

Chairman Heck noted that Commission staff has additional engagement scheduled for March 27 and thereafter and thanked staff for their work during the week and Commissioners for participating in person and over the phone. He noted that the Commission may convene ad hoc meetings by telephone or internet in the next few months, its next physical meeting likely would not occur until around June 25.

Prepared by Paul Lekas, General Counsel

Adopted by the Commission on May 27, 2020.