



NATIONAL COMMISSION ON MILITARY, NATIONAL, AND
PUBLIC SERVICE

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Subject: Roundtable discussion with Air National Guard leadership in Memphis, Tennessee

The following is a record of a roundtable discussion with commissioners and the leadership of the Air National Guard in Memphis, Tennessee, which took place on August 17, 2018, at the Air National Guard facility at the Memphis International Airport. At the meeting, participants discussed the role of the wing, recruiting, and motivations for service. The conversation was facilitated by Ms. Deb Wada and included Commissioners and staff. This memorandum is protected by the deliberative process privilege and should be treated as For Official Use Only. This memorandum is not a verbatim transcript of the discussion.

Attendees:

- Commissioners: Ms. Deb Wada, Ms. Shawn Skelly, Ms. Avril Haines, Mr. Mark Gearan, Mr. Steve Barney
- Commission Staff: Kent Abernathy, Keri Lowry, Paul Lekas, Annie Rorem, Katie McSheffrey, Tara Razjouyan, Cristina Flores, Brian Collins
- Officers in the Memphis wing of the Tennessee Air National Guard

Key Takeaways:

- Recruiting is not a problem for the Tennessee Air National Guard.
- To help units that are having trouble recruiting, participants suggested increasing the maximum age of eligibility, especially for pilots.
- Participants expressed frustration that media depictions of the military give the public an unrealistically negative view of military service.

Meeting Discussion

Ms. Wada provided an overview of the Commission’s mission and began a round of introductions. The Air National Guard (ANG) officers introduced themselves. All are long-serving guardsmen with prior active-component service.

One participant mentioned that he graduated from the U.S. Air Force Academy, and he spends a lot of time encouraging young people to apply and attend, especially people of color. He said that one of the biggest challenges to overcome is the message that young people receive about military service from the media, such as scandals and negative experiences of individual service members. Often the media overlooks the huge opportunities for young people in the military.

Ms. Wada asked about recruitment.

A participant responded that each Tennessee ANG wing (Memphis, Nashville, and Knoxville) has exceeded its recruiting target.

Ms. Wada asked about quality of recruits.

A participant said they have not had problems with the quality of enlistees.

Another participant said that one of their recruiters was recognized as the ANG national rookie recruiter of the year, adding that the recruiting team does an excellent job focusing on the inner city as a source of enlistees.

Ms. Skelly asked about operational tempo.

A participant said the tempo is pretty fast, and that they just finished a five-year deployment cycle. The airplane (C-17) goes worldwide, and they have seen ebb and flow in terms of mission sets.

Ms. Skelly asked how hard they are working at steady state and if the high operational tempo affects the recruiting impact.

A participant said that the operational tempo had not actually been a recruiting challenge for their wing because only about 10-12 percent of the airmen actually deploy, and that will not happen for 4-5 years. Most of the work is done on base. Frequency of deployments is more of an issue for the Army. That said, the ANG wing in Knoxville has regular deployments to the Middle East because of the mission set for their airplane (the KC-135 fuel tanker).

Ms. Haines said that the Commissioners have heard frustration about the eligibility criteria and asked if that should be reviewed?

A participant said that allowing people to join the military at a later age would be helpful—many younger people have kids and cannot join at that time, but they would be interested in serving closer to age 40 when kids are older. Enlisted service members can enter a little later without a waiver, but pilots cannot join after age 30 without a waiver. He suggested increasing the maximum age for pilot training, arguing that those individuals are typically more mature and can probably still handle the rigors of pilot training.

Mr. Barney asked about how the state-focused mission of the National Guard helps to make people aware of military service opportunities.

A participant said that the C-17 does not offer much functionality to help the state, so they do not get much benefit. Their airmen did help clear debris from roads during a recent flooding event, though he added that the Army probably does that better than the ANG, since they have high-water vehicles and helicopters.

Mr. Gearan asked about the gender breakdown of airmen in the wing.

A participant said it is roughly 70 percent male, 30 percent female.

Mr. Gearan mentioned that, at an earlier engagement, participants discussing the potential for registration of women for Selective Service asked how inclusion of women in the armed forces is working now. He asked the ANG officers for their views on this topic.

A participant said it is working well—that an increasing number of young women are interested in serving.

Ms. Wada asked how to change the perception that women are not interested or cannot serve.

A participant said the media plays a large role, and it would help to highlight the “90 percent” of things that are going well as opposed to the times when things do not go well.

Ms. Wada asked what would be an effective marketing pitch to increase propensity?

A participant said that the state of Tennessee recently enacted a law that adds state funding for new guard members to earn a four-year college degree ([source](#)), and that has been effective at attracting people. He added that they host open houses to show members of the community what opportunities are available, and that recruiters focus on the benefits as well as serving something greater than yourself.