Subject: MSO/VSO Discussion

The following is a record of a meeting with Commissioners and representatives of Military Service Organizations (MSOs) and Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs), which took place on October 17, 2018 at the Association of the United States Army. At the meeting, participants discussed issues related to the mission of the Commission from the perspective of MSOs and VSOs. The conversation was facilitated by Chairman Joseph Heck, and included Ed Allard, Steve Barney, Mark Gearan, Jeannette James, Tom Kilgannon, Shawn Skelly, and Debra Wada. [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: Joseph Heck, Mark Gearan, Debra Wada, Ed Allard, Steve Barney, Jeannette James, Tom Kilgannon, Shawn Skelly,
- Commission Staff: Jill Rough,
- Representatives of Military Service Organizations and Veterans Service Organization; Hosted by the Association of the United States Army.

Key Takeaways:
- Participants generally supported the existence of the Selective Service System and the registration of women for the draft.
- Participants generally opposed mandatory national service, but supported the creation of a culture of service, including through civics education.

Meeting Discussion
The discussion began with an introduction of the Commission by GEN (Ret.) Carter Ham. Following GEN (Ret.) Ham’s introduction, Chairman Heck continued by explaining the origins of the Commission and the expansion of the Commission’s mandate by Senators Jack Reed and John McCain. He noted that the Commission traveled around the country receiving comments from the public, while looking at ways to increase propensity to serve across types of service, the future of the Selective Service System (SSS), and whether women should register for the draft. He then asked the representatives around the room to introduce themselves.
Chairman Heck then initiated the discussion by asking whether selective service should continue and who should have to register for selective service.

One participant responded by saying that the Selective Service System should stay in place, and that there was no reason women should not register for the draft. They offered that selective service would be needed in the case of war with a major mobilization. They also noted that the draft should not automatically be used for combat units.

Another participant argued that the SSS should be adjusted so that people know what they are registering for. They agreed that women should be required to register.

One participant argued that the SSS should not exist—because it is not fair—but in the case of conscription, women should be required to register.

Chairman Heck asked this participant if they would support the existence of selective service if more exemptions were granted to reduce the pool of eligible people.

The panelist answered that they would not.

A different participant stated that their organization supports LGBTQ service members and families. They noted that that their membership supported the existence of the SSS and overwhelmingly agreed that women—and transgender Americans—should be required to serve.

Another participant offered that the SSS should be updated and modernized.

Chairman Heck asked whether Americans with critical skills should have to keep their information updated with SSS.

One participant asked how that information would be verified.

Chairman Heck answered that you may have to upload documentation.

Another participant asked whether the SSS could be used for other forms of service.

Chairman Heck then answered that the Commission was looking at a “Serve America” system which would link military, national, and public service.

A participant stated that there are currently consequences for not registering for selective service and asked what the consequences would be in the case of national service registration.

Chairman Heck responded by stating that the goal of commission is to create a universal expectation of service, and that this would likely be a generational change.

A participant noted that people often do not realize what is at stake by not registering for the SSS. They argued that an educational campaign would be needed to explain any registration system.

Another participant argued that other types of service should not be elevated to the level of military service.

After being pressed on this stance, yet another participant answered that military service is unique because you risk your life—“write a blank check to the government.”

Ms. Skelly asked about the 70 percent of Americans who are not able to serve the military.

That participant said that those people should be encouraged to serve in other ways.
A participant then argued that the military’s quality stems from its nature as an All-Volunteer Force, and that the Commission should focus on building a culture of service rather than on conscription.

**Chairman Heck** noted that the Commissioners had noticed a lack of civics education across the country.

A participant then argued that it would not be up to the Commission to define which types of service are more important, and that all Americans should be encouraged to serve in some way.

Another participant said that national service is a great idea, but that the Commission should proceed with caution because many Americans are suspicious of the government.

Yet another participant argued that the Commission should eliminate, or at least radically restructure, the SSS.

**Chairman Heck** then asked whether the country should consider implementing mandatory national service.

One participant noted that national service could be implemented over time.

One participant noted that national service could be incentivized.

Another participant asked whether conscripts would be paid as much as volunteer service members.

A participant then stated that civics education is hugely important. The argued that people do not understand the civic responsibilities to their country.

Another participant noted that community engagement and local-level education is necessary to make these changes to the culture.

A participant noted that the biggest problem with the draft in the 1960s was fairness. They also argued that any new system should preserve the act of citizenship completed through registering for the SSS.

**Ms. Skelly** asked whether people realize that act when they register now. Do people realize that now?

The participant noted that people do not realize what they are doing, and that draft registration should be made into a rite of passage.

A participant then asked what the underlying purpose of a national registration system would be.

**Chairman Heck** answered that the overall mission is to establish an expectation of service, through military, national, or public service.

There then followed some crosstalk on how a national registration system would work.

**Ms. Skelly** noted that it would blow up current models of service.

A participant then asked how long people would serve in such a model, noting that the Marine Corps requires four years of service for recruits.
Ms. James then noted that the Commission had observed cases in which schools required volunteer service as a graduation requirement. *She asked at what age was a good time to inspire service among young people.*

Several participants offered that people who are ineligible for military service should be routed to other service options.

A participant noted that several options for service should be offered throughout school and should be staged over time.

**Chairman Heck** reflected that the idea of service should be inculcated early in life, and that people often become involved in a lifetime of service.

A participant observed that it is in the interest of the nation to get people involved in public service.

Another participant working with a youth program argued that youth programs should be oriented toward service learning and community service.

**Chairman Heck** then asked whether there should be constant rolling conscription.

One participant offered that they could not imagine how that would work.

Another participant stated that conscription should be targeted for specialized skills.

**Mr. Allard** then asked the participants what conditions would cause them to support a draft.

One participant answered that they would only support the draft in a national military emergency.

Another participant stated that they would support a draft in an emergency declared by congress, and that the public would only support it in a national emergency.

A participant then noted that the government should bring back programs like the presidential fitness program in high schools.

**Mr. Barney** offered that the Commission needed to figure out how to inculcate a sense of citizenship.

**Chairman Heck** then thanked the participants and ended the discussion.