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OPINIONLETTERS

The Meaning of America's Military Recruiting Crisis

JFK's admonition, 'Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country,' has been turned on its head.

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New recruits take an oath outside a military recruiting station in New York, Nov. 10, 2017.

PHOTO: JEWEL SAMAD/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

As we see fewer and fewer young people willing to sign up for military service (“The Pentagon’s Recruiting Woes,” *Review & Outlook*, Oct. 15), the country faces a worrisome threat to national security and is losing a vital part of the fabric that holds us together. Wearing the uniform in defense of one’s fellow citizens is an experience that enhances the service member’s character and can help him or her take pride in being an American. President John F. Kennedy’s ringing admonition, “Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country,” has been turned on its head. The percentage of Americans who are veterans or current service members has been dwindling for years, and I believe it is part of the reason we are so divided.

When I served in the early 1970s, my attitude was colored by my misgivings about the Vietnam War. But as I matured, my years in the U.S. Army have become a source of pride. Although I merely sat behind a desk for four years, I am honored to have had the opportunity to serve my country.

Capt. Steven Krohn, USA (Ret.)

Evansville, Ind.

I have learned that many of our young people think that military service, or community service of any kind, is beneath them. My base's recruiters have also informed me that fully a third of the willing applicants to our armed forces are too fat to meet initial criteria. (In December 1941, a third were too skinny.) Another third of the applicants, once they are informed that in one month's time they will undergo a urine drug screening for marijuana, are unable to abstain for the one short week necessary to clear marijuana from their systems. Maybe I'm not sure I want them protecting me anyway.

But even after 22 years of military service, with multiple deployments, and at age 70, despite my Stage 4 cancer, I'd re-enlist in a New York minute, if only to do honor to those who stood with me. Thank you, my fellow citizens, for the privilege of service, and for the G.I. Bill, which paid for my education.

Col. Thomas W. Gross, USAF (Ret.)

Portsmouth, N.H.

It's the economy, stupid; 2023 or 2024 will be bounty years for military recruiting if this follows the pattern of the years following 2000 and 2006. Both years were bad years for recruiting. It was economically better to remain a civilian than join the military in 2006. Yet recruiting rebounded over the next two years during the Great Recession. The military does good in bad economic years. We will likely return to the mean next year or in 2024 for recruitment.

Lt. James L. Warfield, USA (Ret.)

Castle Rock, Colo.

Instead of forgiving all student debt, why not offer debt forgiveness in exchange for military service?

Ray Dimuzio Sr.

Scottsdale, Ariz.

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