

## Guest Column: National military recruitment woes continue but not in Del Norte

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Military recruitment in the all-volunteer armed forces continues to fall dangerously behind minimum national requirements. Experts claim the problem is critical to national defense.

The Selective Service draft terminated 50 years ago in favor of the all-volunteer model utilized today. The recruitment efforts for enlisting are at an all-time low. All five branches, Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force and Coast Guard all recruit from a volunteer pool of qualified candidates. A sixth branch of the military, The Space Force, can now be added to what appears to be this dwindling resource of qualified candidates. To their credit, minimum requirements are being reached for the Marines, Air Force and Space Force.

The reasons for the chronic deficiency of attracting qualified recruits are varied and sundry. The military attributes the latest obstacle to the long-term effects associated with the COVID virus. Other reasons include the infinitesimally low 3.6 percent unemployment rate, the inability of recruiters to meet with applicants on campus, the increase in less than satisfactory reading and math scores, and a significant and growing

percentage of applicants disqualified with felony convictions. The national level of qualified military applicants in the 17-34 year age group has dropped to 23 percent. The Army recently waived the high school diploma requirement.

I'm happy to report Del Norte County has bucked this negative trend and is providing more than its fair share of military recruits.

The Army 's projection filling minimum entry level standards will reach about 455,000; that number is daunting considering the dangerous world in which we live. Much of the problem is cultural. When the Military went all-volunteer in 1973, the perception of serving was polar opposite a half-century later. Most recruits had a grandfather, father or uncle who served. That's not the case today. The Army offers a \$50,000 bonus for recruits who enlist for at least six years. The initial response to this financial incentive has been tepid.

The question begs to be asked: Why has Del Norte County been able to buck this disturbing trend? The military offers some 150 career options with incredible life skills training.

Recruits can earn college degrees in both bachelor and master's degree programs. The military will actually send qualified recruits to law school all expenses paid by the government, if you're prepared to commit a least six years to military service. For a young recruit coming out of Del Norte High or other similar rural communities, the sky's the limit. The positive public perception of military service is profound. Those who are in uniform or wear a military branch cap or similar garb for past service are continually praised by appreciative members of the community with the comment," Thank you for your service. "

Indeed, the competition for qualified candidates is keen; it's most definitely a "recruit's market." Does the military seek to revisit compulsory service from 1973? As best I can tell, the answer to that question is no; however, the argument can be maintained that bringing back Selective Service for 18 year olds incentivizes American patriotism and commitment to public service. I agree with that contention.

Depending on the ability for the military to climb out of this chasm and bolster our national defense, I'm of the opinion amending the all-volunteer model should be considered. In the meantime, those considering a military career would be well advised to seriously ponder this option. Be all you be.

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