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NATIONAL GUARD ON-THE-RECORD ZOOM MEDIA ROUNDTABLE

Wednesday, 21 June 2023 1100 hrs.

TOPIC	SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS
National Guard Recruiting and Retention	<p>Who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Army Col. Andrew Bishop, chief, Strength Maintenance Division, Army National Guard• Air Force Col. Anthony Pasquale, chief, Air National Guard Recruiting & Retention Division• Air Force Tech. Sgt. Stephen Graves, recruiter, 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard• Army Staff Sgt. Yoon Kim, recruiter, Woodstock Recruit Sustainment Program, Illinois Army National Guard• Army Command Sgt. Maj. Marco Irenze, Recruiting & Retention Battalion, Nevada Army National Guard• Army Col. Steve Rowe, chief of staff, New York Army National Guard; and Sgt. Maj. Anthony Abbate, command sergeant major, Recruiting & Retention Command, New York Army National Guard• Army Col. Josh Barrow, commander, Recruiting & Retention Command, Washington Army National Guard• Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Chris Perez, senior enlisted advisor, Washington Air National Guard Recruiting & Retention

Introduction:

Welcome, everyone. I'm Deidre Forster, National Guard Bureau, Public Affairs. I'm happy to be your moderator today. We're excited to have each of you here as part of this on the record Media roundtable.

We have a number of recruiting and retention subject matter experts today to discuss the efforts from a national and state perspective. Once each of our panel members speak, I'll ask each of the



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reporters on the line for one question, and I'll allow each of you one follow up. If we have time, I'll come back around. A quick reminder to everyone to keep their mikes muted again.

We're not speaking and everything is on the record today. Today's panelists are Air Force Colonel Anthony Pasquale, our chief Air National Guard Recruiting and Retention division. Tech Sergeant Steven Graves, a recruiter with the 182nd Airlift Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, Army Staff Sergeant Yoon Kim, a recruiter with the Woodstock Recruit Sustainment Program excuse me, at the Illinois Army National Guard. Army Colonel Steve Rowe, chief of staff, New York Army National Guard and Sergeant Major Anthony Abate, Command Sergeant Major for the Recruiting and Retention Command at the New York Army National Guard. We also have Army Colonel Josh Barrow, commander of the Recruiting and Retention Command of the Washington Army National Guard and Senior Master Sergeant Chris Perez, our senior enlisted adviser at the Washington Air National Guard Recruiting and retention. We'll begin the roundtable with a national perspective on Air National Guard recruiting and retention. Colonel Pasquale, please give us this overall national perspective.

Opening Statement:

Colonel Pasquale: Good morning. Thanks for having me. I appreciate the opportunity to speak as you're probably going to hear from everyone on this panel. This is the most challenging recruiting environment the Department of Defense has probably ever faced, and that reaches across all the components. Currently, right now, the only one that believes they're going to make end strength this year is probably the Marine Corps, but they're still going to be very, very close to making their own strength numbers. As far as the Air National Guard goes as of today, our authorized end strength is 108,400. Right now, as we stand today, we fill about 96.7% of that. So we're about 3.3% short of our end strength as of today. With that said, our big recruiting months are coming up. July, August and September tend to be very good recruiting months for us and we should see that number increase and the majority of our retention through the fiscal year has kind of finished itself off. From an Air National Guard national level perspective. Our division is about 98 different people across recruiting, retention or geographically separated all throughout the country. And our primary job is to support the Director of the Air National Guard and his initiatives, along with the adjutant generals in each of the state, territories and districts.

So the primary job is to work the policy and funding pieces to support the state's recruiting efforts. We basically have four primary lines of effort. Those lines of effort mostly include the biggest top dollar is our marketing. Right now we have about the program for about 36 million.



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However, we got a congressional add this fiscal year for an additional 50 million to support our total force marketing efforts.

When we say total force marketing efforts. We with the active component, the reserve component to get more return on investment, our marketing dollars in order to put our marketing and advertising out there specifically for the Air National Guard. So that's one of our primary line efforts. Another one is our recruiting network, and that mostly has to do with the recruiters on the field. How do we increase production and decrease processing time for those recruiters in the field to get them on point and on mission. Third line of effort for us is policy and programmatic barriers, which we work through service channels primarily. So Headquarters Air Force, we work directly with them to go through policy barriers such as many of the changes we've made from body mass index standards to tattoo policy to open up the aperture to get as many candidates that are willing to join their National Guard as possible.

Finally, we look at recruiting and retention operations. Obviously, in a post-COVID environment, a lot of things have changed. So there's a lot of training that we work alongside our active component to advance our recruiter skills in marketing and advertising along with process and better ways to do business to include the digital space and dealing with the different generations that are looking to assess with the Air National Guard.

That's currently where we stand in our projections as far as we're going to land. We could land anywhere from 3 to 4000 short has been standard. We're a little more hopeful that we'll do a lot better than that, but it's still too early to tell where we'll land on 30 September, at the end of the fiscal year.

Deidre Forster: Colonel Pasquale, I appreciate that. Thanks, Tech Sergeant Graves. Please let us hear a quick summary of what's going on with the Illinois Air National Guard efforts in recruiting.

Tech Sergeant Graves: Good morning, first of all. Thank you for having me. We appreciate the opportunity to get on here and kind of talk with you all about how recruiting and retention looks in Illinois. My name is Technical Sergeant Stephen Graves, and I am a recruiter out of the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, Illinois. I represent one of three Air Guard bases within the state of Illinois.

And retention of recruiting, as the colonel has said, has been challenging post COVID. But we're trying to maneuver as best we can with the resources that he has given us and the opportunities



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to market ourselves really well. Here at the 182nd Airlift Wing, our retention efforts are outstanding. We're sitting at about 97% on the retention side like the colonel said.

And the recruiting aspect is the challenge coming in through January or I'm sorry, the summer months, June, July and August are most challenging where students are out of school. I mean, individuals are looking to do something with themselves as far as what the next step may be. So we're trying to hit the ground running hard. We have a lot of support from the state of Illinois and from our leadership here at the 182nd Airlift Wing to be visible and to enable all of our unit members to be what we call, recruiters as well, because they can reach spaces that we can't.

So again, I had the opportunity to recruit in the Peoria area, northern part of the state, as far as Chicago as well. So again, that's a little bit about what we're doing here at the 182nd Airlift Wing. So thank you.

Diedre Forster: Well, thank you very much, sir, for that. I appreciate that. I'm just I'm having a technical difficulty. Sorry. Senior Master Sergeant Perez, please wrap up our Air Guard panelists and tell us how things are going in Washington, when it comes to our National Guard recruiting and retention.

Senior Master Sergeant Perez: Good morning, everyone. Again, just wanted to piggyback on my colleagues. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you all about the Air National Guard and our lines of effort in recruiting and retention.

The Washington Air National Guard is made up of two different wings on either side of the state, and our main primary missions is aerial refueling, air defense, intelligence, cyber and special warfare. And we employ about 2000 of our residents of Washington. Our team is made up of about 12 recruiters and four managers that's responsible for staffing and retaining our entire force.

Again, like our my colleagues have said, COVID did impact our ability to recruit. But that was during fiscal year 2021. This year, our current strength is about 95.6%, and that's against a goal of upwards of 200 for a team of 12. So far, our team has been able to deliver 128 enlistments, putting us in around the 60 percentile range of our of our required goal and maintaining an retention rate of 95%, I believe we're on the right glide path of meeting our goal and increasing our strength. FY 23 has definitely been a challenge, but also an opportunity for us to expand our capabilities. And one of the things that we've done here in Washington State was employ the use of our Guardsmen in a way that we've never done before.



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And so what we've done here is we leveraged our unit members to be our force multipliers, to expand our reach in different communities where we would not have been able to do with 12 recruiters. And we do that by attending a lot more events and this year we've attended upwards of 350 different events and generated upwards of, I'd say about well over 1000 leads to get us to 128 enlistments.

We leverage a platform called the AIM High App, which is an app that was created by our active duty partners. And what it does is it allows us to leverage a QR code to help us generate leads. Those leads translate directly to our recruiters who are able to actually connect with them and continue the onboarding and recruiting process.

And what that platform and what the concept of using our unit members has done has allowed us to increase our manning in several of our units. In fact, I'm proud to say that three of our units have directly benefited and increased their strength to 100%, while 19 of our units from our two wings have steadily increase in their manning at reaching a 100% or a little bit over.

We still have a lot more work to do, but I'm pretty confident with the platforms that we can leverage with total force recruiting, our marketing efforts across the state and partnerships we are engaging, we should be on track to meet our enlistment goal.

Deidre Forster: Thank you, Sergeant Chris. I appreciate it. We're going to switch over to Army Guard recruiting in the States now. Colonel Barrow, Sergeant Major Abate. Can you give us a quick update of Army National Guard recruiting effort? I'm sorry, Colonel Barrow, you're in Washington. Let's start with you, Colonel Barrow. Let's talk about Army Guard Washington recruiting. Thank you.

Colonel Barrow: Hi. Greetings. My name is Colonel Josh Barrow. And again, I am the commander for the Washington Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion based in Camp Mary Washington. We have an authorized strength of 6,000. So that's ultimately our end strength goal in the state of Washington for the Army National Guard. Our current strength is right around hovering just below 5,700.

And this has been a good year for us so far in the recruiting environment. We're up 11% in enlistment since the last fiscal year. We're also up 7% in market share versus all the other components in the Department of Defense. So a couple of things we can attribute that to is



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schools. There's a lot more access to schools since the COVID pandemic that has really helped us.

We leverage schools quite a bit because probably about 60% of our non-prior service enlistments come from ages 17 to 18, so about a third. So that's significant for us to be full access to schools. We also have a renewed focus on the Army side in high volume areas. So whereas previously we may not have been focused in on King County, that's our highest volume populated area, you know, just about 2.5 million in the I-5 corridor. We have a renewed focus in those areas because that's where the high volume is in the state.

And then I think with that renewed volume we're taking, we're talking about some tactics, techniques and procedures internally and how we recruit and how we manage our organization. So organizational effectiveness has also helped with us internally. And just as Senior Master Sergeant Perez stated earlier, we're leveraging the units as force multipliers has really helped us as well.

And we're certainly operationalizing that and making sure events have good return on investment for us. And then then lastly, just kind of taking a very deliberate and methodical approach to recruiting, and that's really helped us so far in the state. We're still in an uphill battle here in terms of winning the war on talent. But I'm excited for the future and kind of where we're headed. That's all I have for Washington. Thank you.

Deidre Forster: Thank you, Colonel Barrow. I appreciate that very much. Now we'll head over to New York. Colonel Rose, Sergeant Major, please let us know how Army Guard recruiting is going in New York State.

Colonel Rowe: Hey, thank you, Deirdre. Good morning, everybody. Colonel Steve Rowe, the chief of staff of the Army National Guard. With me today is Command Sergeant Major Abate the Recruiting and Retention Battalion, Command Sergeant Major. The New York Army National Guard continues to see exceptional results in the recruiting and retention operations. We're quite proud that in fiscal year 2022, we were the only state and territory to achieve recruiting and session objectives, as well as our retention mission.

Thankfully, with a lot of hard work, our success continues this fiscal year, having achieved already our directed retention mission with over 1300 reenlistments and counting, and currently we sit at 118% of our enlisted accessions. A lot of times we are asked how is this happening? Really our success is due in large part to the importance that we place on strength maintenance



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within the state. New York recognizes the strength of the organization is a strategic imperative that must be delivered in an approach to ensure success.

The recruiting and retention battalion in New York is a priority that is pervasive throughout the culture of the organization. So up and down the chain of command, we recognize that strength really is the lifeblood of our organization. We employ a multifaceted approach to achieve our goals. It includes marketing, operational processing and new soldier integration. And this is all coupled with a full spectrum retention effort.

And really, it's a common saying throughout our organization that beyond soldier safety, we have no higher priority than the strength of the organization. And that's all I have for New York right now. Thanks to you.

Deidre Forster: Great. I appreciate that. Thank you very much for giving us that New York perspective. Staff Sergeant Kim, what's the state of the Army National Guard recruiting and retention in Illinois?

Staff Sergeant Kim: So, first and foremost, thank you so much for this invitation. For me, it's such a high honor. It connects a lot to being able to be pretty much in the roots of one of the things that we do. And I'm really happy to share some of the perspectives that what we do in Illinois. Right now, we're currently at 742 enlistments against 894 for 83% mission.

We're actually at 129 enlistments ahead comparative to last year, which is amazing. I'm located in Woodstock Hotel RSP, which is we divide Illinois up into three sections. So I'm in the northern region. I think northern region is a very unique and beautiful and diverse area. Even within the same team, we have three officers, Schaumburg, Gurnee and Crystal Lake, and we see bunch of different young and motivated individuals that come in.

And I think the biggest success that Illinois has to offer is we approach very holistically and we think about the people that we enlist and the care for our recruiters. I'm honestly super blessed to be Illinois because they take care of me like no other. And I think that helps me bring back a lot of great energy into my recruiting style as well.

They're always open for ideas ever since I was a specialist. So I think Illinois is a very take care of everyone below and take care of your soldiers, and that in itself will bring enlistments as well as some of the technical advances that we've had. We just had a huge popular initiative, which is the QR codes that we're able to utilize to create bigger roundabouts, leads that we can get in



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events that we do as well as some of these unique and more targeted ways to get recruiting and marketing efforts out.

We've been doing more product knowledge and we've been trying to create something more approachable and more organic to our organizations and to local communities by doing really hands on community outreach. So I think that's what Illinois has been doing that's been really successful. Thank you.

Deidre Forster: Thank you, Sergeant Kim. I appreciate it. We are pleased to welcome to the panel today, Command Sergeant Major Marco Irenze from the Nevada National Guard. He's going to talk to us a little bit about Army Guard recruiting efforts in that state. Sergeant Major, please.

Sergeant Major Ineze: And good morning, everyone. Thank you for inviting me to this this roundtable. Nevada is doing actually very well right now. We are we are 274 of 272. So we're at 100% year to date right now. We're at 75% of our mission, so we're on a glide path to finish out strong. The biggest challenge that Nevada has is that we are a small state and we are basically working with being a medium state. So we're right on the cusp. So I have resources for a small state, but I'm trying to maintain medium state numbers. So that's our biggest challenge right now.

What that entails is figuring out how we can get more out of our NCOs. You know, the money thing is a big deal because we are trying to you know, the population is growing, which is it's very difficult to be in this spot. But we're maintaining. We have our recruiters working diligently and hitting the in high schools very hard.

That's where we're getting most of our enlistments from. We had a really tough time. We did really well in 2018. And then when the COVID pandemic hit, Las Vegas took a big hit. So it really hit Nevada hard. We just came out of that in 2022 and then 23, it looks like, you know, we're doing real well. But other than that, it's all I have.

Deidre Forster: Thank you very much for joining us today. I appreciate that. Thank you to our panel. I'm now going to go to our reporters with questions. I have a list of everyone who's in the room. So I'm just going to kind of go through there and I'll say your name if you have a question and one follow up. Otherwise, we'll move on from there. We'll start with AP today. Lita anything?



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Lita Baldor, AP: Hi, Yeah, I was looking for a more overall view and I think did you have an assignment from the Army Guard Bureau on or no. Did I miss them?

Deidre Forster: Our army guard person got delayed so I can get back to everyone with those Army Guard figures are from a national perspective.

Lita Baldor, AP: Okay. So just more broadly, then, what I'm wondering is what if you don't meet sort of broadly the national mission? What are the plans? Will states help other states who haven't met their mission? Is there any broader plan for the Guard units in the states to help others if they have not met their mission and have too small of a number in certain units?

Deidre Forster: Colonel Pascual, can you talk about how how states help each other out, or do we need to take that as a follow up?

Colonel Paquale: No, I speak about it briefly. Obviously, what we have been able to improve policy here through the policy here, National Guard Bureau, is we allow units that are in excess of 100% to go above that authorization. Right. So from a U.S. Air Force combatant type commander perspective, we will allow access in those units. They will allow to over recruit to a certain percentage in order to kind of fill some gaps that may be available in other states or that have a more challenging recruiting environment.

So it's a policy thing where, yes, overall we allows those that are excess of 100% to recruit a little higher so that if the call comes from the nation, we do have the people in place. They just may not be in the right state. Hopefully that answers your question.

Lita Baldor, AP: Just so I'm clear, have you had to do that this year? And do you expect to have to do some of that next this coming year?

Colonel Pasquale: Yes. So we have always historically let states go over 100% to a certain percentage. We give them a little more leeway over the last couple of years based on the recruiting challenges. But that has always been, it's not a new policy. We always let them go in excess.

Obviously, sometimes people retire early, decide to end their commitment, and so we let them go over 100% knowing that we have the excess funding to man those in other states that aren't able to make it. But it provides them a little bit of depth in their capability as they continue to grow their force.



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Lita Baldor, AP: I'm sorry, I wasn't clear. Have you had some states actually fill gaps in other state units this year?

And do you expect to have to do that next year, actually fill the gaps as opposed to just the extra recruiting?

Colonel Pasquale: And so if you're talking mobilization like we had other units

Lita Baldor, AP: In any regard, even to assist in a mission.

Colonel Pasquale: So we do that all the time. That has been a standard practice since the Guard's been if you're short, a couple of people will obviously go to another state to gain mobilization authority.

We've always collaboratively met the nation's mission through domestic operations or any contingency operations overseas. It's a shared effort between the force.

Thank you very much for that, Colonel Pasquale. Well, let's go to the Wall Street Journal. Have any question?

Ben Kesling, Wall Street Journal

Yes, thank you. Who are you all competing with in other job fields? What career fields? What kind of corporations? What kind of jobs are you all in direct competition with as you're trying to recruit folks?

Deidre Forster: Just one of our state folks want to answer that question for him on this.

Sergeant Major Irenze: This is Sergeant Major Irenze from Nevada, to be honest with you, it's Wendy's. It's Carl's Junior. It's every single job that a young person can go up against because now they are offering the same incentives that we are offering. So that's our competition right now.

Ben Kesling, Wall Street Journal: If that's the case, what what is it that incentivizes incentivize a young person to take this path? And are you finding that young people are less likely right now to want to want to enter a career field such as the Army or Air National Guard, where there is the pledge for sticking around for a while, for learning a certain certain job and having to stay with



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it. Does this generation of folks that you're recruiting not like that almost guaranteed continuity. They'd rather have guaranteed flexibility to go to whatever new position they want to go to.

Sergeant Graves: May I say something in that?

Deidre Forster: Sergeant Graves. Go ahead. Yeah, go ahead. I saw you popped over. Go ahead.

Sergeant Graves: Thank you, Ben. That's a great question. Thank you, sir. So to answer your question, competition is any civilian market, any career field, especially when it comes to I.T. And like the colonel said, even fast food chains where individuals don't have to go to a basic training.

Right. They don't have to come up with certain medications or anything like that. We compete with individuals. But the way that we can incentivize them, especially in the Air Guard, is giving them something that's local. Right. A lot of these individuals still want to be close to home. They want to go to school to get their education benefits.

So that's something that's always been a drive. However, we still have face challenges in the IT world, right? Individuals are coming in and able to make six figures just by getting the training that we would give them and each respective branch of service. Then they can go get a job making thousands of dollars. Right? The opportunities for what we call flexibility.

We're looking at changing our schedules from drill weekends where the traditional is one week in a month. Right where now we can have some flexibility to work with the employers to allow these individuals to still have opportunities to make the money on the civilian side and still serve in the Guard in their capacity in different perspective. So that is the way we try to circumvent the competition.

But in the Guard, we also need these individuals and the employers to be on board and understand that their employees are serving commendably. Right. So we do certain things as well to bring the employees out and to show them our appreciation as well. Thanks.

Deidre Forster: I see we have Sergeant Perez and Sergeant Kim, who both have an answer for you as well. Go ahead, Sergeant Perez.



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Sergeant Perez: Yes. Thank you again. Great question. And just to piggyback on Sergeant Graves, yes, we do face stiff competition with, at least here in Washington state, with competitors from that work in Microsoft, Amazon, T-Mobile, especially in the in the cyber section. You know, and like, what's Sergeant Graves said. You know, the Air Force and Air National Guard provides a fantastic training and I'll just we'll talk about cyber for a moment.

They do provide that training. But what that entails is it allows that individual to be competitive for some of these jobs at these I.T. or high tech companies have to offer. So it becomes, you know, it again, goes back to flexibility. You know, what does Company A have to offer versus the Air National Guard. The other part is other things such as what we're what we've seen in the last few years, you know, the propensity to serve people that want remote positions, you know, and at least when someone serves in the Air National Guard, they are committing to serve their community, their state, their nation.

And it's not like we're we can just allow person to just move on from one organization and jump jobs, unlike in the private sector. But we do offer great incentives, great benefits. And that training that, you know, can help an individual land or connect with a civilian company.

Deidre Forster: Thanks, Sergeant Press. Sergeant Kim

Sergeant Kim: The reason why I got so excited for this question was that you have utilized one of our favorite words these days in the recruiting world, which is flexibility.

I think a lot of especially younger personnel as well. And the reason why a lot of National Guard and Total focuses so much on marketing is I clearly and a lot of street recruiters might agree with this, is that a lot of them don't actually know what we truly do as Guardsmen. And once they hear what we have to say, they also kind of realize that it can all work together with their civilian factors as well.

The biggest local difficulties that we've had was like FedEx and USPS. They are amazing employers with very similar benefits as we do, and then they realize, Oh, I'm not going to stop you from joining FedEx. We actually have a double pension that can work with you instead. And I think a lot of that limitation is that a lot of applicants in the job market want to settle immediately when they hear something good.

I think everyone needs to do a little bit more research and see that there's a lot of these cool part time opportunities I can work together to build something holistic and fulfilling for you. It might



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not be long term or we're very flexible as a branch of the National Guard and that's what we will do as well personally.

Deidre Forster: Thanks. Sergeant Kim, Let's go to the Stars and Stripes. Do you have a question?

Doug Ware, Stars and Stripes: Yes, I do. Thank you. My question is for Colonel Pasquale. You mentioned earlier that you're close to your goal of 108,000. I think you said. Could you tell me where are you short? Are you more short in the recruiting side or are you more short in the retention side, or is this you kind of clarify that a little bit?

Colonel Pasquale: Yeah, absolute is a great question. So you're right, word about 96.7% of the 108,400 is our authorized congressional entry. And that's as we stand as of yesterday. That was the last count. As of yesterday, our attention is extremely high. I think our last count we were at 95.8% retention as of about 31 May. That's about 2% higher than historically where we are at this time of year.

We usually end each fiscal year at about 91% retention across the force. So most of our struggles have come on the recruiting end. With that said, we have done about 15% better from fiscal year 23 to fiscal year 22 and just our overall accessions. So that's a lot of the discussion is how do we increase accessions and more specifically, how do we really increase the prior service members that have chose to leave the active component and is still serving in a part time capacity to get after a lot flexibility they're looking for is they complete their active duty service in the Army National Guard or National Guard.

Doug Ware, Stars and Stripes: Just my quick follow up on that, Colonel. While as you noted that the Marines are not having as difficult a time as the other services and that's that's the case, have you what do you think they're doing differently than the other services are, including yourself? And are you trying to emulate them in any way to kind of overcome the challenges that you folks are facing but the Marines have so far been able to sidestep?

Colonel Pasquale: Yeah, I wouldn't say the Marines have been able to sidestep it. The definitely really have the exact same challenges we do. But the Marine Corps is a very niche service. Right. They sell a little bit of a different product, than Air Force. They do a phenomenal job in what they do and they target a very specific individual that wants to join the Marine Corps and they have their challenges with it.



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Some of the stuff I do know that they do, which I think is a great technique, and we're trying to emulate that a little bit here, is when a certain geographic area is not making mission, they will actually deploy assistance to that geographic location to try and make mission. With the Air National Guard in 54 states, territories and the district, it's a little challenging for us to do that.

But the [garbled] ... it to analyze it, and try to figure out what the restrictions are and try to maximize the force capabilities in the specific state.

Deidre Forster: Thanks, Colonel Pascal. Let's go to Military.com. Do you have any question?

Steve Beynon, Military.com: Yes. Hi. Thanks for putting this on. Do does anyone have data on where the Army National Guard is at total with its retention goal this year? I know the active duty Army they announced they already to hit their goal in April. I think. But Steve, we can get you that national that national goal. Our Army Guard national guy wasn't able to make it today. So we'll have to get back to you on that. Okay, cool. That's all I have you.

Deidre Forster: Thank you. I see a military times. Do you have a question?

James Moore-Carillo, Military Times : Yes. Thank you. So is the recruiting rebound that some of the states state representatives described today, is that rebound evenly distributed across the country? You know, are there more states that are struggling? Are there other states that are struggling more than others? And you know what accounts for those recruiting discrepancies that they exist?

Deidre Forster: Go ahead, Colonel Pascrell.

Colonel Pasquale: Yeah, that's a great question. And yes, each geographic area has its own unique challenges, and that's where the active component has a little bit more flexibility. Right. The state of New York isn't going to recruit in Texas from a National Guard perspective. Places like Alaska significantly challenged. The Hawaiian Islands, the Virgin Islands, even Washington, D.C. The district is a challenge because it's such a tight geographic area.

And then you have Maryland and Virginia on the borders that have their own National Guard that are attempting to recruit and access base on those missions. So the cost to [garbled] reach out and recruiting in Nevada versus Illinois versus New York are distinctly different. They have similar challenges, right, that each had to deal with those geographically separate from each



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other. So that's part of our job is to make sure we position resources and personnel in the proper place to make sure those states are successful.

James Moore-Carillo, Military Times : Sure. And just a very good call based on what Ben said about incentives, General Hokanson floated the possibility of offering Guard members free health insurance and reintroducing the referral bonus program last year. Can someone provide an update on the status of those plans?

Deidre Forster: James, we'll have to get back to you on that one. Let's go to The Washington Times. Do you have a question? Hearing none.
We'll go to NGAUS. Mark, do you have any questions?

Mark Hensch, NGAUS Magazine: I do. What can you say about the benefit of certain state level laws, like, for example, providing tuition reimbursements to Guardsmen in your states? How are legislation, legislative efforts like that, helping with recruitment and retention?

Deidre Forster: Colonel Rowe, do you have anything for that?

Colonel Rowe: Yes, thanks. So I will say that that is another marker that we continue to look at is legislating or excuse me, leveraging state incentives and benefits as well to help us continue to move the ball forward with our recruiting efforts. In New York, we do have a college incentives. It pays tuition for students of our soldiers to go to school.

And that has provided a nice dividend for our soldiers or our applicants to enlist into the New York Army National Guard. And as similar as other states, some states have referral bonuses. Some states have education that they pass on to family members, which are kind of opening the door for other states to look at is an opportunity to further incentivize service with the opportunity to be a member of the team.

Deidre Forster: Do you have a follow up or are you good with that one?

Mark Hensch: No, that's perfect. I appreciate it.

Deidre Forster: Okay, great. Let's go to Reserve and National Guard magazine. Do you have a question?

Kari Williams: No, not at this time. Thank you.



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Deidre Forster: Great. Thank you. How about Army magazine?

Karli Goldenberg, Army Magazine: Hi. Good afternoon. I have a more general question. I feel like in the recruiting conversation broadly with the Army, there's been a lot of talk about the growing gap of Americans who have a connection to service and also just reintroducing America to the Army.

So I was curious if the Guard has been working on that as well. And if so, if there's been anything on the state side that has been particularly effective with that. Thanks so much.

Deidre Forster: Thanks to any of our Army Guard state guys. Have anything to say on that one? Go ahead. Sergeant Kim.

Sergeant Kim: I don't know what happened. It's something new to me. So one of the things that I find and it really helps people in how they feel about service is we deeply have a conversation about what they perceive in the real world and what service truly means for them. I think now it's such an intangible concept and it's really hard for people to wrap their heads around when there's so many real life problems that are right in front of them.

So a lot of recruiters in our team like to have a realistic conversation on what kind of different forms of service it can take on for that individual. And I think it's been really helpful for these young men and women to come to a decision about how flexible and how inspiring their service could be. A lot of the times when people see me, they don't think I was in the military and I had that open conversation with them and a lot of different recruiters and their different lifestyles.

And I think that really does inspire them that we are still an amazing traditional and such an amazing organization, but at the same time, having this real conversation between two people that connect, that creates a connection is what gets them forward and moving. And I think that's one of the reasons why our Hotel Company is doing so well.

Deidre Forster: Sergeant Kim. Colonel Rowe, I see you have your hand up.

Colonel Rowe Yeah. I just would give Sergeant Major Abate a chance to talk to this as well, because we have seen as of the last five or six years, the relevancy of the National Guard mission is among the highest it's been in recent memory. Sergeant Major.



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Sergeant Major Abate: That's a great question. And, you know, one of the great things that makes the National Guard across the nation unique is we're grassroots.

We're in the communities. We're from the communities where we're living and recruiting out of. And this is very much our line of effort. And through the COVID pandemic, which was which was very rough on the nation, New York state specifically, we didn't have to ever reintroduce ourselves to the community because we were in it running food pantries and drive thru test sites and at the Javits Center.

And I can't say enough about the Soldiers, officers enlisted of the New York Army National Guard and what they did in the communities to assist through that time. So it was a very unique experience for everybody and the New York Army National Guard, as well as other state National Guards, definitely stepped up. So, in terms of reintroducing ourselves, we've always been there.

Deidre Forster: Thank you. We have time for maybe two more questions. So I'm going to go to Will Radio, WILL Do you have any questions?

Jim Meadows, WILL Radio Illinois

: es, just a question for the either of the two Illinois recruiters. And I was just ask wondering to know what differences you saw in success or difficulties in recruiting efforts. Different parts of the state Chicago area versus downstate urban areas versus rural or any other any other differences? You may have noticed?

Deidre Forster: Sergeant Graves, I see you. Thank you, James.

Sergeant Graves: Thank you for that question. That's a great question. Here in Peoria, the difficulty that we faced is, as others have said before, we're in our local communities. But as a base where we're stronger with numbers. So we have over 1300 unit members here in the Illinois Air National Guard in Peoria. So we have really incorporated all of our unit members to be recruiters.

So they are in places where we can't be. If they know about individuals, they may have interest in the air. We really equip them with the opportunities and wherewithal to know how to give information to those individuals and to pass out information as recruiters and subject matter experts a lot to them so we can make those connections real time and quickly and allow them to come to the unit to be a part of the Air National Guard.



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So with us being in our local communities and surrounding areas, we have unit members who are all over the state. So where we can reach out to them and really capture those hot leads, as we like to call it.

Deidre Forster: Thank you. Sergeant Kim, really quickly.

Sergeant Kim: With what Illinois does, I think, as I said, we do a lot of missions that we have been very in place, as well as the school outreach programs at our state generally supports.

We have so many different ways to reach out to our young men and women. And I think that's where it's been really successful and seeing us all the time as young individuals, open minded, without pressure, having healthy discussions, I think has skyrocketed. COVID had restricted a lot of our in class efforts. But now that we're able to have these open conversations and be a job fairs and be friendly faces and lovely adults in general, beyond being sergeants, I think has been really helping.

Deidre Forster: Sergeant Kim, thank you. W hro, do you have any question? You could be our last guy today.

Steve Walsh, WHRO: All right. You mentioned the the impact that COVID had had on recruiting. What about in the high up tempo that's been happening over the last couple of years with all sorts of different missions? Has it had an impact on retention at all, or do you see fatigue among some of the people who have been in for a while?

Deidre Forster: Would a number of states like to answer that. Sergeant Graves, I see you're unmuted.

Sergeant Graves: My apologies. I'm sorry. So as we talked about the retention here in Illinois, our retention rate is about 97% for for the state of Illinois, which is which is a good thing. I think a lot of individuals are understanding that the Guard is is a valuable option, but it's still again the flexibility.

It allows them to kind of still pursue whatever it is that they want to pursue on the civilian side. But stretch it out a little bit on our end and still stay a little bit longer because there sometimes there still is a little bit of uncertainty there. But our retention efforts have been really good.



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Deidre Forster: Do you have a follow up question?

Steve Walsh, WHRO: Because you're not at 100%. Are there any missions that aren't getting done? I know Virginia, like many other states, has been volunteering to send troops to the border, but are there missions that aren't happening because you're not at 100%?

Deidre Forster: Colonel Pascale, can you answer that one? Yeah. No. Right now, no.

Colonel Pasquale: We're meeting all our mission. The reality is, you know, 97% of the force is basically there. And even if we gotta cross state lines to make it happen, we will still take every tasking we get regardless of that end strength number. It's still relatively small compared to the capability we're bringing.

Deidre Forster: Okay. Thank you for that, Colonel. That's all the time we have today. I want to thank each of our panelists and our reporters who joined us today. If anyone has additional questions, please send them to the BPA media team and we'll track down the answers for you. A transcript of this media roundtable will be available later today on National Guard dot mil. Have a great rest of your day. Goodbye. Thank you.

For information regarding this transcript, please send an email to the National Guard Bureau Media Operations desk at ng.ncr.ngb-arng.mesg.ngb-media-desk-owner@army.mil