



# Transcript

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## NATIONAL GUARD ON-THE-RECORD ZOOM MEDIA ROUNDTABLE

SEPTEMBER 20, 2022

TOPIC	SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS
National Guard Recruiting and Retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Army Gen. Daniel Hokanson, Chief of the National Guard Bureau</li><li>▪ Air Force Maj. Gen. Daryl L. Bohac, Adjutant General, Nebraska National Guard</li><li>▪ Army Maj. Gen. Jeff H. Holmes, Adjutant General, Tennessee National Guard</li><li>▪ Mr. Anson D. Smith, Deputy Chief, Army National Guard Strength Maintenance Division</li><li>▪ Air Force Col. Nashid A. Salahuddin, Division Chief, ANG Recruiting &amp; Retention</li></ul>

### Opening Statement from Gen. Daniel Hokanson, chief of the National Guard Bureau:

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about the National Guard's recruiting and retention challenges and share with you the solutions we have offered the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Whenever I visit the Guardsmen in the states, territories, and District of Columbia, I make it a point to meet with the recruiters to ensure we have the personnel we need to fight our Nation's wars. These recruiters have told me, in no uncertain terms, they are currently facing the most arduous recruiting environment in more than 20 years.

For Fiscal Year 2022, the Air National Guard is projected to reach 97.2 percent of its end strength, 3,000 short of its 108,300 authorized strength. The Army National Guard is currently at 98.1% of its end strength, 6,000 short of its 336,000 authorized strength.

While every branch of the military shares these recruiting issues, the National Guard has unique challenges. Every potential recruit weighs the benefits of serving their country against how military service will impact their lives and their families. The advantage the National Guard offers is balance—you get to serve your Nation without the full-time commitment of the active forces. However, there is a gap in benefits to serving in the reserve component and it diminishes our force's readiness. Additionally, it discourages those recruits who are seeking those benefits, often impacting their decision to joining the National Guard.

To level the playing field, I consulted with senior leaders and recruiters across our states, territories, and



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DC. Together, we have come up with three solutions that will address this challenging recruiting environment and allow the National Guard to fulfill our promise to America—to be Always Ready, Always There.

I have also submitted these solutions to the Senate Armed Services Committee who are holding a hearing tomorrow to discuss the current recruiting and retention issues that exist in the Armed Forces.

The first solution is healthcare coverage. Today, there are approximately 60,000 Guardsmen who do not have health insurance. Even our Guardsmen who have healthcare coverage through their civilian employer, face challenges when they change duty status, because moving between civilian healthcare and TRICARE can create gaps in coverage. This can cause undue financial and medical hardships for our Soldiers, Airmen, and families. The current lack of healthcare coverage for National Guard members impacts readiness, recruitment, and retention.

The second is educational benefits. While National Guard members can now concurrently use federal tuition assistance and their GI Bill benefits, they cannot claim independent student status like their active-duty counterparts. This affects their Free Application for Federal Student Aid status and makes the National Guard a less-competitive option.

The third is incentive pay. Increasing recruiting resources on par with the active components, adding recruitment bonuses for serving members and recruiters, will have a long-lasting, positive effect on reaching potential recruits.

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on this critical issue and look forward to your questions.

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**NOTE:** The above content is for clarity. The actual dialogue is included in the transcript, but due to technical difficulties, the General's opening statement is provided.



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## Dialogue:

[Name] [QUESTION/RESPONSE]

**Ms. Nahaku McFadden** [00:00:02] Welcome, everyone, especially to this media roundtable on the National Guard's recruiting and retention. I'm Nahaku McFadden and I will be moderating today. Today we are here with the chief of the National Guard bureau, General Dan Hokanson, and Air Force Major General Daryl Bohac, Adjutant General, Nebraska National Guard. We also have Army Major General Jeff Holmes, Adjutant General, Tennessee National Guard. We have Mr. Anson Smith, Deputy Chief of Army National Guard Strength Maintenance Division, as well as Air Force Colonel Nashid Salahuddin, Division Chief, Air National Guard, Recruiting and Retention.

[00:00:46] This media roundtable is on the record, and we are here to discuss the National Guard's recruiting and retention efforts. And we really appreciate, if you would, focus your questions accordingly. General Hokanson will start with an opening statement and then we're going to open it up for questions to ensure to allow as many of you to participate. Please be respectful by asking one question and a follow up. If there is time remaining at the end, then we can open it up again. Reminder to mute your phone when you are not speaking. I have a list of the media and I will call on you by name. With that, turn it over to General Hokanson.

**GEN Hokanson** [00:01:24] Okay. Great. Thank you and good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for joining us here today and for the opportunity to speak with you about some of the recruiting challenges that we're facing in the National Guard. Obviously, this is something we've been watching throughout the year. And in light of tomorrow's hearing with the four major services there, we won't be part of that. So it's an opportunity for us to kind of share with you some of the unique characteristics that we're facing in our recruiting environment. And as a quick background, every time I visit our states, territories or the District of Columbia, I meet with our recruiters there really because they've got a difficult job and also a very important job of bringing in the future leaders of our National Guard and also those that we're called would be there to serve our nation, to fight our nation's wars. And they have told me pretty much unanimously in every location I go, just how difficult the current recruiting challenges are that they're facing. For many of them, it's unprecedented in their time as a recruiter.

And if you look at where we are today, if you look at the National Guard as a whole within the Air National Guard, we're currently at about 97.2% strength as we come to the end of our fiscal year ending September 30th. And that puts us about 3000 short of our authorized strength of just over 108,000 on the Army Guard. We're about 6000 short, which puts us just over 98% of our authorized in strength of 336,000. And the reason why this is a concern is, obviously, if you look



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at last year or the year prior to that, we have always met or authorized in strength and is probably due to myriad of factors that affect all services. Obviously, there's a lot of competition for folks by many industries as well as universities. And some of the recent statistics show that only 23% of what we consider primary military age 18 to 24 even meet the requirements to join the U.S. military. And another interesting statistic as well is over 80% of those that do come in usually have an immediate family member or relative or friend that is in the service. So there's a little bit of good news and bad news there.

The good news, I would say, is of 80% knows someone and they're willing to come into the military and serve. They do see the value in serving their nation and many of the opportunities that they provide. The bad side of that is there's a lot of people that may not have that exposure to the military, which may be a great choice for them to help them develop leadership skills, training or just opportunities that they may not have otherwise. So we're looking very closely at that. And in my meetings with the recruiters, we looked at potential ways. How do we resolve this? How do we address this situation? And there's a lot of ideas out there. And I'll just share with you three of the potential things that we're looking at on ways to potentially mitigate this and increase the number of recruits and then also help with our retention.

And the first is something you may have heard from me before, and that's the health care coverage for all of our Guardsmen that serve our country. And when we look at it statistically, even today, we have about 60,000 Guardsmen that do not have health insurance or health coverage and even those that do have coverage through their civilian employer. Sometimes the transition from their civilian provider to TRICARE, when they're mobilized, there could be gaps in coverage which can add stress to them and their families. But we work very hard to try and mitigate that whenever and wherever we can.

But when you look at overall the fact that there is no health insurance provided by the National Guard for folks, and we ask them to be ready really at a moment's notice. And we saw that during COVID, during civil disturbance, as well as many of our operations that we do around the country on a day-to-day basis, we really need to make sure that they're medically and healthy and ready. And if they're injured, they've gotten that treated so that they can really respond when we ask them to do it. And so when we look at potential folks who are coming to the National Guard, sometimes that's less appealing if health care is not part of their decision process to serve. And if it is really important and sometimes that would be a distractor or something that would cause them to go somewhere else. But really, when we look at recruiting and retention and the ability, really the most important aspect of that, the ability to be ready whenever we're needed. Health care is absolutely critical to making that happen.



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Another area we're looking at is our educational benefits, which really is one of the main reasons a lot of folks would join the National Guard historically. And now all the National Guard members can currently use their federal tuition and their GI Bill benefits. They cannot claim a dependent or they cannot claim independent student status like their active duty counterparts. And really, where this comes into play is when it comes to the FAFSA or the free application for Federal Student Aid. And that makes National Guardsmen less competitive for that. And for us, we just want to make sure that there's a level playing field for them and they can utilize all the benefits that they're entitled to.

Lastly, the thing I would like to share with you is really looking at incentivizing our service members that are already in to help us recruit. And if we look at some of the previous programs that were put out there and by putting in the right checks and balances in place, we could really help make every single guardsman a recruiter by paying them a bonus for anybody that they bring into the organization that's able to complete their military training. Previously, this worked at the height of our wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and numerous recruiters, and a lot of our leaders have brought this up as a potential option going forward as we look to recruit back to our full authorized end strength, really to meet the readiness and needs of our nation.

So those are just a few of those. And I know some of the other folks on the line have things specific to their state that they're seeing. And I'd really like to give them a chance to share those as well. But overall, I really appreciate you taking time out of your day and the opportunity to visit with you. And I look forward to your questions and back to you.

**Ms. Nahaku McFadden** [00:07:29] And thank you, sir. I really appreciate that. Let's start with Alex Horton from Washington Post. Alex, do you have a question?

**Alex Horton** [00:07:39] I do appreciate that. One question. One. Our first question is about the state active duty component. You know, as you know, you get fewer benefits like education and health care. Are you maybe pushing or advocating, too, to governors to use different authorities for them to get the benefits? Because I, I feel like perhaps that is one thing that turns off people from volunteering for these things is the benefits that you so aptly described. Is that something you're in conversation with governors with to make sure there is something that can help people when they are activated for such missions? And I have a follow up, too.

**Ms. Nahaku McFadden** [00:08:26] Thank you, Alex. General Bohac, would you like to start?

**Maj. Gen. Bohac** [00:08:30] Yeah, sure. And thank you. Thanks for the opportunity to be here today. With respect to state active duty, that's a duty status that's funded by and controlled by the



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state. And so there is some variability across the 54 states territories in the district when it comes to that that state active duty event. I would say that I have not seen a lack of volunteerism. When we ask for people to come on state active duty and respond to disasters or other events in the state. In fact, I would say typically we have more volunteers than requirements and EMS. And so I think that's actually one of the reasons young people do want to join the National Guard in particular, because they get to serve locally and they get to help their communities. Thank you.

**Ms. Nahaku McFadden** [00:09:23] Alex, do you have a follow on?

**Alex Horton** [00:09:25] Yeah. This one is about a about complacency. You know, as the general mentioned here, so much reliance has been on people who have military family history, you know, and reliance on really kind of broken American social problems like student debt, medical care, medical debt. Do you feel that that the Guard has relied on that for so long that it has not anticipated changes where it needed to be nimble, fluid and creative in drawing people in such as right now, when all these other issues are causing new challenges to bring people in. Do you do you feel like you were prepared creatively to address some of these challenges?

**Ms. Nahaku McFadden** [00:10:12] And, General Holmes, would you like to answer that?

**MG Holmes** [00:10:15] I'm sure and thank you for allowing me to participate. So, yes, I think absolutely. You know, we're experiencing unprecedented challenges from society in general. You mentioned nimbleness. You know, I think to a large, large organization, institution, we struggle to be nimble. But I however, there are certain benchmarks in history where it requires some creative solutions. And I think we're at that inflection point now. And you can use any number of examples. You know, our, you know, obesity, the health crisis, I will say that we have in the United States with our youth now, you know, there are certain things, red lines that I would say that we cannot really sacrifice on the military side. We cannot lower standards to the point where a young soldier or anyone could perform their duties. However, we do have to recognize what society is providing us. And I think I think there's some opportunities in addressing what we call cap for potential recruits that may have some weight problems. They may not have been educated properly or mentored properly, and the ability to eat healthy exercise regularly. I think we in Tennessee have started focusing on trying to educate those youth. And we have a program here. It's an RSP program. It typically prepares recruits prior to shipping for basic training. We're actually looking to the left of that and finding those potential recruits that have the capacity to serve. But they're you know, they don't meet the high wage standards or even the minimum wage standards to even ship. And allowing them to come in and then allowing us to say two weeks initially, it's going to get them educated, get them in a region, and then look and see if we can with we can allow them to kind of, you know, transform their



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bodies and eating habits just through education. We're also focusing on testing. And I think it's this well, it's well understood that over the past two years, with the lack of schools in session, testing has suffered across the nation, with our youth as we have suffered under ASAN test interest exams. We need to be nimble enough to look at that. Colleges, universities have actually waived that for a number of years, realizing the impact that the at Kogan has had on our youth and ability to test properly. We should be nimble enough to look at that and maybe relaxing some of those requirements and so that we're able to bring that the youth that have the propensity to serve bring them along. And we have we partnered with our state institutions and colleges. And so they're providing actually courses that you can go and take Tuesday night or whatever. And it helps that student learn to test again. And it kind of feels that gap that they weren't able to get over the last three years by a lack of in-person school.

**Ms. Nahaku McFadden** [00:13:31] Thank you, sir. I really appreciate that. So we're moving on to most games from NBC. Most of you here.

**Moshesh Gaines** [00:13:39] I thank you for doing this. I was just curious, are there areas of the country where you're seeing more of a gap for recruiting and retention versus other areas? And is there a sense that part of the shortfall is due to social issues, that the military has become too political over the years? Wondering if you've been hearing anything about that? Also, we just recently did a story on kind of big Army and its retention issues with recruiting as well. And one of the things that one of the recruiters that we talked to said that a big hesitation was when it comes to, you know, kind of fear of deploying. I'm wondering how that may kind of factor into some of the shortfall here, what you're hearing in that sense as well. Thank you.

**Ms. Nahaku McFadden** [00:14:31] Thank you. Mr. Smith, would you please start with how is recruiting and retention or recruiting from your perspective? And then, Colonel Salahuddin, if you can add a little bit to that, just talking specifically as it relates to the actual recruiting piece.

**Mr. Smith** [00:14:48] Oh, yes, sir. Thank you. So from my perspective, if I can go back one 1/2 to the previous question and then I'll come to this question based off what Major General Holmes just stated in terms of being nimble. He mentioned the Air Force or individuals who score less than 31 on ASVAB. And so, one of the things that we are doing is a part of our Future Soldier Prep course, which we partnered with the Army, which allows those individuals to score less than a third of want to go be a part of an educational training to be able to increase their ASVAB scores. And so to date of 138 that we've been listed in that process, we've had 87 that have actually increased their scores from 4 to 3 Bravo School, anywhere from 31 to 49. So that's a good news story also in terms of us adapting to the educational concerns and issues that Major General Holmes spoke of in reference to the sessions across the United States, we've actually



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seen a decrease across a throughout the entire United States. Some areas that historically did well are not doing as well this year. Follow those missions that were all those reasons that was mentioned earlier, whether it was Colgate policy or things of that nature. But we have seen a few states that have done better doing this environment that didn't do so well in previous years. But, you know, along with that and the civilian competition and things of that nature, all those things are indicators that it's a more challenging population that we have to go after. And so we're doing what we can to mitigate some of those issues and challenges to be a more viable source for those individuals seeking to serve in the military. Our.

**Ms. Nahaku McFadden** [00:16:51] Thank you. Colonel Salahuddin, do you have anything to add?

**Col. Salahuddin** [00:16:55] Yeah, I'll just say that really, the competition is a lot stiffer. So whereas in the past, maybe there were youth that were pinched that would certainly join the military now because of the labor shortage. Private sector companies are becoming a lot more competitive in terms of attracting that talent as well. So that's why as your focus on talked about making sure that our benefits are aligned, that we're creating those incentives for young people to join the National Guard, I think is critical. And I want to address the point.

**Ms. Nahaku McFadden** [00:17:37] Yes, sir.

**GEN Hokanson** [00:17:38] Yes. So one thing, when you're with the National Guard since 911, everyone in the National Guard today has either come in or has re-enlisted or has voluntarily extended since 911. And as a result, any of the cases when official organizations there any of the expected deployment come into the National Guard. And it's not just the response that they get to defend in their communities, but many of them look for those opportunities to report it. In fact, I would say we usually have way more volunteers than we actually need for many of our deployments overseas. And if a unit has a vacancy. There's usually competition not only within the state of which states are willing to go with that patient just for the opportunity to report overseas and really do what they've signed up to do. Thank you.

**Ms. Nahaku McFadden** [00:18:34] Thank you, sir. If your staff could do just a little bit of a calm check, your connectivity was coming in and out. Just for everyone's knowledge. We will have a transcript. So will ensure that you have exactly what General Hawkins just shared for your for your articles. Thank you. Thank you, sir. We're going to go now with. With Stars and Stripes. Are you. Are you there? Rose?



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**Rose Thayer** [00:19:05]: Yes, thank you. I was wondering if I could get a little more detail about the health care that you're looking at offering and if you could talk if you have looked at any cost estimates for that yet and sort of how you're going about working that problem. Thank you. Let's see. Colonel Salahuddin, do you have any information on that specific aspect as it comes to recruiting and retention?

**Col. Salahuddin** [00:19:38] Right. So, you know, as General Wilkinson said, really, when you look at the tri care benefit and active duty member as basically the premium free TRICARE. So in order to have equity with the active duty services, certainly the National Guard has been advocating the Congress for TRICARE, basically free TRICARE benefits to come up with that equity. So we can certainly get the press those that detail analysis that have done in terms of the cost for that. So we can follow up with that information.

**Ms. Nahaku McFadden** [00:20:15] Thank you, General Bohac, from the state level. How does that affect recruiting and retention when you're talking about these types of benefits?

**Maj. Gen. Bohac** [00:20:25] Well, I think the benefits matter and I think benefits parity matters as well. And really that's what we're after in order to ensure medical readiness across the formation and so that people are prepared, prepared when they're asked to deploy. So I think that's the critical component. You know, in terms of the costing models in general, Hogan could answer that probably the best, but it's the question is really not the cost. Are we willing to invest in the future of our nation by providing health care insurance to those that are willing to raise your right hand to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic. Thank you.

**Ms. Nahaku McFadden** [00:21:09] Thank you, sir. Rose, do you have another question?

**Rose Thayer** [00:21:12]: Yes, I do. So did you want to jump in, sir?

**GEN Hokanson** [00:21:17] If you don't mind. And thank you for the question. So we actually did do the costing on this and if all members of the National Guard, the best estimate we have is about \$719 million a year to provide health care coverage. Understanding that many of them already have through their civilian provider, we are really looking at ways and options to really get after the 60,000 that we know that do not have any health care coverage. Just mention, you know, the key is, you know, we talk about variations of access, particularly for state active duty. If there is an emergency, they need to respond immediately, which is really important they are taken care of and ready to go. And as General Bohac also mentioned, when you look at the investment, it's kind of a two piece investment here. You know, the individuals, when they come



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into the National Guard, they invest in going off to basic training, to their technical schools and their advanced training, that's a significant commitment of time away from them, from their employers and from their families so that they learn the skillset that our nation needs. But then you also look at the investment that our nation makes and the cost to send them there, train them, get them ready, and also equip them to do that mission that they may need to do at a moment's notice. And so for me, I think it's really important to acknowledge the investment that our nation has made and the individual has made in serving our country and really trying to make sure that we take care of them so that when we need them, they're ready to go. Thank you.

**Ms. Nahaku McFadden** [00:22:58] Thank you, sir. Rose, do you have a second question?

**Rose Thayer** [00:23:02]: Yes, I did. You know, I'm sitting here in Texas where there were some problems that rose up with state active duty, particularly pay issues and some other sort of benefit distribution challenges. Is there anything the Fed side is looking at that it can do to help the states mitigate these things? Because I would think they can be a detractor for people looking to serve.

**Ms. Nahaku McFadden** [00:23:32] General Hokanson, do you have anything regarding that? From the federal level. Oh.

**GEN Hokanson** [00:23:41] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Rose And so obviously at the national level we're concerned about the wellbeing of every single one of our Guardsmen. Obviously, when they're under a state active duty status, if the state needs help, we will always augment them in any way that we can. But ultimately, at the end of the day, since they're under control of the governor, being paid by the state, and so under those protections, we really are just there to help them to do that because there is no direct federal nexus related to that.

**Ms. Nahaku McFadden** [00:24:16] Thank you. Okay. Moving on, Mike Brooks from Washington Examiner. Mike, are you there?

**GEN Hokanson** [00:24:25] Hi. No questions. Thank you.

**Ms. Nahaku McFadden** [00:24:27] Thank you so much for being here. Okay. Next is. Ellie Watson right here. Ellie.

**Ellie Watson** [00:24:37] Yep. I have two quick ones. Over the course of the past year, has the guard had to change its goals as the numbers weren't looking good? And then what's the outlook



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for the next few years? How long is this? How long are you guys thinking this could be a problem?

**Ms. Nahaku McFadden** [00:24:54] Okay. Let's start with Mr. Smith. You talk about overarching recruiting numbers and goals.

**Mr. Smith** [00:25:01] Oh, yeah, absolutely. Thanks for the question. So now at this point for FY 23, we're still looking at our strength goals was at 336,3000 I'm sorry, 336,000. And so, in 24, there may be some decreases in emission based off the COVID losses. But right now, we're still moving forward at our initial goal of 336,000.

**Ms. Nahaku McFadden** [00:25:30] And Col.

**Col. Salahuddin** [00:25:31] And for the Air National Guard, our total authorized for fiscal year 22 is 108,300. So really that's what we need to do our work and mission and that's what we're authorized to have. So no, our total instrument certainly is not going to be adjusted looking at the long term. You know, really many of the things that we're confronting are not just one time issues. As we said, up top, you know, propensity to serve has been defining. There's some issues around young people being able to qualify for the military overall. We're going to continue to be aggressive because joining into National Guard is still a tremendous opportunity both to serve the nation and to serve the local community. So we'll continue to focus on that.

**Ms. Nahaku McFadden** [00:26:21] Thank you. General Holmes, do you have anything to add as it relates to how the effects are happening in the state?

**MG Holmes** [00:26:29] Yeah. I think there's some standard challenges that are always going to be there at once. The economy. Then we're fortunate in Tennessee, we've got a very robust economy, so we're in direct competition for that talent. So we have really reached out to civilian private sector companies, large companies, and kind of partnered with them. And so that we can tell a story that you don't have to pick one or the other. You can do both. That's one of the uniqueness is that you can have two careers and we can if we come together, we can partner that. We've got a lot of a lot of industry, a lot of big companies that are moving in here and there, and they're really advocating hiring with our support, hiring reservists and National Guard because they see the true benefit that can be a leader in this in the state. So other companies, smaller companies that may not have that knowledge, see that that they're reaching out and they see the benefits of our reserves around. And I'll say you're back to the state active duty peace. As I said, that's a state issue given by state law and compensation. And I'll tell you that three years ago, typically our state active duty duration with maybe a week, two weeks, three weeks, four weeks,



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the past three years, really it became evident that we had some work to do internal to the state to make sure that that compensation matched Title 32 service. And we were able to do that and we did that in the state and we realized that insurance was a significant disadvantage for soldiers and airmen that were more than willing to volunteer for state active duty. But we realized that there were gaps as John gets and said it, it bridges that gap. And, you know, I've said all along, we would never need to put something a decision for a soldier and say, I need to go volunteer, I need to serve my state or nation. However, I'm putting my family at a disadvantage. We should never put them in that in that position. So I think and I'll when I talk about the benefits that that we're looking at, both nationally and in the state, we talk about a number of things. And every time I mentioned insurance, it gets the most absolute, most attention. And I think it can absolutely be a game changer. The economy is going to be what it is. It's going to tilt back and forth over ten years or whatever. But insurance is a game changer, partnering with civilian corporations and companies. That's a way to get a go at it. And we've got to do a good job of telling our story. And the 1% continues to get separated by the 99%. You know, they get the parents, you know, obviously, the you know, the mentor of that young potential soldier, airman. We have to you know, we have to educate them on all the qualities of serving your state in the nation. And we've spent a lot of time and effort getting out back into our communities and in educating that population and demographics are going to change, they're changing across the United States right now. Internally, the Tennessee demographics are changing. So populations are moving to the to the urban areas. So we're looking at a comprehensive eight year plan of starting to consolidate our readiness centers, moving our units around the state to follow the demographics. That's something that doesn't change every five years. So we see the direction it's going. So now we're taking the proactive steps and moving our units to those areas. We're still not abandoning the rural areas but focusing on the areas that that our population and recruiting potential are moving to over.

**Ms. Nahaku McFadden** [00:30:23] Thank you, sir. Ellie, you have a second question?

**Ellie Watson** [00:30:27] Yeah. Just real quick. Thank you, guys. Mr. Smith, you mentioned I think you mentioned COVID losses or something like that. What did you mean by that?

**Mr. Smith** [00:30:37] So when we look at our mission past and what 23 obviously are, we're waiting for a decision for phase two from SecArmy in terms of COVID losses. But at some point those individuals who have not applied for ETP, an extension for either medical or religious reasons, then those individuals will refuse to take the COVID test, will have to be discharged. And so as we go into FY 24 and beyond, that will be factored into our overall mission. And those losses that we will have to make up based on those individuals will choose to not get



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COVID. So right now we're looking at possibly in FY 23, about 9000 and then FY 24 additional 5000 over the next two years, potential COVID losses over.

**Ms. Nahaku McFadden** [00:31:32] So he used the acronym ETP Exception to policy. Okay. Moving on, we're going to go with Luis Martinez, ABC News. Are you here?

**Luis Martinez** [00:31:46] Ma'am. Thank you. Just following up on that, what is the actual number of discharges that you've had because of COVID? Is it that number that you just cited? Before I get to my real question. Thanks.

**Mr. Smith** [00:32:01] Yeah. So I can answer that. So right now, we haven't had any discharges because of COVID, because we still, again, are waiting on the phase two memorandum from the Secretary of the Army before we get into who will be discharged based off refusals to take COVID.

**Luis Martinez** [00:32:24] But you're so you're anticipating up to 9000 from next year then that's what you're saying.

**Mr. Smith** [00:32:29] Yeah. Based on the numbers that we have of refusals. Once the phase two goes in effect, yeah, we're anticipating probably around 9000.

**Luis Martinez** [00:32:38] Okay. And then my question to General Hokanson is, sir, when the National Guard was pretty well known for being at the forefront of attention in recent years, I mean, how do you explain the change?

**GEN Hokanson** [00:32:54] So Luis, what's interesting is if you look over the past two years, our retention rates have actually gone up even higher than we anticipated. So with that respect, from what we're seeing so far right now, we're finding that our service members, and women that are in actually see the value in what they're doing and they're sticking around or they're staying longer. And so obviously we watch that very closely. And that's why some of these areas that we're looking at, we think will help also reinforce that, because we are very reliant on their ability to continue to serve and want to serve once that they're in over.

**Ms. Nahaku McFadden** [00:33:31] Okay. Antonio Express Sig Christenson. I think you're I think you're still on mute.

**Sig Christenson** [00:33:41] Thank you. Thank you, General Hokanson. You mentioned having recruiters recruit other people. You know, you had a program like that some years ago. I wrote



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about it. A bunch of people got arrested. It was a bit of a scandal. How would you prevent that from happening again? It was really badly abused at one point, including here in Texas.

**GEN Hokanson** [00:34:07] That's a great question. And that's why when we talk to folks, we go back to really the amount of recruiting that we did really at the height of the war in Afghanistan and Iraq. And it actually overall, the program was very successful. Now, obviously, there were lessons learned that we would definitely want to incorporate. We want to basically have a firm set of rules and orders and set and really set the terms and conditions under which to really eliminate the opportunity for what had happened previously. Because at the end of the day, it was successful, was what it was trying to accomplish. The means and processes really needed to be refined and fixed so that that doesn't happen again. But it's one of those things. I mean, it's one of many options that we're looking at. And for us, we're trying to think of those things and work with folks that they know that they had done previously that were successful or stuff that we've never done before that we think shows promise. Because at the end of the day, as they mentioned, you know, there is no plan to produce or authorized end strength right now. We're at 336,000 on the Army Guard and 1.8 on the air side because that's what our nation needs. And really, it's up to us to do everything we can to fill those formations so that when our nation asks us to do whatever we need to do for our country, that we've got the people in formation that are trained and ready to to do that whenever they get asked.

**Sig Christenson** [00:35:35] Thank you. I throw one other thing out there. Some years ago, I wrote about a fellow who had spent 11 years in a prison in Texas who joined the Texas Army Guard and served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Felony waiver programs became somewhat popular at some point during the war in Iraq. Our is that and waiver programs in general something you're going to look at harder to help increase your recruiting to try to reach your recruiting goal.

**GEN Hokanson** [00:36:15] I'll defer to the both the arm and the air. But there is no plans, no discussion at all for anything similar to that that I'm aware of. But I'll let the army of the Air Guard add in here as well specifically.

**Col. Salahuddin** [00:36:28] So from the air side, there is no initiative or no discussion at this point.

**Ms. Nahaku McFadden** [00:36:35] Mr. Smith.

**Mr. Smith** [00:36:36] Yeah, yeah. Same for the Army Guard over there.

**Sig Christenson** [00:36:40] Thank you.



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**Ms. Nahaku McFadden** [00:36:42] Thank you. Okay. Moving on. Military Times with Megan Myers.

**Megan Myers** [00:36:47] Hi. Thanks. I'm just wondering if you guys are doing any sort of research for the guard to look at itself to see whether the nature of serving in the Guard might be having an effect on retention or propensity to serve. You know for a long time the guard's big saw was its one weekend a month and it's two weeks a year and then you can have your regular job. But that's less and less common, especially, you know, in places like Texas, where state active duty has dragged on for a lot of troops who didn't want it. There are states activating Guard troops to drive busses to teach school. You know, none of these things that people really sign up for. So is there you know, is there a possibility that that part of the changing nature of serving in the National Guard might have an effect on whether people want to join?

**Ms. Nahaku McFadden** [00:37:37] Thank you. General Bohac, would you like to answer that?

**Maj. Gen. Bohac** [00:37:42] Sure I can start. I think that our experience, at least here in Nebraska, is that people are signing up and understand that they will likely deploy overseas. They also understand that in part of our recruiting, quite frankly, pitches the opportunity to serve in their communities when disaster strike or other events occur. And I think young people today are looking for that in terms of kind of values alignment. They want to they want to help others. They want to help others locally. So we haven't really experienced experience anything along the lines of people not wanting to join because they might be asked to do something here at home. Now, I, I will acknowledge that we are mindful of what we call personnel tempo, which is the amount of time people are being asked to contribute above and beyond, if you will, the basic minimums? But to date, here in Nebraska, that's not caused us to experience retention losses or recruiting challenges. Thank you.

**Ms. Nahaku McFadden** [00:38:48] Do you have a following question?

**Megan Myers** [00:38:50] Yeah, well, I mean, you're speaking about Nebraska specifically, but has there been any research, any thought to do surveys or just specifically ask, you know, the way DOD asked high school age kids every year whether they picture themselves serving? Is there any way to look into what might be keeping people from joining? Because Nebraska is a specific case. But, you know, the things that I'm citing aren't going on in Nebraska either.

**Mr. Smith** [00:39:13] Right. Hey, this is Mr. Smith. I got to take that question. So. So are you asking about joining or staying?



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**Megan Myers** [00:39:22] Either. I would imagine, you know, you could ask existing Guard members, you know, if they plan to get out at the end of their contract. Why is that? Or, you know, recruiters to be able to drill down into. You know if there's a lower propensity to serve. Get the actual answer from people why that is instead of you know the common trope is that is are external factors that you know, health and fitness is going down in this country and the job market's really, really competitive. But is there anything that the guard can do to look at itself for things that might be causing a problem?

**Mr. Smith** [00:39:56] Right. So from a from a retention standpoint, I think all the things you just mentioned from an assessment standpoint, pretty much all the main factors. Right. Is contributing to do the sessions. Even if you look back to last year and we actually achieved that in strength like in May, so we were doing the work and people were joining. So the question is, why are people now changing their mind? Well, we're still trying to figure it out. And then for the piece about the retention piece. So my attrition management branch, we do an exit survey for all the soldiers who are coming upon their expiration term in service or ETS date. And we do an exit survey to find out why and asking those individuals why they are not re-enlisting into the Army National Guard. And so just like any survey is only as good as the amount of people that actually participate. But we do have some information that kind of gives us indicators of why people are not staying in the guard. So, yes, we do track that information.

**GEN Hokanson** [00:41:06] And if I could just add Megan, at the national level, every Thursday I speak with our 54 adjutant general across the country, and we discuss issues or concerns like this because at the end of the day, what we're trying to do is find that balance or our guard members can serve their nation, still maintain their civilian job and their growth there, but then also balance that with their family. And we know over time we're going to have to lean on one over the other. But at the end of the day, we work with Daryl and Jeff and the other adjutants general to make sure that we're doing everything we can at the national level to sustain that balance. And in many cases, of course, there's an emergency. And we look at the National Guard, we're there for an emergency. But when the emergency is over, you know, there are other organizations that are probably better equipped long term. And our ability to meet the emergency but then hand it off as quickly as possible is really some of the things that our adjutants general work with in their states every single day. And we do the same here at the national level to try and reduce whenever possible that that tempo. But the amount we ask our people to do things, understanding that they have deployments and then they have their civilian career and their family as well. Thank you.



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**Ms. Nahaku McFadden** [00:42:20] Megan, this is going to be the last question. Oh, I'm good. You're good. Okay.

**MG Holmes** [00:42:29] To follow up, our OPS tempo pers tempo that we talked about. We have had, you know, our soldiers and airmen, they want to deploy. They want to deploy it in a, you know, an a regular occurrence that allows them to have those dual careers. If they do not get that opportunity, it will be a negative impact on our recruiting and retention. There is a balance, and I think it's up to us as leaders to check their purse tempo and ensure that we're not driving them in the ground. We have controls of that. We can gauge the number of days that they do a year. I think when you hear, hey, it's one week in a month, that's how it used to be. It's more of a badge of honor than it is kind of a slight. It's like, Hey, we do more than that one weekend a month. We go to we go overseas, you know, our Air National Guard there. They're going over missions every night. Every day. They want that acknowledgment if they are participating in this nation's security. So, you know, one week in a month old school stuff, our soldiers and airmen are proud to do more than one weekend a month. And I guarantee you, if we don't use them, they will go find something else to do. So I think that's a narrative that kind of needs to be checked in some regards because you can use it either way and it's a positive for us. It's up to us as senior leaders and leaders to make sure that we do allow them to balance. But if when we call them, they will come and they always have. So it's up to us to make sure that we're taking care of them and not asking too much of them.

**Ms. Nahaku McFadden** [00:44:10] Okay. Thank you, everyone. Unfortunately, we're running out of time. General Hokanson. Would you. Do you have a closing statement you'd like to provide?

**GEN Hokanson** [00:44:19] Yeah. Thank you and everyone. Thank you for taking the time. Obviously, this is very important to us and we look at the sides of the National Guard. We are of this size because our nation needs that. And we obviously take this very serious if we're not able to meet our recruiting and retention goals, we're looking at other options that will help us get there. And a lot of the questions that you asked today are really helpful for us because those are the questions that we get from the public at large. And ultimately, we have to be able to answer every single one of those to show the value of service to your nation. I think we do a great service, and every time I visit our soldiers and airmen, when they're out there doing these jobs, I mean the smile on their face, they feel like they're making a difference and they are making a difference. And so for me, I want to make sure that I look at this as a hopefully just a short term issue. We need to make adjustments based on the current environment because for the long term, our nation needs a National Guard the size that we are, or maybe even larger to meet all the



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requirements that we have. And it's up to us to make sure that we fill our formations so that they're ready when our nation needs us.

**Ms. Nahaku McFadden** [00:45:29] Thank you, General GEN Hokanson. General Holmes and General Bohac. And then of course, Mr. Smith and Colonel Salahuddin for being here today. Anybody whose questions still didn't get answered, please feel free to reach out to the National Guard Bureau of Media Operations desk and we will respond and get you advances that you are looking for. This concludes our Media Roundtable on recruiting and retention. Thank you so much for being here. Aloha.

**GEN Hokanson** [00:45:59] Thank you all.

[End of Audio]

**Duration: 46 minutes**

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