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Army Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville speaks Wednesday during a Coffee Series event hosted by the Association of the U.S. Army in Arlington, Virginia. (AUSA PHOTO)

Army seeks to inspire youth to serve

The Army needs many things, but one of its top priorities is inspiring military service, Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville said Wednesday.

Speaking at a Coffee Series event hosted by the Association of the U.S. Army, McConville said that what he needs most today is for young men and women to answer the call to service. “What we need help with is inspiring people to serve,” he said.

“We are in a war for talent,” McConville said. “It is a war that we have to win. We need everybody’s help.”

“What we want to do in the Army is we want to give people an opportunity to do great things. In fact, we want them to be all they can be,” he said, using a 20-year-old recruiting slogan that’s being refreshed by the Army as a way of marketing military

service as a path to building character and a sense of purpose.

The Army has had problems meeting its recruiting goals. As a result, its troop strength has decreased because leaders don’t want to lower accessions standards. “We have a lot of young men and women who want to serve but cannot pass the academic requirements or their physical requirements,” McConville said.

McConville said he and Army Secretary Christine Wormuth refuse to lower standards because “we think that quality is more important than quantity.”

“What we are willing to do is we are willing to invest in young men and women,” McConville said. This investment comes through what the Army is calling the Future Soldier Preparatory Course, which helps

youths who can’t meet academic or physical fitness standards improve so they can qualify. They are learning math, improving their physical fitness and learning discipline so they are prepared for basic training. “There is no screaming or yelling,” McConville said. Instead, the focus is on development.

So far, the preparatory course at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, has had a 95% success rate, McConville said. “Either they are improving their scores, or they are losing body fat,” he said, adding that the Army plans to expand the program as it continues to show success.

McConville said he’s a big believer in giving people an opportunity. “If we don’t want to lower standards, we are going to have to invest in young men and women,” he said.



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Emergency mental health care expanded for veterans

Veterans in acute suicidal crisis can receive care at any emergency health care facility at no cost under a new Department of Veterans Affairs policy.

The new policy that went into effect Tuesday provides veterans access to acute care, including inpatient or crisis residential care for up to 30 days and outpatient care for up to 90 days, according to a news release from the VA. Veterans do not need to be enrolled in the VA system to use this benefit.

Eligible individuals include veterans who were discharged or released after more than 24 months of active service under conditions other than dishonorable, former members of any component who served more than 100 days under a combat exclusion or in support of a contingency operation, and former service members who were the victim of a physical assault or battery of a sexual nature or sexual harassment while serving.

There are approximately 16.5 million veterans in the U.S., according to U.S. Census data, and they are disproportionately affected by suicide compared to the U.S. population.

“Veterans bear a disproportionate but preventable burden,” Christopher Jones, acting director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Center for Injury Preven-



There are approximately 16.5 million veterans in the U.S., and they are disproportionately affected by suicide compared to the U.S. population. (U.S. ARMY/SPC. PETER SEIDLER)

tion and Control, testified before a House Veterans Affairs subcommittee. “At this moment in history, it is imperative to address the challenges veterans face head-on and provide supports to increase hope and resilience at the individual, family and community level.”

For the up to 9 million veterans who are not currently enrolled in the VA system, this new benefit will increase their access to care when they need it most, the VA said in its news release.

Among service members who separated from active military service in 2019, Army veterans experienced

the second highest suicide rate during the 12 months after leaving the military, according to the VA’s 2022 National Veteran Suicide Prevention annual report.

Though veterans are particularly affected by suicide, suicide deaths among veterans are decreasing, according to the VA report.

“There were 343 fewer Veterans who died from suicide in 2020 than in 2019, and 2020 had the lowest number of Veteran suicides since 2006,” according to the report.

“From 2001 through 2018, the number of Veteran suicides increased on average by 47 deaths per year. From 2019 to 2020, there were consecutive reductions, of 307 and 343 suicides, respectively, an unprecedented decrease since 2001.”

The new VA policy ensures that veterans will have access to the care they need, said Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough.

“Veterans in suicidal crisis can now receive the free, world-class emergency health care they deserve—no matter where they need it, when they need it, or whether they’re enrolled in VA care,” McDonough said. “This expansion of care will save veterans’ lives, and there’s nothing more important than that.”

Meet the AUSA headquarters staff

Greg Sprouse

Audio/Visual Specialist, IT

Greg Sprouse has been with AUSA for nearly six years. He enjoys his job helping people and making sure they are connected and prepared for events. In his spare time, Greg enjoys weekend hikes, being outdoors and going to national parks to view wildlife in all the elements. He also likes time inside being entertained by a good movie.



Whitley: Continued cuts to Army budget are ‘not sustainable’



Soldiers with the 25th Infantry Division’s Lightning Academy conduct insertion/extraCTION training Jan. 12 at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. (U.S. ARMY/1ST LT. DAVID BLOCK)

In a new Association of the U.S. Army policy paper, former acting Army Secretary John Whitley highlights the dangers to the Army and the nation from ignoring ground warfare capabilities.

He’s concerned that current planning and budgeting overlook the vital role ground forces, particularly the U.S. Army, have played in past conflicts and will likely play in the future.

“From World War II through Korea, Vietnam and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Army averaged about 50 percent of serving forces, provided about 60 percent of deployments and averaged about 70 percent of wartime fatalities,” he writes.

“What is less widely recognized is that this is also frequently true during peacetime,” he writes. “Consisting of less than 50 percent of the total force, the Army has provided: 75 percent of the U.S. joint force support to Ukraine; 80 percent of the COVID National Guard response; 80 percent of domestic border security support; two-thirds of the Joint Staff’s directed readiness requirements; and over half of the Combatant Commands’

global requirements.”

Despite the proven demand, Army funding has been on the decline, Whitley writes, with cuts that are “not sustainable” and not aligned with the National Defense Strategy.

The ongoing war in Ukraine and the potential for conflict elsewhere require making Army modernization a higher priority, Whitley writes. “The Army requires significantly increased investment from 2024 to 2030 to modernize and maintain overmatch against near-peer competitors.”

He is worried. “Cutting the Army to its lowest funded level since before World War II with no decrease in demand is not sustainable. As recruiting recovers, Congress should not repeat the historical pattern of decreasing Army end strength. Instead, Congress should direct a plan for how DoD intends to restore Army forces to the levels required to execute the NDS. Congress should also direct DoD to develop an analytic framework for force structure sizing so that Congress has a mechanism for evaluating force trade-offs.”

The full paper is available here.

AUSA Extra

Voice for the Army –
Support For the Soldier

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Brown addresses future operations at Stryker conference

Stryker brigade combat teams and their “tremendous capability” will have a key role in the multidomain operations of the future, said retired Gen. Bob Brown, president and CEO of the Association of the U.S. Army.

Brown made his remarks last week during the annual Stryker Leader Summit at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, where industry and Army experts came together to examine modernization and readiness for Stryker units.

“The Stryker brigades are the only infantry-centric medium brigades in the Army,” Brown said. “They have tremendous capability, enhanced lethality, mobility and networked mission command.”

During the two-day summit Jan. 9–10, key stakeholders discussed the Army’s 2030 force structure initia-



Retired Gen. Bob Brown addresses the Stryker Leader Summit. (U.S. ARMY/SGT. JOSHUA OH)

tives, Stryker brigade combat team modernization and potential improvements to the weapon system, as well as lessons learned and ways to maintain readiness.

Brown, who commanded a Stryker brigade combat team and is a former commander of I Corps and U.S. Army Pacific, emphasized that as the Army shifts to training for large-scale combat operations, “the actual lessons will be

learned from those on the ground closest to the problem. They will come up with what the future fight looks like.”

Lt. Gen. Xavier Brunson, commander of I Corps, agreed that the Army’s people are vital to finding the best path forward.

“We’ve got to figure this out, and that innovation is going to come from deep down in our formations,” Brunson said.



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Center for Leadership connects with chapters, soldiers

The Association of the U.S. Army's Center for Leadership is working to expand its outreach on a national level, with more engagements planned in 2023.

Established Oct. 1, 2021, by retired Gen. Bob Brown, AUSA president and CEO, the center aims to help educate, inspire and connect leaders of character and cohesive teams through podcasts, publications and forums.

Retired Command Sgt. Maj. Mario Terenas, deputy director of the Center for Leadership, traveled to Texas and North Carolina in December to meet with AUSA chapters, ROTC programs and Army units.

"My primary purpose was to encourage awareness of AUSA and the Center for Leadership, grow membership and conduct leader professional development sessions, as well as meet with local chapters and their leadership to provide support in their efforts," Terenas said.

In Texas, Terenas led professional development sessions focused on building trust with ROTC cadets at the University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M. He also led a session with more than 300 students and cadre at the III Corps and Fort Hood NCO Academy.

He also met with AUSA's Texas Capital Area chapter and participated in its meeting at the headquarters of the Texas Army National Guard.

"It was motivating to meet with soldiers, cadets and our association members at the local level," Terenas said. "Professional development sessions are an important part of strengthening leadership and a practical demonstration of AUSA's mission to support soldiers."

In North Carolina, Terenas met with the leadership of AUSA's Braxton Bragg chapter and senior enlisted personnel from the XVIII Airborne Corps and Army Forces Command at Fort Bragg.

The topics of the professional de-



Retired Command Sgt. Maj. Mario Terenas, second from left, deputy director of AUSA's Center for Leadership, meets with members of the association's Texas Capital Area chapter. They are, from left to right, retired Col. Garry Patterson, the chapter president, David Berlad and retired Col. John Willis, the chapter treasurer. (AUSA PHOTO)

velopment sessions he led with cadre from the installation's NCO Academy and enlisted leaders from the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, included building effective teams and managerial systems and transitioning from the military to civilian life.

"The Center for Leadership is, above all, about inspiring the next generation of Army leaders at the brigade level and below through lessons on leadership," Terenas said.

In the coming months, the Center for Leadership plans professional development days for III Corps at Fort Hood in coordination with AUSA's Central Texas-Fort Hood chapter, and for the 3rd Infantry Division at Fort Stewart, Georgia, with AUSA's Marne chapter. The Fort Stewart event will feature Lt. Gen. Leslie Smith, AUSA's vice president for Leadership and Education, Terenas said.

For more information about the Center for Leadership, click [here](#).



Retired Maj. Gen. Al Ayccock, left, chair of the advisory board for AUSA's Braxton Bragg chapter, and retired Command Sgt. Maj. Jimmie Spencer, right, the chapter's vice president for NCO and Soldier Programs, meet with retired Command Sgt. Maj. Mario Terenas, center, deputy director of AUSA's Center for Leadership. (AUSA PHOTO)

New programs aim to better support military families

As we kick off the new year, there is a lot to celebrate.

First, as part of the Defense Department's commitment to help strengthen the economic security and stability of service members and their families, the Pentagon has announced an expansion of the Military Parental Leave Program.

Under the new policy that went into effect Jan. 4, 12 weeks of parental leave will be granted to birth parents following a period of convalescent leave. Non-birth parents will be granted 12 weeks of leave following the birth of their child.

Family Readiness

Twelve weeks of parental leave also will be granted to adoptive parents and eligible foster parents.

Additionally, policies have been updated to reimburse nursing service members for shipments of breast milk when they're on mandated temporary duty travel.

These are big steps toward a more family-friendly environment, and just part of a larger DoD initiative.

Defense officials also have announced improved access to child care programs and resources. This includes the Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood program and expanding the in-home child care fee assistance pilot program to additional states, allowing for more options for military families, according to



Spc. Tina Smude of the Minnesota National Guard holds her newborn twins. Under a new DoD policy, 12 weeks of parental leave will be granted to birth parents following a period of convalescent leave. (U.S. ARMY/STAFF SGT. SYDNEY MARIETTE)

the Pentagon announcement.

That's not all. Commissaries are cutting prices, there is a 4.6% pay increase for service members and a Basic Needs Allowance is available for eligible service members. Expanding resources for duty station moves is another focus area.

As an Army Spouse for Life, spouse employment is near and dear to my

heart. We have come a long way and continue to push the needle forward in this area for our spouses.

For example—and included in the above commitment—is additional development on occupational licensure interstate compacts, expanding remote work and telework options, and increasing the use of non-competitive direct hiring authorities for military spouses in DoD.

There also is the recently launched Military Spouse Career Accelerator Pilot, which allows spouses to be placed with civilian employers for 12 weeks through a DoD-sponsored fellowship.

These are just a few steppingstones to increase support for our military families. I am excited to be part of this support system and look forward to more improvements in 2023.

Holly Dailey is AUSA's Family Readiness director.



A soldier and his wife receive information about Spouse Employment Center services at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. (U.S. ARMY/SIRENA CLARK)

Chapter awards recognize soldiers' service, leadership

In December, the Association of the U.S. Army's Redstone-Huntsville chapter in Alabama presented its annual Sgt. John Ordway Leadership Awards and celebrated the National Guard's 386th birthday.

The Ordway awards program was created by the chapter in 2005 to recognize the 200th anniversary of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. The National Guard birthday celebration was co-hosted by the Redstone Arsenal Sergeants Major Association.

"Service and the call to duty is what defined Sgt. John Ordway and the leaders who are being recognized here today," said Command Sgt. Maj. Dylan Lemasters, the Redstone Arsenal garrison command sergeant major and guest speaker for the Dec. 12 event, according to the *Redstone Rocket*.

The award recipient for the National Guard was 1st Sgt. James Pescia of the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 142nd Military Police Brigade.

Pescia, who has served in the Alabama Army National Guard for 18 years, was recognized for his outstanding professionalism and sincere commitment to ensuring soldiers' welfare. Since October 2019, he has been instrumental in efforts to stand up the Alabama National Guard's newest brigade.

Receiving the award for the Army Reserve was Master Sgt. Jeremy Burns, NCO-in-charge for Detachment 1 of the 1-108th Engineer Battalion. Burns was honored for his efforts to maintain accountability and contact with soldiers during operations in the COVID-19 environment, both virtually and outside normal duty hours.

The leadership award recipient for the active component was Sgt. 1st Class Douglas Mitchell of Fox Army Health Center. He was recognized for providing outstanding leadership by



Rhonda Sutton, left, president of AUSA's Redstone-Huntsville chapter, and Command Sgt. Maj. Dylan Lemasters, right, garrison command sergeant major at Redstone Arsenal, Alabama, present the Sgt. John Ordway Leadership Award for the active component to Sgt. 1st Class Douglas Mitchell. (REDSTONE ROCKET/MARIAN ACCARDI)

studying with his soldiers who were attempting to attend boards and schools.

His efforts resulted in one soldier graduating from the Basic Leader Course on the commandant's list, one soldier being promoted to sergeant and another promoted to staff sergeant.

The chapter also presented its President's Award to Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Smith of the Alabama National Guard's 142nd Military Police Brigade. Smith took part in mul-



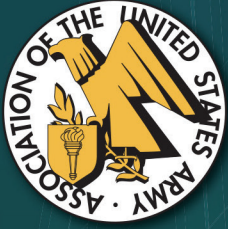
Command Sgt. Maj. Dylan Lemasters, the Redstone Arsenal garrison command sergeant major, addresses the Ordway awards event. (REDSTONE ROCKET/MARIAN ACCARDI)

multiple overseas training missions during his 34 years of service, including in Panama, Honduras, Belize, Egypt and Germany, as well as deployments to Atlanta in 2002, Guantanamo Bay in 2003 and Iraq in 2009.

First sergeants "are responsible for all of the soldiers in their respective companies, regardless of rank," and perform duties including tax adviser, educator, event planner, morale booster and much more, Lemasters said. "There is no job greater or as satisfying as being a first sergeant," he said, as reported by the *Redstone Rocket*.

The National Guard birthday cake was cut by Pescia, the youngest National Guard soldier attending the breakfast, and Command Chief Master Sgt. David Bullard, senior enlisted leader for the Alabama National Guard and the oldest National Guard service member present.

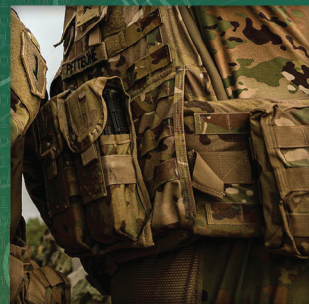
"Today, we celebrate the 386th birthday of the National Guard by recognizing the men and women currently serving who live and work in the Huntsville and Madison area," said Mike Dove, the chapter's vice president for Army Reserve and National Guard Affairs.



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