

Borne the Battle

Episode # 176

Commission on National, Military and Public Service Featuring Navy Veteran Shawn Skelly and Marine Corps Veteran Ed Allard

<https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/69718/borne-battle-176-national-military-public-service/>

(Text Transcript Follows)

[00:00:00] Music

[00:00:08] OPENING MONOLOGUE:

Tanner Iskra (TI): Oh, let's get it. Wednesday, December 18, 2019. Borne the Battle. Brought to you by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The podcast that focuses on inspiring veteran stories and puts a highlight on important resources, offices and benefits for our veterans. I am your host, Marine Corps veteran Tanner Iskra. Hope everyone had a good week outside of podcast land. I, again, did not get to soundproof this office, as I went to Seattle for Grandma's Christmas. Uh, it was a great Christmas. Got to see a lot of the family, love going home. Love going home and spending time with all of them. So, with that being said, I was not too concerned about soundproofing the office. As this is the last episode of the year. That's right. We will have a couple of bonus episodes for Christmas and the new year, because both of them drop on our normal Wednesday drop. But after that, Borne the Battle will be on hiatus as we migrate podcast hosting sites and fire up the VA Podcast Network. Pretty excited about this, as this has been in development even before my involvement in Borne the Battle. So, starting in 2020, we will be releasing and supporting other podcasts from all throughout the VA. Currently, we have three shows in development, one is on VA research. One is on veteran suicide prevention, and one will feature American citizens who are not veterans but feel the need to give back to the veteran community. And I hope we bring you many, many more. So expect all of that to drop in 2020. And when they drop, I'll tell you where and how to get them on your pod catcher of choice.

Noticed a couple ratings this week. We are almost at 120 ratings, so thank you. However, no reviews this week. Remember, the more you rate, review and subscribe to this podcast, the better chance other veterans out in podcast land will get a chance to listen in, and hear not only these great stories about these great veterans, but the benefits break down episodes and the information provided in the news releases.

Speaking of news releases, we have three this week. First one says, For immediate release. The US Department of Veterans Affairs will begin deciding Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 claims, on January 1, 2020. Extending the presumption of herbicide exposure that involves toxins such as Agent Orange to veterans who served in the offshore waters of the Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam War. Prior to this measure, only Vietnam veterans who served on the ground in Vietnam or within Vietnam's inland waterways were eligible to receive disability compensation and other benefits based on a presumption of herbicide exposure. Signed into law June 25, the law specifically affects Blue Water Navy veterans who served as far as 12 nautical miles offshore of the Republic of Vietnam between January 6, 1962 and May 7, 1975. As well as veterans who served in the Korean demilitarized zone between January 1, 1967 and August 31 of 1971. These veterans can apply for disability compensation and other benefits if they have since developed one of 14 conditions that are presumed to be related to exposure to herbicides such as- such as Agent Orange. Veterans do not need to prove that they were exposed to herbicides. Again, veterans do not need to prove that they were exposed to herbicides. The specific conditions can be found by searching Agent Orange on www.va.gov [Link] and I'll also put a list on the blog at blogs.va.gov [Link: <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/>] of the 14 conditions. I'll put the link right in there. In addition to affected veterans still living, qualifying recipients are also certain survivors of deceased BWN and Korean DMZ veterans. Survivors can file claims for benefits based on the veteran's service if the veteran died from at least one of the 14 presumptive conditions associated with Agent Orange. The law also provides benefits for children born with spina bifida if their parent is or was a veteran with certain verified service in Thailand during a specific period. The Blue Water Navy Act also includes provisions affecting the VA Home Loan Program. The law creates more access for veterans to obtain no down-payment home loans regardless of loan amount and the home loan funding fee is reduced for eligible Reservists and National Guard borrowers who use their home loan benefits for the first time. Certain Purple Heart recipients do not pay a funding fee at all.

Veterans who want to file an initial claim for an herbicide related disability can use the VA form 21-526EZ. That's VA form 21-526EZ. The application for disab- the Application for Disability Compensation and Related Compensation Benefits. Or work with a VA-recognized veterans service to assist with the application process. Veterans may also contact their state Veterans Affairs office. Blue Water Navy veterans who previously filed a claim seeking service connection for one of the 14 presumptions that was denied by VA may provide or identify any new

and relevant information regarding their claim when reapplying. To reapply, veterans may use VA form 20-0995, the Decision Review Request Supplemental Claim, as a result of the new law VA will automatically review claims that are currently in the VA review process, or currently under appeal. For more information about Blue Water Navy Act and the changes that will take effect, visit www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/blue-water-navy.asp [Link]. And I'll put a lot of the links in the show notes at blogs.va.gov. Just put them in the show notes there.

Alright. Next one says, For immediate release. VA announces proposal to increase access to dental care. The Department of Veterans Affairs announced it has submitted to Congress a waiver request and pilot program under section 152 of the VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks Act of 2018. Otherwise known as the MISSION Act. Uh, I did not know what the MISSION Act stood for, and that is a mouthful. To improve access to dental care for veterans. The MISSION Act authorizes VA to submit statutory waivers to Congress for the purpose of testing service delivery models to improve quality of care for America's veterans. Under the existing statute, VA has limited authority to provide dental services for veterans. With this waiver request, VA is submitting a proposal to increase access to dental services for enrolled veterans ineligible for dental services through VA by connecting them with a community-based pro-bono or discounted dental service provider. For more information on the MISSION Act, you can go to [missionact](http://missionact.va.gov), all one word, missionact.va.gov [Link: <https://missionact.va.gov/>].

Okay. And finally, it says- this one says, For immediate release. VA and Walmart open telehealth locations to serve veterans in rural areas. The US Department of Veterans Affairs and Walmart cut the ribbon in Asheboro, North Carolina December 10 for a new VA-led Accessing Telehealth through Local Area Stations, otherwise known as ATLAS, services pilot location. Uh, so basically that's a new ATLAS pilot location at a Walmart in Asheboro, North Carolina. Walmart has donated equipment and space at five sites as part of a pilot initiative allowing veterans to meet with a VA provider in a private room via video technology. VA telehealth clinical services vary by location and may include primary care, nutrition, mental health, and social work. Last fiscal year there were more than 1.3 million telehealth encounters with more than 490,000 veterans which was more than any other telehealth service in the United States. Other telehealth pilot sites are in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Iowa. For more information on ATLAS and this program,

you can go to connectedcare.va.gov/partners/atlas [Link: <https://connectedcare.va.gov/partners/atlas>].

Alright, so, I got a question for you. Should every American citizen serve in the military? Should women be required to register for the Selective Service? Otherwise known as the draft. What should the future of the Selective Service look like? Our guests came on Borne the Battle to talk about the two years' worth of data that the National Commission on Military, National and Public Service has gathered to answer those questions. And, they still want to receive feedback from you, their fellow veterans. And the clock is ticking. The deadline for said feedback is December 31, 2019. So, in like two weeks. They're gonna tell you exactly how to get your input to them. So, without further ado, I give to you, Navy veteran Shawn Skelly and Marine Corps veteran Ed Allard. Enjoy.

[00:09:59] Music

[00:10:09] Interview:

(TI): Shawn, Ed, uh, thank you for coming on the podcast. Uh, you know, it's, uh, as I understand it, both of you are veterans—

Ed Allard (EA): That's correct.

(TI): And, you both work on the National Commission of Military, National and Public Service. Did I get that right?

(EA): Yes.

Shawn Skelly (SS): Yep.

(TI): Awesome. Uhm, which I think, for me, personally, I think it's extremely important. You both have—and your commission has the potential to provide input that could potentially help shape the future of the Selective Service system. You know, of course, based on how Congress receives your findings, right?

(EA): Correct.

(TI): Uhm, you have the ability to shape that- that whole program's future regulations, rules, and its registry. So, uh, real quick, please give me a quick introduction and a quick- quick synopsis of your military career.

(SS): Shawn Skelly, Commander, USN Retired, uhm, turns out as a teenager, my mother's best friend, excuse me. My mother's- my grandmother's best friend, her husband was a Marine pilot in World War II, Guadalcanal.

(TI): Ooh-rah.

(SS): [Inaudible] Uhm, and their son was one of the first F14 Tomcat pilots in the Navy.

(TI): Oh, wow.

(SS): And those two gentlemen became my mentors with regard to- and I grew up on Long Island, the cradle of Naval Aviation manufacturing. The Grohman- Grohman Corporation built every aircraft on the flight deck from the 60s- practically every aircraft on the flight deck from the 60s through the 90s.

(TI): Oh, wow.

(SS): Many of my classmates in school, their parents worked building those airplanes. Uhm, so I gravitated that way, got interested in the Navy, Navy ROTC scholarship, actually wound up making it through flight schools, a Naval Flight Officer onto the fleet, flying the S3 Viking.

(TI): Oh, wow.

(SS): Uhm, for 20 years. War Hoover. Uhm, and after I got out, I did actually- my dad was a Marine. So, I was already leaning towards, uhm, the concepts of service and it wound up that in my career, the last tour I did as a Naval officer as a Commander, was attached to the Marine Corps at the Marine Corps War Fighting Lab where I directed the Marine Corps IED group, coordinating the service-wide effort on IEDs.

(TI): Oh, okay.

(SS): Which was a real honor to be a part of that fight.

(TI): Down there in Quantico?

(SS): Quantico.

(TI): And Ed?

(EA): Uhm, I appreciate this opportunity. I learned something about Shawn I did not know. She's always been kidding me about being a former Marine, so it's good to know you have Marine blood in you, Shawn. Uhm,

I started out, I had an appoint with the Naval Academy. I was walking down the streets in Abilene, Texas and I saw a jet being prominently displayed and I looked at it, and it said, I'll never forget. It said, "Do you wanna fly one of these?" And I cut my teeth on aircraft, so. We used to have the Thunderbirds come over the house. My father was old Army Air Corps and Air Force, so I looked at that, and I said, "What do I have to do?" So, I went in, they said- the recruiter said, "You take this exam, if you do well, you can go to 12 weeks of boot camp at San Diego and then go to flight school." So, long story short, I went through boot camp, came out, got my dress blues, my little PFC stripe, went up before an O6, which, you know is- is God in the Marine Corps—

(TI): Absolutely.

(EA): And, uh, I said, "Thank you, sir. Appreciate your saluting me for being the Honor Man of the platoon. I appreciate the blues. Where- when do I go to Quantico?" And he looked at me and said, "Son, didn't they tell you?" I said, "Tell me what, sir?" He said, "They cancelled that program."

(TI): [Laughter] Oh, no.

(EA): So, within a heartbeat, a PFC talking to an O6, and I said, "Well, sir. I lived up to my part of the bargain, uh, looks like the Marine Corps didn't live up to theirs. I'm out of here." And he said, "Son, you don't understand how the Marine Corps works." And I said, "Sir, you don't understand who I know." So, anyway, long story short, ended up still getting my engineering training, uh, went to every school the Marines had. Uhm, went to two tours- combat tours in Vietnam. '67 through '69.

(TI): Tough years.

(EA): Volunteered, uh, Tet Offensive, as you know.

(TI): Yeah.

(EA): Came out of that. Picked up commission, rose up through the ranks a couple of years to Captain. After that, I got out and came back to Washington, D.C. Was literally shot at on the streets of Washington, D.C. Was a tough time back then. Had battery acid thrown on me because I was a Marine, uh, so I understand that returning home during that timeframe was not the most positive thing you wanted to do.

(TI): And I- I talked about this with, uh, Dale Dye back in episode 171. Uhm, I think what you gentlemen, ladies and gentlemen went through back in

Vietnam, helped swing the pendulum for us, so, as far as coming back from IOF and OAF, so, if there's any solace, and I tell this to every Vietnam veteran, know that you endured that, helped pave the way for us and we always appreciate that.

(EA): Thank you. And, uh, we appreciate the service you have performed and those that may be listening in. Veterans are the cornerstone of our nation's founding and very richly deserve the credit they get. Now I go through airports and I hear people thanking the veterans coming back, and it makes my heart feel good. It truly does, so.

(TI): Ohh-rah. Uhm, so, obviously a- a wealth of public service both in and out of the military, in and out of the government. Uh, Ed, in your case with some non-profits. Looked through some of your bio there. Uhm, both of you have a lot of public service after your military career. Why is that important for both of you?

(SS): It's the place where I found that I can keep applying myself in the same way we all learned to in uniform. That the mission is bigger than you, that you're never the sole person that works on a mission or is responsible for a mission being completed, if it's ever completed in your tenure. I've always referred to the big things we do, whether it's in uniform or what I learned in my time in government service was, you know, it's almost like Sisyphus a little bit. You have to understand that you're there to spend your time pushing on a big rock for the right reasons, pulling on the big rope. And if you think you're gonna dance a touchdown dance, then it's probably not the right line of work for you 'cause it doesn't happen very often.

(TI): Mm.

(SS): You know, you get a first down, you might move it over a particularly rocky patch of terrain, but you're there to fight the fight in many different ways for the right reasons, because most of the good fights are your constant fights. Good government providing services to our citizens, protecting the nation, all those things are enduring. You know, things go up and down and you need to fix certain things or address certain pop-ups, but it's almost an internal, enduring kind of mission, and having people around you that are at one with that mindset is a nice place to be. I enjoyed my time in the corporate space, the short period of time. But it was different, I learned a lot from it.

(TI): Sure, absolutely.

(SS): It's really valuable time to understand, you get out of uniform and figure out- that's when you really learn what you took out of it and what it- how it molded you and how it shaped you, and then you take that and go, "Oh, I can find a place to reapply that again."

(TI): Within the government?

(SS): Within the government.

(TI): Because I think once you get out, and you go into the private sector a little bit, you see those- those trends, those current, things that are current, sometimes the government's a little far behind. Uhm, but, yeah, you're able to go back and go, okay, learn from here, go back to doing- that's good. That's awesome.

(EA): Uh, for me, it's a little bit different. I took a fairly circuitous route. I'm a little older, uh, no wiser.

(TI): [Laughter].

(EA): But, uhm, after I got out and resigned my commission, I joined the United Way of America. And it was exactly the transition I needed. I had gone from death and destruction at a very high level, to building and creating and it's exactly what I needed on the road to recovery, if you will. And then after that, I started working in political campaigns, John Glenn for President was my first, and that just kind of launched a whole other series of events. And, since then I've held three or four presidential appointments, so it's kind of in my blood, now. It is an opportunity to continue to give back to this nation, which I continue to believe, although I've traveled the world. It's the greatest in the world.

(TI): Absolutely. Okay, but you both now work on the National Commission on Military, National, Public service. How did this commission come about?

(EA): Actually, it came about with the- I think it was the 2018 NDAA, National Defense Authorization Act. And it was really the end product of the efforts of Senator McCain and Reid. In the Senate and trying to figure out a way to do something that had never been done before. An in-depth analysis not only of just Selective Service, uh, but also of military, national and public service.

(TI): Mmhmm.

(EA): And that's the first time, in the history of our nation, that that triad, if you will, actually, four, entities have been looked at as a whole. We're a

three-year commission. We were appointed by President Obama and the key leadership of Congress, the House and Senate Armed Services Committee, both Ranking and Chair, also had appointments, so there are eleven of us.

(TI): So, straight down the aisle, this thing was like, “Hey, maybe we should all take a look at this.”

(EA): Exactly.

(TI): Roger. Very good.

(SS): What I’d add is the original event that started things in motion was the 2015 decision by the Secretary of Defense at that time, Ash Carter, to open up all the final positions in the military, all occupational specialties were open to women for them to attempt to qualify.

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): Which, essentially, in short-hand, opening combat positions- ground combat positions to women, which then raised the question of, if those positions are open, should women be asked to be required to register for the Selective Service system because that’s an issue that had come up before in court.

(TI): So, before that, it wasn’t a- it’s not a thing, currently, right?

(SS): It is not currently a requirement.

(TI): Roger. So, what is the overall mission or the overall purpose of this three-year commission? Because this commission does have an end-date, correct?

(EA): Correct.

(TI): Roger. So, what’s the overall purpose and the mission?

(EA): Actually, our vision is to- to excite people about providing service, be it military, national or public service. So, we’re- we’ve adopted the- the term, Inspire2- the letter 2, Serve. And our website is inspire2serve.gov [Link: <https://inspire2serve.gov/>] and we invite people to go to that, because we’re still soliciting information. We’ve been in activity for about two years now—

(TI): Yeah.

(EA): We do have a termination date of, I think it's in September of 2020, uh, we are still soliciting information, but we do have a drop dead date of 31 December of this year.

(TI): Oh, that's coming up.

(EA): It's coming up very soon.

(TI): Very, very soon. So, this podcast comes up to anyone that signs up for our email list, and, uh, as of right now, that's over nine million plus veterans.

(EA): That's great.

(TI): And, uh, even- let's hope for even a 10 percent click open rate, you know, and there- you get some feedback from veterans. That's awesome. So, the commission's two primary tasks. From what I've read, is to review the Selective Service registration process, and examine and recommend ways to increase participation in military, national and public service to strengthen our nation. Uh, since the commission's been formed, what have you all learned?

(EA): Well, to be honest—

(TI): I know that's a pretty broad question [Laughter]

(EA): And, to be honest, it- it goes a little bit further back than that. First, the question is, is there still a need for the Selective Service?

(TI): Mm.

(EA): It's been like 45 years we've been an all-volunteer force. And, although we've been fighting for, what? Almost 20 years, in constant combat, it seems that while not quite broken, it's very strained, but it's still doing the job. And, uh, so that was our first question as to whether or not the Selective Service should continue to exist. And then, if it does exist, then should we make modifications given that it's been around since 1917, if you will.

(TI): Roger. Shawn, what do you think is one of the biggest things you think the commission has learned since it started?

(SS): The passion that there is amongst Americans to serve. Their neighbors, their community, and their nation. It's- no one should doubt that those

Americans- what everybody generally believes to be American ideals of service, are real and are active across the country at all levels.

(TI): That's awesome to hear.

(SS): So, where we've concentrated, and where you mentioned in our mission and our mandate, is to increase the number of opportunities for people to do that outside of the Selective Service question we have to examine, but it's how do we increase opportunities for people to serve? Because there's a definite demand for opportunities for people to serve in all kinds of different ways.

(TI): Mm.

(SS): And one thing that we're very keen to make sure that people understand is anything that we're looking at- with relationship to a federal government perspective, the Corporation for National and Community Service distributes a billion plus dollars a year, in addition to what the Peace Corps does, uhm, that finds its way down, in part, to state service organizations, which then finds its way down to local places where it's often matched up with local donor dollars and state and local dollars to make grants for different charity and volunteer service organizations that do good in local communities. But that doesn't eliminate the pride and the impact that goes on with people who serve through their church, through civic organizations like KIWANIS and like people who serve through their companies. You know, corporate social responsibility is increasingly important thing in our communities out there. Companies that care. Companies that want employees who want to give back and make sure that they incorporate those things. They actually use it to stay competitive for talent.

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): It's a big deal. And that this is a layer over the top that helps nurture all of those things.

(TI): But overall, you're seeing like an overall want to serve in some capacity whether it be military or- or some other civic service. So, you're looking at not just the military, you're not looking Selective Service, you're looking at like the deep roots of service, period.

(SS): We have been across the country, as- as Ed mentioned. I'm completely in concert with Ed in regard to, you know, I've been to- I don't think of

myself as a well-traveled person compared to some of our compatriots who served in the military, I've only been to 22 countries.

(TI): Only [Laughter].

(SS): Right? Right? Sailors and port calls. But I also feel this is the greatest country on Earth- and one of the ways- but, I still have learned so much about it that I didn't know before. The Navy- I never thought the Navy would take me to 45 states.

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): Different ways, Naval air. It's easier to get there. But, uhm, but what I've learned about the country and this journey, we've been to, uhm, all nine U.S. census districts. We've been to, uhm, 15 states, 24 cities. Met over 300 organizations while on the road, let alone the thousands of people we've interacted with over that time. Uhm, it's been an incredible learning experience for me as an individual, as an American, as a veteran. It just- it helps makes everything make even more sense.

(TI): Mm.

(SS): As to what I did back then, what I've been doing today. Uhm, this is a great place and people that are out there care for one another. And what we're looking at, with regard to increasing opportunities is to how to help them help each other even more. Because, really turns out in service, and Ed's lived this life with his connection with United Way and other organizations, a little bit goes a long way in terms of- it's not like giving people money so they'll do things they wouldn't otherwise do.

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): It's providing that little bit of enabling support that gets people the means to help other people. It's- there's new studies, new hard research coming in all the time about how disproportionate the return on investment is. One getting four dollars of impact back for every dollar spent with regard to service is actually turning out to be a low number now.

(EA): Yeah.

(TI): Wow.

(SS): It's really wild.

(EA): We- we also found out as we were going throughout the nation and holding public hearings and gathering insights and information that awareness is a really key issue. Uh, some people are more than willing to volunteer, but not aware of—

(TI): Of how.

(EA): Of how, and when, what the opportunities are, and those kinds of things. And we found that—

(TI): I can understand that.

(EA): it was amazing that, given the military-civilian divide that exists with lower and lower proportions of our citizenry going into the military, and that's a diminishing number—

(TI): Yeah.

(EA): As you well know.

(TI): Yep.

(EA): 40 percent of our youth are not even aware or haven't even considered the possibility of serving in the military. And it's not so much because they don't want to, it's perhaps because they're not aware. We found that—

(TI): Interesting.

(EA): We found that a certain proportion of the United States, generally the south and the west, uh, 45 years ago provided probably about 40 percent. Now that figure has grown to 70 percent of the military.

(TI): Oh, wow.

(EA): So, what's happening is, we're going to—

(TI): Everybody's from Texas or California.

(EA): Or- or Florida, Alabama—

(TI): Yeah.

(EA): Mississippi or those- or those states. You're absolutely right.

(TI): You always find one from Texas [Laughter]. In every unit, there's always that guy, yeah, yeah, he's Texas.

(EA): Yeah, you can tell him. They have the big hat, right? And the big boots.

(SS): But no cattle.

(EA): Awareness is a key issue, so we've been trying to, as a commission, determine ways that we can, in fact, uh, enhance that opportunity for people to become aware, which we think will inspire them to serve, which is what our overall objective might be.

(TI): Got you, got you. What are some methods of- of- you've talked about traveling. What are some of your methods of gathering data and feedback from the public for the commission? Like, what have you guys, you know, it's- it's been, what? Two years on the road? And you've got an online presence. Uhm, what are some ways that you guys are getting out and making people aware of the commission, you know, I mean, I know we're towards the end, but—

(SS): But it's not too late.

(TI): That's right, that's right.

(SS): It's not too late. We're 11 appointed commissioners. We're part-time folks. We generally spend three to four days a month worth of work. But we have a full-time staff of professionals, in the public engagement realm. In the research realm. Couple lawyers, too, 'cause they're everywhere.

(TI): Is this like a term for, uh, civilian employees? Is it contracted, like how it—is it GS?

(SS): Uhm, we have a couple of contract people in some specialist areas, but we have term employees.

(TI): Got you.

(SS): Overall.

(TI): Roger.

(SS): And, uhm, all the comments that we've gotten in all the different forms via social media, via our website. I think folks have even written into us, mailed things to us. All those are actually data analyzed. You know, they're doing the keyword search, looking for the topics and the like, seeing, graphing them. We've been looking at those, to see, how do those resonate with what we've heard when we sit down with people?

We're seeing things in the public comments that I heard sitting at- at a little kids table in a children's library in a thousand person town in the heart of Texas as I was having a conversation with a half-dozen evangelical preachers about what their thoughts on service is.

(TI): Wow.

(SS): Fascinating. I mean, truly fascinating experience.

(TI): How- how do you decide on where to go? 'Cause, you know, America's so big.

(SS): That's why we started off with the census, you know.

(TI): Ah, okay.

(SS): Plagiarism is, you know, the purest form of flattery.

(TI): Absolutely.

(SS): They figured out how to divide up the country, so we'll use those as a guide. And then we had some research criteria. We need to look at the urban areas where population are. Urban and suburban, ex-urban. Then there are the more not urban, rural's a bit of a pejorative nowadays. But- so we'd go to a place, and then a couple of commissioners and staff would get in the cars and go long, an hour or two, to get to these smaller communities, while some are some place in a more downtown and getting those looks.

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): And looking to get a statistical sample and talking to folks regionally, and by professions and by the types of service. So, like, I had the opportunity to talk with preachers. We had the opportunity to talk with, uhm, Mr. Allard, I believe, helped facilitate us getting with a program in downtown Los Angeles that deals with former offenders, and people who've served significant time in prison, about how they serve their community. And then we've talked with general officers, first time enlisted, senior NCOs. Why do you serve in the military? We've talked with small town mayors who are fighting the opioid crisis and how they make use of national service and local volunteers to bring together coordinated teams, along with their fire chief and their police chief and all these people come together in a place like Nashua, New Hampshire. They've got volunteers, they've got former addicts who are now counselors. They've got AmeriCorps volunteers.

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): All that, sitting around a table, trying to figure out how to help their fellow citizens. It's really remarkable. That is America.

(TI): Yeah. That's- I think that's the coolest part about your commission, is that you get to- you're using the census. I think it's one of the coolest things about your commission is you're using the census to get the full American picture. The full American public opinion on what you're supposed to be studying. I think that's so cool.

(EA): Thank you, we also, uh, had hearings. Public hearings where we had experts, renowned experts. Come and testify, and then we purposely built in a public opinion, uh, opportunity, following those- those stated testimonies. And, it was remarkable to hear some of the things being said from the common, everyday person. I'm not diminishing their role. As a matter of fact, I'm elevating it.

(TI): Well, yeah.

(EA): Because we also got a lot of insights from those public comments. And then we provided, uh, as we did from the experts, and then we also provided—

(TI): That's what I love about this, everyone has a voice.

(EA): Yes.

(TI): That's so cool.

(EA): Everybody had a voice, and we are desperately seeking additional voices.

(TI): Yeah.

(EA): So again—

(TI): Your online presence.

(EA): Thirty- 31 December of this year, uh, we're open for all public comments. And the website again is, inspire2 – the number- serve.gov [Link: <https://inspire2serve.gov/>].

(TI): I love how you- you plug it throughout the whole show, 'cause no matter where anybody clicks on this podcast, they're gonna get Ed's voice go, "Hey, this is the website."

(EA): Thank you, sir.

(TI): [Laughter] That's awesome. Through the commission, what are some myths that many feel are true about Selective Service that you've heard? And you're like, "Ah, that ain't true"?

(EA): Well, uh, I- I can say, having been there, uhm, that, uh, there's—

(TI): Having been there as in you believed in this myth?

(EA): No, having- having been there as a part of the Selective Service system.

(TI): Got you.

(EA): Uhm, that- there's a general lack of understanding and awareness about the Selective Service.

(TI): Yeah.

(EA): I mean, people don't know that young men, 18 to 25, are required by law to register. Uh, with Selective Service. And if they don't there are penalties associated with that lack of registration. And that's unfortunate because, if they do find out, sometimes it's too late to- to correct their error.

(TI): Yeah.

(EA): So, that is a major problem. Which, frankly, the commission is looking at and trying to figure out ways to modify if we continue the Selective Service.

(TI): Yeah.

(EA): We're also trying to figure out ways to, uh, modify—

(TI): Make it easier for people—

(EA): Make it easier for them to register and be aware that they are registering.

(TI): So, is it- I mean, what's the most basic ways? Isn't it like getting your driver's license or your social security card?

(SS): Depends on where you live.

(TI): Really?

(SS): So, the easiest and most direct way is to go to the Selective Service system's website and- and an individual can sign up that way, or they can

fill out the postcard and, uh, and send it in. Many states, not all, and the District of Columbia and other places. But states and territories have the ability for you to sign up while getting your driver's license. Some, uhm—

(TI): So that's not with every state?

(SS): It's not.

(TI): Wow. Did not know that.

(SS): So, it's- depending upon where an individual lives will guide how they encounter the Selective Service system, whether they're given additional opportunities as opposed to just their personal responsibility under the law.

(TI): Mm.

(SS): As Ed explained. To register.

(TI): What- what are some other ways that you're seeing states- 'cause of course, Washington State, for me it was driver's license. What are some other ways that you guys were seeing?

(SS): Uhm, for instance, it's very unique to Alaska because they have their, uhm, their wealth fund and from the oil revenues where every Alaska resident get those with some qualifications, I believe as to how long they've lived there and the like. But if you're an Alaskan male who is not registered with the selective service system, you're in obligation, you can't qualify for the annual check.

(TI): Got you. So, they- they dangle a carrot there for that.

(SS): And they have a pretty- one of the higher compliance rates.

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): There's a check attached to it.

(TI): So, they're like, "Hey, send it- by the way, here. Selective service."

(EA): Yeah, and, another way is that- that when people apply for a Pell Grant or things like that, they're required to have a registration number with selective service or else they cannot get a Pell Grant. And, uh, but we found one of the most effective ways is that if we send the letter to the home of the young man, at this point, uh, and perhaps even in the future.

Uhm, if the mother of that young man receives the letter, believe me, the young man gets the word that they need to register.

(TI): [Laughter]

(EA): Because you're looking at tuition money, you're looking at, you know—

(TI): Yeah.

(EA): College assistance. You're looking at federal jobs that, uh, if you don't register, you're barred from getting. If you've ever gone on USAJobs, I can assure you that at the bottom of that application form, it does say, Are you registered with Selective Service?

(TI): Yeah.

(EA): And if you're not, you're not qualified for a federal job. And again, many young people are not aware of that.

(TI): Yeah. Wonder how that's checked—anyway, I'm not HR. Whatever [Laughter]. I was pouring over the executive summary that was provided me- to me before the interview. Uhm, it talked about how many people value public service. We've talked about. Uhm, but there's some barriers that sometimes prevent them from serving. Uh, do you mind like if we dig in to like each one of them?

(SS): Please.

(TI): Like I'm just gonna kind of say it. Just tell me what- in layman's terms, what's it mean to you? Uh, military service as a responsibility borne by few. Why is that a barrier?

(EA): I- I think it's a barrier, again, it gets back to awareness.

(TI): Mm.

(EA): Uhm, back in my day if you had the air show, civilians became aware at Dyess Air Force Base in Abilene, Texas. They would see the jets fly over and they would become aware and they'd come and visit the Air Base. Once they got a chance to get through that gate, uhm, they got a whole awakening about the different type of aircraft, what different jobs are available in the military. Those kinds of things. Because they had exposure to it.

(TI): The military was more involved in like the public—

(EA): Precisely.

(TI): Got you.

(EA): And if- if they did not get through that gate- see, after 9/11, things tightened up.

(TI): Yeah.

(EA): So, access to the actual bases themselves has become a barrier for people to- to become aware of what's available to them. And, virtually every single occupation that exists in the civilian world, also exists in the military world

(TI): Yeah, I'm sure you guys- I'm sure you both have had that conversation with an 18 year-old kid. "Hey, did you know there's over 300 jobs in the military?" "No, bro—"

(SS): If it's not in Call of Duty, they're not gonna know of it.

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): That's one factor. Uhm, a serious factor that's actually studied by folks as to how the public and especially young people gain an appreciation of what the military does, movies, video games—

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): And they're not very realistic in many respects. Sometimes, you know, movies and other things can be lauded for their realism. As real as anything can be in that regard, very limited. But they don't see the people in the rear with the gear. They don't see what makes- puts the tip of the spear out there. They don't see the things that are truly involved.

(TI): No, they show what's dramatic. What's the dramatic part of the military? That's- that's the two percent of what actually happens, absolutely.

(SS): I had a, uhm, I had the pleasure of spending some time talking with a, uh, a portion of a group of- we live here in D.C. and anybody who goes on the metro or is anywhere near the Mall, sees groups of young people from across the country, class trips all the time. And we were able to get one of those class trips to stop in with us and talk about things. And I had one slice of them, about 13 kids around a table. And, uhm, I asked 'em what they wanted to be when they grew up, you know, what do you want to do? And it was lawyer, doctor, banker, nurse, uhm, whole bunch of other

things. I said how many- I asked 'em, how many of you have ever thought- just thought about whether you might want to serve in public service or the military? Not a hand rose and somebody kind of twitched and I call it a half.

(TI): Yeah. Interesting.

(SS): And I said, you realize that every one of those things, those fields that you talked about, you can find in military service and definitely in government service, whether the federal or state, or even a big county or city. Every profession you've got there, you can serve—

(TI): Is represented somewhere in- in service.

(SS): Somewhere in there. And they all kind of gave me that, you know, what us older people call the RCA dog look where they kind of tilt and stare at you, tilt their head. They- it had never gotten to them. So, it's really that awareness, which is driven in large part by the decline of our veterans population, relative to the size of the overall population.

(TI): My father-in-law talks about that. Uh, you know, part of the joke about this podcast is I make it out of my in-law's basement, just like every other podcaster. While we were- I'm building my house. But he talks about that. He talks about, you know, I joined the military because my dad was talking about it with his buddies on the porch. And that's the only time he ever talked about, was with his buddies.

(SS): The thing is, that's now becoming the most predominant factor as to why young people join, is because they have immediate or that next ring out—

(TI): Connections.

(SS): Aunts, uncles there where they have those personal connection and they believe what those people are saying. And they translate the greater stories, not just the cool stuff, the hard stuff or the scary stuff, it's all the stuff.

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): So, it's kind of de-mystified for them, and it's not de-mystified on Call of Duty.

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): You know, we talk- we've talked to recruiters as well, which has been a fascinating experience. And they've conveyed how some young folks are like, "Okay, when I sign up, how long 'til I get to be a SEAL?"

(TI): [Laughter] No, buddy.

(SS): No.

(TI): So, military service is a responsibility borne by few you think right now because of awareness?

(SS): It's a large portion of it.

(TI): Got you. Uh, national service is America's best kept secret. Why? How?

(EA): Again, it boils down to awareness. Few people are aware of how many opportunities there are to serve. And frankly, that's something that the commission is trying to hit straight at and address without hesitation. Uhm, awareness is a way of educating folks. And we're also becoming more and more aware about, uh, the fact that there is a lack of civics education in school. Uh, at the cost of some other items that have been put to the forefront.

(TI): Yeah.

(EA): Civics has kind of dropped off the board. And, you know, if you don't learn as a young person to salute the flag and how basic government works, so on and so forth, then as you become a young adult and then an adult, you lose track of the responsibility you have as a citizen to this fine nation, of this nation. Uh, again, the rights and freedoms that we hold are not free. As you well know, and those in the listening audience well knows, it comes at a tremendous cost. But it's that cost is being borne by lesser and lesser numbers because those pockets are of the west and the south, if you keep going back to them, they're going to dry up.

(TI): Yeah.

(EA): And as people- I've had the pleasure, speaking before honor flights coming from- to Washington, D.C. And when you see those World War II veterans coming in diminishing numbers each year—

(TI): Yeah.

(EA): It's a- it's a personalization of what's occurring nationally on- on the military front. And that's why it's a bigger and bigger, uh, divide between

citizens and the military. And the one thing I really love about the commission is, we're not just looking at the military.

(TI): Yeah.

(EA): We're looking at national service, public service, community service—

(TI): All public service, in general.

(EA): Yes, sir.

(TI): That's awesome, that's awesome. Uhm, why do you think civic knowledge in the education system has- has lost nowadays. I remember when I was a kid, I think the only time we got a civics lesson was if you were able to do on the school state senate things, and I never got a chance to do that, right? So, uhm, I think for me it was more just my own self taught, you know, going, oh man what are they talking about when it comes to, you know, how does a law get passed?

(EA): Well, I'm old enough to- to know when Abe Lincoln talked to me about what you need to do in order to support the government.

(TI): [Laughter]

(EA): We- we have moved away from that. And it's a lot of things pushing that.

(TI): Yeah.

(EA): You know, if you look at- at education in America today, we have cut our children short in many, many ways. It's not just civics, it's mathematics, it's English. Uhm, it's very difficult to find somebody who can write.

(TI): A lot of the core competencies of just—

(EA): Precisely.

(TI): being educated.

(EA): And if you just push them out, and other things have taken- there's so many hours in a day. So, if you- if you- it's like that whack-a-mole toy we used to play with. If you push down on a couple of things, other things pop up.

(TI): Yeah.

(EA): And that's what's happening. We've been pushing down on civic education, at the cost of elevating other elements that are more

manufacturing driven or whatever. And when you do that, it's a limited budget, and everything costs something. There's a cost to doing something different.

(TI): Maybe educating the educators, too. Who knows?

(EA): Precisely.

(TI): Uhm, going back to this executive summary. Public service practice needs an overhaul. What does that mean? 'Cause I think of public service for me personally.

(SS): So, we'll take you as an example.

(TI): Absolutely, let's do it.

(SS): How'd you get your job- this- this job?

(TI): You really want to know?

(SS): It could prove to be valuable information

(TI): My wife applied on my behalf.

(EA): Wow.

(SS): Ooh.

(TI): [Laughter].

(EA): Good- good wife.

(TI): She goes- you know, and if you go back to the podcast where the previous host interviewed me, uhm, I tell this story, but it's uh- my wife goes, "Hey, I know you've been taking Marines out to the track—" before this I was with Nascar. "I know you've been taking Marines to the track, uhm," and I was like, "Yeah, you know, really felt that I wanted to give them what I never got," which, you know, like how to properly- 'cause I was combat camera, combat videographer. And I was showing them, "Alright, this is what a photographer does, this is a shooter, this is an editor, this is a producer, and these are the skillsets that you need for each one. So, when you look when you get out, whether you do four years or 30 years, these are the positions and this are the skillsets that are needed." And, uh, my wife saw that, and she goes, and she realized that I'd reached part of my career there that I was pretty much plateaued. Was like a chief in Washington, my position. It was nice, but

there was a ceiling. And she goes, “Hey, you have an interview Monday.” “For what?” She goes, “It’s for the VA, you’re gonna be telling veteran stories.” “Alright, I can mess with that.” So, that’s how I got here.

(SS): So—

(TI): Sorry, it was a long answer to your short question, but—

(SS): See, you’ve got a great story for the hiring process. How long did it take from flash to bang from when you said “We want you on board.”

(TI): Oh, three months.

(SS): There you go. That’s a short one.

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): Not- not a lot of people can put up with the timeline. When your six months is not uncommon at all.

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): In a lot of places, people who’d like to work for their government find the pursuit of a government job for the right reasons, you know, there’s conversations in the public space as to the value of government workers and that’s a problem.

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): But when folks do step forward and want to do things—‘cause I am a big fan of clean water and paved roads, safe food and safe medication, and all that good stuff, which is what the average government worker does for Americans.

(TI): Yep.

(SS): You know, airplanes that are safe—

(TI): So, from city to federal.

(SS): Exactly. And they all contribute. No one level gets it all done.

(TI): Yep.

(SS): When they do step forward, though, the government’s at a disadvantage. Because the commercial space, which the- the full economy is a behemoth compared to the federal government. The federal government’s massive. It’s one of the largest employers of people in the

world. But at the same time, it doesn't move as fast as individual corporations out there, big and small. Some of the most talented people who want to serve their country are not gonna wait around. Sometimes they do. You know, they'll keep- they'll check their email, they'll listen to that voicemail, but if it doesn't come, or if it doesn't come soon enough, they will have moved on.

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): When- we've heard tales of, uh, young people who graduated from college programs that are in dire need, high tech and science and the like. And they go to their job fair at their school, and somebody from a big tech corporation or a big pharma type corporation sees them right there, they know what school they're graduating from. You come to me with a degree from this school, I know you're the real deal for an entry-level position for what I want to do.

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): You graduate, you're hired, is not uncommon for certain fields. The government, it's a nine-month slog to find your way in. Some special positions- some spec- some agencies have some- have some wherewithal to do it faster. But that is not the average experience.

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): And while they'd love to support- support their country, but they've gotta close the deal, because everybody's got loans, everybody's got, often, families to take care of. And they can't wait. In that way we lose out on people because they can't close the deal fast enough.

(TI): So, what this means is getting- making federal service or public service, more competitive with the civilian sector.

(SS): Can't be- I would dare say, they can never be the same.

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): Because, you know, the public responsibility. Uhm, but you have, and using the taxpayer dollar. But, have to be more competitive. For instance, we don't advertise in the way—

(TI): Yeah.

- (SS): That's out there. Federal agencies are very restricted in how they reach out to people and recruiting and the like. So, our country is at a disadvantage when competing to get our citizens to help their fellow citizens.
- (TI): Very good point.
- (SS): That makes it awkward.
- (EA): And it is not just limited to public service or national service. We found that- that in trying to anticipate what's gonna happen and how we should prepare the military for future activities. We started looking at things like military critical skills. And there are a lot of those, some of which we are aware of now, but there are gonna be skills of the future we don't even know about that are gonna be needed. I mean, look at the advancements taking place in the Corps in the last ten, twenty years. I can go further back than that.
- (TI): [Laughter]
- (EA): I remember, you know, firing the M14, and then they got to 16 and then on and on. So, there's, as the world is changing, as war is changing, as we are fighting not nations, but the—
- (TI): Ideas.
- (EA): Ideologues of- of those—
- (TI): Technology.
- (EA): Precisely. Everything is changing and we need to be prepared not to be able to react to that, but to be in a proactive mode. And that's gonna require some real serious thought about what are the critical skills and how can we tap into those, and that's where it kinda ties into the- back to the Selective Service. If we do registration, should we also explore ways of identifying the skillsets that they have? And that opens up a whole other series of thoughts that we need to think about in terms of- of how do we do the registration? Is it simple name, address and phone number and contact information? Is that gonna be sufficient for meeting the needs, should, God forbid, ever a draft be required?
- (TI): You guys were also talking about, uh, establish a norm for every American to devote at least a full year to either military, national, or public service and require all Americans to serve. Require all Americans to serve with a choice, and I think these are key- I'm just, I'm highlighting

key- key words, require all Americans to serve with a choice in how to satisfy the requirement.

(EA): We're looking at, uh, as a commission, we're looking at whether or not mandatory service or voluntary service. And we're still debating that issue. Uh, we- we have to produce a final report to the president and congress by March of 2020.

(TI): Got you.

(EA): But we are exploring, uh, what- what is fairly unique in America. Americans for the most part do not like to be told what to do.

(TI): No, the last people that told us- tried to do that, we shot at them for eight years.

(EA): Precisely. And, you know, that- that has not gone away. De Tocqueville visited America from France and toured our country and was amazed by the sense of volunteerism that existed in America.

(TI): Oh, wow.

(EA): People helping each other, as we toured the country, we found that- that has not gone away, in fact, it does exist in so many different forms, and shapes and fashions. And they don't even think it's volunteering—

(TI): Just helping your—

(EA): Helping your neighbor.

(TI): Yeah.

(EA): 160 million people providing meals to people that don't eat. So, that- that is remarkable. And it still is true today. And as we traveled, I was very, uh re-inspired by the nature of our country. There are some darn good people out there and it's the bulk of the people.

(TI): Yeah.

(EA): It's not what you hear in the news, it's- it's just people that do the right thing because it is the right thing to do. And that- that just makes me feel blessed to be an American.

(TI): Absolutely. I think if you stay in the beltway long enough, you kind of lose that sense, uhm, as, you know, as great as D.C. is, you sometimes- you lose that sense. I think, uh, back in 2009, I was at the Pentagon, and, I had

kind of lost- I was like, man, do people even remember that we're still at war? You know? You get that kind of negative perception about the public in the beltway. And then you go outside to Pennsylvania, to a funeral, or you go to South Carolina for people that are- are just wanting to do something for an active duty military member. I think you're right. I think it kind of reinvigorates why you're doing what you're doing here in the beltway.

(EA): For many years, I live in Los Angeles. So, I would fly from Los Angeles to the Pentagon or the Department of Energy or this commission or the Selective Service in my various capacities. So, I was always at 35,000 feet, going across the United States. And when I was at the Department of Energy, I made the decision to drive from Los Angeles, California out to Washington, D.C. Because we had sites- energy sites, all along. Lawrence, Livermore. There were sites in Tennessee and other places. So, I was able to do that and- and Albuquerque, Los Alamos and some other places. So, I was able to do that. But this time, I didn't, you know, put my head down and drive 80 miles an hour. If I saw something, and it interested me, I stopped. Which I never, ever do. And, uh, I would stop at mom and pop stores—

(TI): Yeah.

(EA): And just talk to the locals. And believe me, there is a remarkable difference between inside the beltway, where we are sequestered. And the world that's really out there that is the United States of America.

(TI): Yeah.

(EA): And as I say, there were volunteer firefighters that volunteered- they dropped everything they had, if the fire started, the boss didn't complain. Because he or she knew that that was a needed community activity. So, they didn't complain. People would drop what they were doing, go out, put out the fire, come back, resume their duties, and not think a thing about it in terms of volunteerism. But think how many times that's replicated. I'm from Los Angeles. I can take you to places now, where ash is everywhere. And thank God for the firefighters and first responders or we probably wouldn't even be a state any longer.

(TI): Yeah.

(EA): Uh, that's remarkable.

(TI): I love that. I love that. Uhm, other options you guys are considering. Expanding the registration requirement for Selective Service to include women. 'Cause we talked about this, that's not- is that still a discussion? Is that a- a recommendation you guys are prepared to make or not?

(SS): It's one we have to make.

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): It's part of our mandate is whether or not- if it should be- if the Selective Service system should endure—

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): Should registration be changed? Or should it even be kept is another question, too?

(TI): Yeah, should Selective Service even be kept, but if it's kept, should it include women?

(SS): You can still have- it's legal- conscription into the military in times of emergency is constitutional.

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): Supreme Court's ruled on that. You don't have to have a Selective Service system just sitting by if you don't want one. The country has decided for decades that that is of strategic value to the United States to have an organization ready to implement that. The other question is, do you have to have an ongoing active registry as part of your strategic ability? The determination has been yes. So, we've been asked to look at all those questions, is the draft still worthwhile? Do you need a Selective Service system? Should there be a registration prior to any use? And then, if so, who should be in there, which, as I mentioned before, is the core question that was brought to the fore. Because there are actually a couple court cases right now working their way through the federal court system—

(TI): Got you.

(SS): Challenging the constitutionality of only men being required to register. One by people from the side of men, saying it's unfair to men that they're the only ones who can, and one on the side of women saying it's unfair that women are not asked to contribute.

(TI): So, are we gonna- have we made a decision on that? Or is that gonna say, hey, wait until—

(SS): Well there will be a recommendation in March of 2020.

(TI): Roger that.

(SS): And we're still in our deliberative phase.

(TI): Makes sense. No worries, thought I'd get a- see if I could get a little—

(SS): That is one where we're proud to have listened to a lot of folks on that one.

(TI): Absolutely.

(SS): And there's- that- that is not a, uh, that is one that's one of the more closely contested or people on both sides with very earnest and deeply felt positions about whether or not—

(TI): I think that's- I think that's a conversation a lot of people have had. You know, whether, A or B. Uhm—

(SS): And that's- and it goes into a lot of the, uhm, one of the difficulties in having those conversations is some of the topics my colleague Ed has mentioned before, is, uhm, a lot of folks don't have a decent understanding of the military at all.

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): So, what people do- how many positions in the military are direct combat, how many positions in the military are not? What the nature of warfare is now of days, does it matter what kind of position? What MOS incoming in any role depending upon where you are and what you're doing?

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): Then, whether or not registering for the draft- registering for Selective Service means that everybody on that list automatically gets sucked into uniform if a draft is invoked. Not at all.

(TI): I remember this conversation- I think right around the time this commission was started. I think it was just a hot topic at the time.

(SS): Mmhmm. Sure was.

(TI): And, uh, you know, conversations of like, well- and I love that the fact that the commission looked into other areas of, uhm, okay, how am I gonna try to say this? Has looked at other areas of the country and the fact that, like, okay, should everybody serve or not in the military? I think that was a hot button topic. And then it was like, okay, well what about the health of America? Could everybody physically serve in the military, well if not, is there another way that they can serve? And I think that's- you guys are in the middle of answering that question, I think that's so cool.

(SS): That's one of the big factors of- if I could, is that, most folks think that everybody on the street is subject to it. Well, people only have to register between- well, right now, men have to register between the ages of 18 to 25.

(TI): Oh, wow.

(SS): That doesn't mean those are the only ones that could be called—

(TI): That are in the pool, yeah.

(SS): During World War II, the age crept up and generally it's unlikely that 18-year olds would be immediately drafted because people with a little bit more maturity tend to do better and be more successful—

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): Especially with- the Marine Corps itself is actually for the first time in decades deliberately getting older because the commandant- successive commandants of the Marine Corps have decided, I need Marines that are—

(TI): That are mature.

(SS): That are a little bit more mature, because they're asking- they're being asked to do so much. And individual Marines are actually that much more critical as individuals with all the tasks that they need to be do- you know, from rifleman on to whoever in the technical- the very technical specialties. Being a rifleman's a highly technical specialty.

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): Now—

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): You know, so, the value of maturity and all that—

(TI): Interesting.

(SS): comes into play. So, just because you have to register by 25 doesn't mean you still might not be draft able by later on. But at the same time, barely three in ten Americans are qualified to serve in uniform. You've got physical requirements, health and the like, do you have the educational requirements? Then you have the, what are called the moral things. Do you have any criminal issues like- like that? Barely three in ten Americans meet those. Right now, you could raise that bar a little bit by going, we don't care about tattoos, okay, you have a whole slew of misdemeanors where, you know, we wouldn't have taken you in the all-volunteer force, but this is an emergency and maybe we'll take people with a slightly less good record. But even then, you don't move the bar that much, because, as we all know, America is a less healthy and less fit nation—

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): Than it was several decades ago.

(TI): Lot of physical requirements, yeah.

(SS): So, the number of people that could be potentially subject to a draft is relatively small, if it were to happen. And then at the same time, that whole cohort. Everybody that's- the 30 percent of people under age 30, say, they're not all going in. Hopefully. But, then would be the lottery system, which has always been done. People from a certain birthday from a certain year—

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): And like, get processed through. So, there's a lot of misconceptions that all of a sudden people get sucked out of the system automatically without any consideration that are exemptions and deferments. Are you the sole provider for a family?

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): Are you the sole survivor of a family in some ways or do you have conscientious objections?

(TI): So, you're looking at all those regulations?

(SS): The Selective Service—

(TI): Hundred percent, the Selective Service part of that the whole thing.

(SS): To execute those things, make considerations to those, and those things aren't understood when people come to the table and say what do you think about it? They say, well I wouldn't want to see everybody go. Well, actually, it's a very serious question as to whether or not someone would be conscripted, compelled to serve in the military—

(TI): Absolutely.

(SS): Or, yeah. It's not to ever sell that part of it short. But there's a real lack of understanding about how- it's a very complicated process.

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): In actuality. People think that, you know, you get a postcard or an email saying report and that's it. It's not like that at all.

(TI): It's report to be screened [Laughter].

(EA): Yeah, and people don't- also don't- are unaware that the Selective Service system has some 11,000 volunteers that serve throughout the United States and the territories. Uh, on what we call Selective Service Boards. These are people from the community, uh, that generally serve up to 20 years. And they have been trained every single year on different phases of how- if somebody be- comes before the board, how to determine whether or not they are in fact a conscientious objector, uhm, some people think that all they have to do is declare that they're conscientious objector. But, uhm, what they don't understand is, these people, five to seven people on a board, know that individual. They know their parents, because they come from the local community. And they- they pretty much reach agreement as to whether or not that person has demonstrated a- a religious background, demonstrated through their life. Uh, so, one cannot just automatically say I'm a conscientious objector, be accepted as such. Then, even if somebody is a conscientious objector, a lot of people are not aware that they have to serve in an alternative work service program of two years, which the Selective Service monitors.

(TI): Oh, wow. I did not know that.

(EA): Yeah, a lot of people don't know it. Uhm, and that's why I'd like to bring it to the forefront. There's a lot of- and then, if we keep Selective Service, and expand it to include women, how does that impact the children that they have?

(TI): Yeah.

(EA): So, that opens up a whole other—

(TI): The family dynamic.

(EA): Consideration in terms of—

(TI): Support.

(EA): Of, you know, single mothers, as single fathers, child support, all those kinds of dimensions that didn't exist in- in the history of Selective Service.

(SS): The American family of 2020—

(EA): So those are the kinds of—

(SS): is not the American family of 1960 or 1970.

(TI): Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. Now I know you've already asked this- I know you've already answered this. Uhm, many times, but that's- that's great. How long do you have to gather feedback?

(EA): Uh, we have until December the 31 of 2019 and people can provide feedback via www.inspire2serve.gov [Link: www.inspire2serve.gov] and please do so.

(SS): I would also add that we're on social media. Facebook, twitter, uhm, and YouTube. And LinkedIn, we're on LinkedIn, as well, at Inspire the number 2 serveUS [Inspire2serveUS] on social media.

(TI): And they can- you solicit comments from there, as well? As data?

(SS): Anywhere you can find us—

(TI): Oh, wow.

(SS): In the worldwide webs, you can make a post.

(TI): What happens after the deadline? And the commission dissolves? So, like, when do you- 'cause you guys dissolve in 2020?

(EA): 2020, uh, we- we are trying to put into place that- those actions and activities that will enable the commission to go beyond its lifespan. Uh, because the kinds of things we intend to recommend are gonna be far reaching. Uh, and some of the considerations that we're looking at now will probably go into the year 2030s-2040—

(TI): Yeah.

(EA): And beyond.

(TI): You're talking about affecting families, you're talking about every- almost every American citizen.

(EA): Exactly.

(TI): You gotta study the aftereffects so- no plan's perfect, right? So, you gotta be able to monitor it and be able to make changes.

(EA): Exactly.

(SS): Some of them are also generational type changes in terms of –

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): Civics education for young people to be better participants in their government, expanding if congress were to decide if we recommend to increase the number of positions or- or the amount of funding to certain programs. Those don't happen overnight, and generally those things are phased in over time. One of the big things about national service, for instance, is, you gain secondary and third effects, not just from the work that people do where you get at least a four to one return on the dollar invested, but then, people who serve other people to include church service and Rotarians and the like, on average, you're a healthier person, because you just feel better and you do things.

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): On average—

(TI): Do- doing stuff for other people feels good.

(SS): And the doctors, there's lines of medical studies now that recognize that in senior people. A lot of senior people volunteer with other seniors or with young people, those people are healthier. People also, that volunteer, tend to be more socially active, civic active, better voters, more regular voters, and care about the issues in their community in that way. So, those kinds of things are to everyone's benefit. When more people get those opportunities. So, a lot of those things sort of kind of secondary effects where the body politic, the citizenry kind of come out healthier in the end. It's not just that the young people, the younger people in the conservation corps helped deal with the aftermax-

aftermaths of a hurricane or a flood or that those folks helped deal with the problem that's years long, but they helped deal with the opioid crisis or they helped teach schools that needed additional help. But then, what those people get, and the folks that they work with might be inspired and likely are inspired to do good, as well, because they've been shown a way of living—

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): In that way. So, we're talking about in some cases, a lot of immediate, procedural policy and legal changes, like especially with the federal government, lot of fixes there with civil service. But a lot of it's turning the titanic and putting it on a course away from the icebergs to keep moving out into a healthier and healthier space over time.

(TI): Roger.

(SS): And I would say, our final report- our- our comments window, public comments end December 31, but our report is due to congress in March of 2020. So, that'll go up and right before then and afterwards, the commissioners, the commission will be out around the country, everyone will have the opportunity to pull that report down off of the web, off of our social media sites—

(TI): So that's when you start seeing the- the news tour all that?

(SS): The news tour, going out there, getting that, we will turn in our homework and take our beatings from all the different folks.

(TI): [Laughter]

(SS): But at the same time, the individual citizens, veterans, particularly, listeners of this pod, will have the opportunity to look at this report, look at the recommendations, you're looking at our interim report and the summary of that—

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): We'll have the final report, they'll be dozens and dozens of very discrete recommendations, as well, some big picture we can do better ideas. And then they can engage their members of congress, their senators. As well as their governors and their state legislators, because there's things in there with regard to state programs and state education and the like, because it's not just the federal level.

(TI): What I love about, uhm, podcasting in general, is that it's almost like a living record. So, any armchair quarterbacks that come out in 2020 can always refer back to this and go how did they get this? You commissioners and your staff can always look at it and go, hey, refer to this podcast. This is how it was done. Because we talked about you guys doing the census and everything, you know, it's great.

(EA): And that's why we appreciate this opportunity so much, Tanner, thank you.

(TI): Absolutely. Uhm, so now let's get back to why you're on the podcast, in general. Uhm, you're looking for feedback from veterans, right? Where can they go? Why? Why veterans? Why do you guys wanna come on Borne the Battle?

(EA): Uh, I- we value the input of veterans- provide, because they've already stepped up to the line.

(TI): Where can they provide feedback, and I know, Ed- I love, I love- I'm keep asking this because I know that you're gonna plug it. Uh, where can they go to provide feedback? How long do they have to do it? And, uhm, how can they get input out to you.

(EA): Thank you, for asking that question. Uh, we have up until 31 December of this year, 2019, to get feedback on our website of www.inspire2serve.gov [www.inspire2serve.gov] and—

(SS): On social media, Inspire2serveUS. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn.

(TI): Alright. And I'm sure on all of those platforms and on that website, they can look for whatever kind of topic you need input on, right?

(EA): Right.

(TI): Uhm, is there anything else that I might have missed from either of you that you think it's important to share?

(SS): I don't know that the dead horse can be beaten too much. But it really is about hearing from people. Because people all have- the stories in there- their stories and their experiences are valuable. Every individual one of them as to what they're concerned about, what they've seen work, what they've experienced that should be fixed. All of those matter because they add up in that way. Uhm, and I'll share a second one that I'm glad I remembered I wrote down. Uhm, there's been an event the last couple days, on the hill, called HillVetsHomeFront, uhm, and, uh, I caught on

social media a quote attributed to the former Chief of Staff of the Army, General George Casey, which really caught my eye—

(TI): Also been on the show.

(SS): So General Casey, uhm, is attributed saying, by someone I trust, to veterans, “Don’t let your military service be the greatest thing you’ve ever done.”

(TI): Absolutely. 100 percent.

(SS): And- and some people might find that striking, that a- that a chief of staff of the Army would say don’t let the military service be the greater thing. But I think it’s part of that issue- we’ve talked about, second service and why do people serve in different ways? So, once you get a taste of it, you understand yourself better, you understand your capabilities, you understand what it means to be a team and how you can make a difference. And that- we all leave- I had a great commanding officer who said, “We are all leaving the Navy at one time or another—”

(TI): Yep.

(SS): You might decide as an individual, the Navy might decide it’s time for you to leave the Navy, but we’re all gonna leave. You have to think about what you want to do afterwards and why.

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): And for most people, there’s only that- one percent that spend virtually the most of their professional life in uniform. The majority of us do not.

(TI): Yeah.

(SS): We spend much more time out of uniform than we do in. The story should not stop.

(TI): Don’t get into that- uh, high school quarterback syndrome, you know?

(SS): Yeah.

(TI): Like, that was the- that was the greatest time of my era. You still got a lot of life left, you know, let it- let it enhance you but not define you.

(SS): That’s exactly right.

(EA): And service is a valued effort, it is a much-needed effort, especially in our country today. This has been a tremendous learning experience for me.

I've been around D.C. since '64. And, you know, I think I've been there, done that and all- pst. Are you kidding? This has been a tremendous experience, uh, to me. Not only for the opportunity of working with such people as Shawn and the other commissioners, but also the splendid staff we had. Uh, these people, uh, did something I'm not sure I would have done at their stage in their career. They have volunteered, you might as well say they volunteered—

(TI): Yeah.

(EA): To work for us for three years, with no guarantee for any follow-up whatsoever. So, they've taken a three-year hiatus from their careers, to dedicate their time, energy, efforts, and talents to what I feel is a very noteworthy cause, and—

(TI): Yeah, there's not even a chance for re-enlistment.

(EA): Not even a chance to sign back up, you know?

(TI): As of right now.

(EA): As of right now, that's true, but the point is, that they're willing to make that extra effort, and that's indicative of public service that we have in the United States of American government. And not only that, but in- we have people going to foreign countries, spending years in very destitute situations, you don't have to go to a foreign country. We have places in America that, you know, require a massive sacrifice of time, energy and talents. And, frankly, income. But they're willing to do it. And that- that's remarkable in the United States of America, and that's why I love it.

[01:16:28] Music

[01:16:33] PSA:

Narrator: My grandfather served in World War Two. Spending time with him were the best memories of my life. I became a physician at VA because of my grandfather. So I can help others like him. I can't imagine working with better doctors, or a more dedicated staff. I'm fulfilling my life's mission with the help of my team, and thanks to these veterans. I'm proud to be a doctor at VA, and proud to honor my grandfather every day. Search VA careers to find out more

[01:17:02] Music

[01:17:08] Closing Monologue:

(TI):

I want to thank Ed and Shawn for coming on Borne the Battle. Again, like Ed said many times, you can give your own input on all these questions that they have to answer to congress at inspire2serve, that's all one word with the number 2, don't spell it out. Inspire2serve.gov [Link: <https://inspire2serve.gov/>]. On there you can submit a comment or go on their social media handles. They're on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and plenty of others. Usually their handle is also Inspire2serve, all one word, with the number 2, don't spell it out. Again, you have until the end of the year. Again the end of the year. So, like, two weeks to give Sean and Ed your input on public and selective service.

So, it was recently the 75th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge. And I want to reserve this week's Borne the Battle Veteran of the Week to any veteran who took part in that hellacious battle. To all the men and women who took part in the effort to repel Hitler's last offensive, we honor your service. That's it for this week's episode. Again, this is the last full episode of the year. Got a couple of bonuses coming out that we didn't get to air throughout the year that will be- we'll be posting on Christmas and the New Year. And then we'll be coming right back with a full slate of episodes toward the beginning of the year. Uh, new episodes will fire up again either on January 15 or January 22 depending on our workflow and workload here at the VA. So, in the meantime, for more stories on veterans and veteran benefits, you can check out our website, blogs.va.gov [Link: <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/>]. And follow the VA on social media. Twitter [Link to VA's twitter page: https://twitter.com/DeptVetAffairs?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwca], Instagram [Link to VA's Instagram page: <https://www.instagram.com/deptvetaffairs/?hl=en>], Facebook [Link to VA's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/VeteransAffairs>], YouTube [Link to VA's YouTube page: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBvOzPLm_bzjtpX-Htstp2vw], RallyPoint [Link: <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/56052/question-rallypoint-great-place-start/>]. Deptvetaffairs. US Department of Veterans Affairs. No matter the social media, you can always find us with that blue checkmark. Thank you as always for listening. Have a happy, happy holiday season. Have a safe New Year, and we'll see you again soon.

[01:19:11] Music

(Text Transcript Ends)