

US media, retired officers tout youth fitness as necessary to boost military recruitment

By Warren Duzak
10 August 2018

A series of newspaper columns around the nation are proposing the creation of a pool of potential recruits and conscripts for the US military as an important physical educational goal.

A recent opinion piece in Nashville, Tennessee's *Tennessean* emphasized the need for additional physical training in all schools and grade levels not as a way to keep children fit and healthy but to prepare them for military service and war.

The *Tennessean* article, headlined "Law Requiring Physical Education Will Help Military," was written by Joan Cronan, women's athletic director emeritus at the University of Tennessee and a member of Champions for America's Future, and Eden Murrie, a retired US Air Force brigadier general and a member of the Council for a Strong America's Mission: Readiness program.

The pair praised the state legislature for recently passing a law requiring schools to provide two hours of physical exercise each week. They said this is vital to reduce the 71 percent nationwide rate of military-age young men and women unable to pass the armed forces' physical requirements:

"Here in Tennessee, that figure rises to 73 percent," they wrote. "That means that, for nearly three-fourths of young Tennessee adults of prime recruiting age, serving in the military is not an option. The leading medical disqualifier for military service is being overweight. The military can be an excellent career path for many Americans, but being overweight closes off that path. This problem also undermines the national security by shrinking the potential pool of service members."

Derivatives of this article have appeared in newspapers around the country.

A recent news article in the Sarasota, Florida, *Herald-Tribune* noted: "Formed in 2009 by retired US generals, admirals and other military leaders, the bipartisan nonprofit [Mission: Readiness] advocates for

national and state policy solutions that champion early education, fitness and nutrition in hopes of nurturing a larger pool of military-eligible citizens. Targeting young children is key."

That children who are overweight might count for more than just raw material for the military, or that the health and social needs of children for their own sake should be paramount, escapes the authors of these columns. In their opinion, the optimal "career path" for jobless, working-class youth is to be physically prepared for what amounts to an economic draft.

The Council for a Strong America, according to its web site, had its roots in 2006 with creation of "America's Edge," later renamed "ReadyNation" and is described as "an organization of business leaders advocating for a more productive workforce through investments in kids."

The council would go on to create Mission: Readiness, which is the fount of militarism in the schools. "As retired senior military leaders, we know that encouraging more young Americans to lead healthy lifestyles is a critical part of ensuring that our nation is prepared to respond to the challenges of the future," a statement by Mission: Readiness proclaimed.

"The more than 700 retired admirals, generals, and other top military leaders who are members of Mission: Readiness recognize that the strength of our country depends on a strong military."

On May 10, a headline in the Illinois News Network declared, "Retired generals' group: Illinois-supported childcare is a national security issue."

"A group of retired generals from Illinois who have pushed lawmakers for more gym class and raising the age to buy tobacco is saying that the nation won't be ready to fight its enemies if Illinois doesn't spend more on childcare," the story reports.

In Maine, in January, the *Portland Press Herald's* "Maine Voices" column carried the headline: "Early

childhood education is as crucial to military readiness as jets and ships.”

“Much of the recent debate about ways to build our military strength has focused on additional ships and jets or developing new technologies,” author Gregory G. “Grog” Johnson wrote. “But no matter how much we spend on hardware or the latest and greatest technology, we will never be a secure nation if we do not have qualified and skilled men and women to operate that hardware and utilize that technology.”

The May 19 *Cadillac News* in Cadillac, Michigan, boasted: “Military high school recruitment in the area remained steady this year despite national trends contributing to fewer people putting on a uniform. ... Counselors said it’s important to consider that military recruitment doesn’t stop at high school. Prime military recruitment age ranges from 17 to 24, so many enlistments will occur after high school.”

According to the 2010 Census, median income for a Cadillac household was \$29,899 and 15.4 percent of the population under 18 lived below the poverty line, making youth there prime targets for recruitment.

On May 17, the *New Jersey Spotlight* carried an op-ed by two retired US Army generals headlined: “Expand New Jersey’s pre-K to strengthen national security.”

“As US Army generals, it was our job to look over the horizon to determine future challenges and threats to our national security,” retired generals Steven Hashem and Douglas Satterfield wrote. “As we look over the horizon today, we believe one of the biggest challenges for our nation is that so many young Americans are simply not qualified for military service.”

The Heritage Foundation called the lack of eligible candidates for recruitment a “looming national security crisis,” in a report authored by Thomas Spoehr and Bridget Handy in February.

“If only 29 percent of the nation’s young adults are qualified to serve, and if this trend continues, it is inevitable that the US military will suffer from a lack of manpower. A manpower shortage in the United States Armed Forces directly compromises national security,” they said.

According to the Defense Manpower Data Center, an arm of the Department of Defense, active-duty military personnel nationwide decreased from 1.16 million in 2013 to 1.12 million at the end of 2017.

A million-man military and a defense budget exceeding \$700 billion are not designed for “national defense” but represent a policy aimed at regaining and maintaining US

economic hegemony around the world. That policy has led to 25 years of continuous war and an entire generation of American children growing to adulthood knowing nothing but war, not to mention the quarter-century of death and destruction visited on children and families in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Militarism, nationalism and the drive toward war are happening across the world. Spain’s Popular Party (PP) government has designed a new syllabus for 6- to 12-year-old schoolchildren, “Social Values and Ethical Values,” which promotes militarism and Spanish nationalism.

As Germany, France, England and other European countries increase military spending, countries that had turned their backs on conscription have done an about-face, the WSWS reports, often in places thought to be thriving social democracies and models.

“Sweden isn’t the only country in northern Europe taking more defensive postures. After scrapping conscription in 2008, Lithuania, which is a NATO member, reinstated the draft in 2015 for men in the 19 to 26 age group [and] Ukraine also reintroduced conscription in 2014, just months after suspending it,” the WSWS reported.

“Unsurprisingly, Sweden’s new conscription protocol will take some of its inspiration from neighboring Norway, which features one of few gender-neutral fighting forces in the world. Its first enlistment begins in July and will draw from a pool of men and women born in 1999.”

The growth of “physical education” programs for children, military schools, the return of conscription and the increased spending on the world’s militaries stand as a warning to working class parents and their children.

The crisis of world capitalism compels each nation to size up its military resources and equipment. And the cannon need fodder.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>