

Healthy kids today, stronger military tomorrow



Veterans' Voice
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Guest columnist

America's military recruitment is facing a crisis. Did you know that in 2023, the military fell short by over 41,000 recruits? Even after lowering expectations, the Army missed its recruitment goals for two consecutive years.

One major factor? A lack of physical fitness.

As a veteran, I see this as more than a recruitment problem; this is a national security issue, and it starts with the health of our children.

That's where the Healthy Future US initiative comes in. Their mission is clear: to empower kids to live healthier lives by focusing on:

- Eating nutritious meals and staying physically active.
- Managing stress effectively.
- Avoiding harmful habits like smoking, vaping, or drug use.
- Staying safe, handling conflict, and navigating social media responsibly.

These aren't just lofty goals. They're critical for ensuring our future military is strong, qualified, and ready to serve.

Why Does This Matter to Veterans?

Let's connect the dots. Only 23% of young Americans are qualified to serve in the military today. Why?

- Many can't meet the physical requirements.
- Distrust in institutions and nontraditional career paths is rising among Gen Z.
- A strong economy is providing more career options outside the military.

The Healthy Future US initiative hopes to address these issues head-on by promoting better health education and physical activity in schools. As Scott Turner, one of the program's founders, explains:

"Investing in quality physical and mental health education means healthi-



Basha High School Air Force Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) marches in the Phoenix Veterans Day Parade.

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er, fitter teens, which increases the pool of qualified military applicants. This helps us meet recruitment goals and strengthens the quality of our volunteer armed forces."

But the benefits don't stop there. For veterans, healthier kids mean healthier families and communities. Here's how:

- **Improved physical education** ensures that veterans' kids and grandkids grow healthier, reducing the risk of chronic diseases across all income levels.

- **Better mental health resources** help future military personnel and veterans manage stress, PTSD, and other challenges during and after service.

- **Lower healthcare costs** mean veterans who rely on private insurance keep more of their hard-earned income.

What Can We Do?

Turner and his team at Healthy Future US need public support to push state governments and health plans to fund these crucial programs.

As Turner puts it:

"Bad health endangers national security, yet much of the risk can be prevented. This is about building a stronger Arizona and a stronger America."

Veterans, we can help lead the charge. Visit HealthyFutureUS.org online to learn more and see how you can support this vital initiative.