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Senior leader diversity: What does the Army value?

"Don't tell me what you value. Show me your budget, and I'll tell you what you value." I first heard this during the 2008 presidential campaign debates. The quote came to mind as I sat in the audience among senior Army officers who were being prepared for the next stage in their careers as advisers to strategic leaders.

Plainly evident, the composition of this Senior Leader Seminar (SLS) group of high performing and high potential officers (about one hundred colonels) did not reflect the diversity of our Army and the nation. The Army has long espoused the value of diversity and inclusion in its ranks and among its leaders. But the Army's "budget" for senior leadership, evident in this elite SLS group, did not affirm the value it otherwise places on racial and gender diversity.

The selection criteria for this special program included officers in positions of great responsibility. They are managing the Army's many current challenges in a new era of fiscal austerity and organizational turbulence.

They are also advising their superiors on ways to approach and

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solve difficult problems. They have successfully navigated through the leader development programs of training, education and experience. As post-Military Education Level 1 officers who have completed senior level college, they are the iron-colonels doing the hard work of running the Army.

Implicit in their current assignments and attendance in this SLS program is that these officers are the pool from which future generals are drawn. Accordingly, many of them will rise to the highest levels of Army leadership.

As the Army manages its talent, it is important to understand the paths by which officers arrive to

this point in their careers. Some observers will claim that the path to senior officer goes through the traditional combat arms (since 2009, the Army identified Maneuver, Fires and Effects (MFE) as a functional category). Then they note the trend of minority officers not to select those branches when they are commissioned. Because of their lower numbers in the ranks, it is understandable that their promotion rates are below the board averages, as reflected in fiscal 2012 Active Competitive Category majors and the fiscal 2013 ACC lieutenant colonel selection results. The lower rates for any given year are thus to be expected.

But, as a 2012 Rand study reported, statistics for the past two decades show lower overall promotion rates for African American male officers from the grades of O-4 to O-6. Retaining officers beyond field grade is also of concern: The highest attrition rates are for minority and female officers when they reach eligibility for 20-year retirement.

Even so, observers continue to note that if minority and female

officers are not in MFE branches, then no one should be surprised at their absence from the Senior Leader Seminar. But this is a red herring since just under 30 percent of the assignment requirements for positions at the colonel-level are "branch immaterial" or non-specific within combat arms, and this rises to about 38 percent if one considers the logistics branch. Moreover, SLS attendees come from both the operating (warfighting) and generating (supporting) forces. So MFE branching should be irrelevant. This begs the question, "What are the factors that contribute to and determine assignments to such key positions?"

A reasonable follow-on question may be, "Are there significant differences in the accession and assignment process that result in a non-proportional representation of senior minority and female officers?"

Does this matter? The Department of Defense and the Army have long recognized the challenge. So did Congress when it directed the formation of The Military Leadership Diversity Com-

mission (MLDC) in the 2009 National Defense Authorization Act. In its March 2011 report, the Commission concluded that the lack of racial and gender diversity in the senior ranks of the U.S. military was a strategic problem because the forces did not reflect American society. The Army has responded with programs and initiatives. Its current "Diversity Roadmap" looks toward Army 2025.

Nevertheless, as current trends continue, the result will be a paucity of minority and female officers in key positions. Thus Army leaders for the near-term will not reflect the Army or the nation's racial and gender demographics. So it is not encouraging to hear our most senior leaders declare that "fixes will take 10 years to see their effects."

As I sat through the week-long SLS program, I pondered, "How do we attract and retain talented minority citizens to service when there is limited evidence of their potential to be highly successful?"

It is important that we find the answer, especially with the turbulence and uncertainty ahead for our Army. □

allow participants to draw their pension at 55 years of age.

Nothing can beat the current retirement system as it is today. Soldiers are not required to make educated decisions on rebalancing of 401(k) portfolios.

The rate of return when 100 percent is invested in bonds is far different than the rate of return when invested in 100 percent equities. Soldiers will be required to understand the principles of investing, and failure to do so will only increase financial risk.

Additionally, one can be sure that a new industry preying on the financial incompetence of many will seek profits at the expense of those less informed.

The primary goal of retirement savings is to ensure the participants have a lifetime annuity. Few have the knowledge or capability of building a balanced compensation plan for later years.

Dismantling a system that works

will be regretted.

Col. Robert J. Arnell III, ret.
East Hardwick, Vt.

I don't know who is doing planning at the Defense Department concerning retirement pay, but one can only conclude they are totally out of touch with reality. Presently, any soldier who wants a Thrift Savings Plan account can set it up himself. The soldier can also establish a 401(k) plan. Neither is a special benefit bestowed upon the soldier justifying destruction of the present retirement system.

Where is the push coming from to give a retirement to persons who don't complete 20 years service? Not from the soldiers. The soldier is paying into Social Security like everybody else, investing in Thrift Savings and 401(k) plans now if he wishes.

I believe the net result, if DoD gets its way and destroys the current retirement system, would be

very few people volunteering for the military, as the incentive would be destroyed. No retirement pay at a relatively young age when one could then start a new career and try to make up for the years spent fighting wars, most often starting at the bottom rung at 40 years of age, would be a disincentive not to enter the military in the first place.

No medical care for the retired if the DoD gets its way. Tricare was a bloody, lengthy compromise, fought in the courts and the court of public opinion, which the DoD now wants to renege on and destroy, even for veterans who have served honorably for many years.

The top brass is silent and certainly not acting in the best interests of the soldiers or retired soldiers and seems to go along silently with destruction of retirement, Tricare and even commissary privileges.

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[FORUMS]

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CAN'T GET THAT CAMO

Regarding "MultiCam maker: Camo talks broke down over cost," armytimes.com, March 18:

I bet if we had the MultiCam instead of the Army Combat Uniform in the first place, it wouldn't be a problem. Now millions of dollars are gone for a bad camouflage.

— **Francisco Rodriguez**

\$24.8 million is laughable com-

pared to the \$\$ spent on ACU gear over the past decade.

— **Pete Stanford**

Army rejected all of Crye's proposals and did not present any counter proposals, effectively saying that a proven increase in soldier survivability was not worth a price difference of less than 1 percent.

— **Ron Barker**

MultiCam is a proven camo pattern. Pay the man already and quit wasting more money.

— **Pepper Pierce**

The Army is in uber careful mode. They're trying to tell Congress "Hey look! We're being frugal!"

— **Kyle Klincko**

Just go with MARPAT and be done with it. It works just fine for the Corps. Why can't it work for the Army?

— **Keith Stenerson**

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