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Editorial: Encourage your child or grandchild, to join the S.C. State Guard

Tuesday, November 13, 2012

By Richard Eckstrom



Photo Provided

Our nation's military is an all-volunteer force. No one in this country is made to join. Some may recall that the days of the draft ended in 1973 during the late stages of the Vietnam War.

Some observers contend that the volunteer nature of our military produces a partial disconnect between our men and women in uniform and the rest of society.

I share the concerns of some that this disconnect undermines our national cohesion and unified sense of purpose. Witness the headline of a January 2011 report by CNN: 'Joint Chiefs chair warns of disconnect between military and civilians.'

Adm. Mike Mullen, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, is quoted in the article saying, 'Our audience, our underpinnings, our authority, everything we are, everything

we do, comes from the American people ... we cannot afford to be out of touch with them.'

But for all of our military might - it is unquestionably the strongest in the world - our country does not require some sort of military service. Many nations do, according to a tabulation by the CIA.

Don't misunderstand me. I'm not suggesting that we go down this road, even though noble arguments can be made for mandatory military service.

But in lieu of such a requirement, a state military organization exists right here within the borders of our own state in which South Carolinians can serve their fellow citizens. It's never mobilized for combat.

It's called the S.C. State Guard, an unsung state military organization. While having prior military experience is not a requirement for joining, our ranks include many former members of the U.S. military.

With origins tracing to the colonial militia, our modern-day State Guard was formally established under state law during World War II to serve as a state defense force in the event of natural disasters or other emergencies.

Today's State Guard is an unpaid, all-volunteer military force with hundreds of members spread throughout all regions of our state. It adheres to military customs and observes the rank structure and uniform standards of the Army, yet its members cannot be called into combat or required to leave the state.

What they can be asked to do, and sometimes are asked to do, is respond to critical needs of their own communities in times of crisis. I'm the commander of the State Guard, and I've seen this happen many times.

The State Guard helps to bridge the gap between our military and our civilian population.

The State Guard is about service. It's about service to other South Carolinians, service to the state, and – when you really think about it – service to one's self.

Think about the ways that joining the State Guard would benefit not only your community and your state, but also your own journey in life.

Believe me, we need people from all walks to help us grow our ranks, fill key slots with dedicated members, and become a more vibrant organization that'll be even better suited to respond to the needs of our state when the next massive storm or other serious emergency strikes.

There's a bonus. Think of the sense of purpose gained from being a part of something bigger than your own self-interests.

The State Guard is just that. It's also a valuable resource to our state at a time when we should be looking for every way possible to reduce the costs of critical services. What better way to reduce costs than to turn to trained volunteers when they're available?

Let me go one step further. For all the reasons I've discussed, I highly encourage you to speak with your sons and daughters – and maybe your grandsons and granddaughters if you're fortunate enough to have them – about joining their fellow citizens to serve in our State Guard. Our ranks are open to applicants as young as 17.

All of us will be better for it.

If you are interested in learning more about membership in the State Guard, please contact us at 803-299-4238 or toll free at 866-238-3181, or visit our website at sg.sc.gov.

(Brigadier General Richard Eckstrom is the Commanding General of the South Carolina State Guard.)

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