

The Military and Public Behavior (Discussion)

Transcript of discussion held in Washington, DC, on December 9, 1997

TRILLIN: There's Kathleen over there.

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON: Would your proposal for Junior ROTC exclude the student whose sexual orientation is different from the mainstream orientation?

BECTON: No.

JAMIESON: Would that put the model at severe disadvantage in relationship to the military model?

BECTON: No. The Junior ROTC is not designed to be a recruiting device. It's not designed to be a training device for basic training. It's not designed to be anything but to help the school to be able to teach a little bit of civics, bring about a little bit of discipline, bring about a whole array of things that are good, that will provide, I think, a win-win situation. And so one's sexual orientation in high school, I don't think, should be a bar to their participation in Junior ROTC.

Yes, sir.

PAUL VERKUIL: General, thank you for that very helpful discussion. I think one question I have, and that comes back to your idea of national service—how practical is it? I know certainly some of us have sort of been through the era of the draft and understood the quality that you discussed about how important it is to, really, to level people together in a commitment to public service, whether it's the military or not. But today we seem to be facing cutbacks in the military, which may even jeopardize existing programs which seem to be working well, at least in terms of diversity. How are we going to find the will and, I suppose, the economic support for a program that would not only maintain but extend national service in a time when we seem to be cutting back so dramatically on all these fronts?

BECTON: I think I said it's gonna be a tough call by someone, and I agree with that. But I also think that we have gotten away from, as a nation, from having our youngster to have an obligation or feel an obligation to anything. I believe this is a way to do that. This is simply saying that 'Youngster, you owe your country something.' I see too much today in our high schools or junior high schools where there is no recognition of owing anyone, and somehow I believe we've got to find a way to turn it around. This obviously is not the only way. This just happened to be one of the ways which I think will work.

And we're not just talking about bringing them into the military. We're talking about a whole array of things, and this has been discussed from time before. I can recall in another reincarnation as a young student at Temple University—pardon me, ma'am—I was on active duty, but I took a few hours in the summertime, because I'm a slow learner. I took my first college course in 1946 and I finally got my degree in 1960. But in this period of the '40s—late '40s and early '50s, we were talking about military service or universal service, and it was in vogue in the community of academics to find out ways of making it happen. And, of course, it fell because of, I suspect, a lot of feeling about Korea. But that did not remove, in my judgment, the reason for coming up with something to help our youngsters understand.

TRILLIN: General, I have a question about—looking at it from the outside, it appears that various branches of the services have had various success in integrating, if that's the word, the diverse...

BECTON: Yes.

TRILLIN: ...population that they now have. Would that be, in your view, partly having to do with their differing missions or their differing cultures or their differing histories, or what?

BECTON: I think all of that.

TRILLIN: Oh.

BECTON: I can only talk with any expertise about the Army, but I think I can at least look across to Ralph and my friends in the Navy, and you have an entirely different culture there, where for a very, very long time, the only thing black America could do in the Navy was be in the kitchen. Well, when you're on board a ship, that's very confining, and you know where they are.

In the Army, it's difficult; we don't have one little ship. They spread all over. And they also have an opportunity to prove they can do things all over, and I think you have that as a standard that we could, given the opportunity, take the Army—the Army's big breakthrough came at the Bulge in 1944, when the commanders in the field realized that 'We gotta get more people, more manpower,' and they got a whole bunch of black units back there who were not carrying rifles to shoot at anybody, except each other, I guess, but they could become effective. And they asked for volunteers. And, as you probably read, at least in the reading assignment by Charles Moskos, they formed platoons. And, by God, they found out that when those black soldiers were brought up there, they did well.

I think that the Army got in the forefront because it recognized it had a bigger problem. We have more of them, and because of that, they decided they better do something about it. In 1972-73, as a young brigadier general, the Chief of Staff of the Army said, 'I've had it with this lack of racial harmony. I expect every general officer to attend a 2 1/2-day course, seminar, on equal

opportunity.' And I told the Chief as kindly as I could, since I was his youngest brigadier and he was a four-star—'Sir, I don't need that.' And he said, basically, 'Read my lip' before George Bush said it; 'I will be there and you will be there.'

And it forced every senior officer in the Army to attend this two-day seminar. That message went throughout the Army, because guess what? When you got the generals and the colonels going, guess who else is gonna learn? I'm not too sure—I am, really—the Navy didn't do that. The Air Force, they came along different. As you know, they had the first black four-star in Chappie James. Dynamite of a soldier, but he also was a leader to help people to do things the right way. And I am happy to say, I have my youngest daughter is a lieutenant colonel in the Air Force. She went to Leheigh, but that's all right. Yes ma'am.

JOYCE APPLEBY: I appreciated very much what you had to say about how essential it is that we recommit ourselves to our public education system and that we are in danger of losing successive generations if we don't attend to this really great need that you referred to as an education deficit. What seems so troubling is I think that all of us would agree that the neglect of the schools is a fundamental problem with the ramifications that you can hardly estimate, and yet we're in a political environment where there doesn't seem to be the will to spend the money that would be necessary.

Now along with the education deficit, there once was something called the peace dividend, and there was the hope that perhaps as you cut back on defense budgets, there would be the money available for domestic programs that had been neglected. I wonder if you think there's any possibility that we could extract anything from that defense budget that would free up tax moneys for schools, for a fundamental recommitment to our public education throughout the nation?

And secondly, perhaps even more importantly, are there officers in the service like you who see the education deficit as having a fundamentally malign influence upon our readiness, our military readiness?

BECTON: Let me not talk about extracting money from the Department of Defense, because I really don't know that much about—I've been out of the military now for 14 years. I can read, like everyone else, and I see their budget going down. I also recognize the readiness got to find a way to keep going up. But let me talk about the latter portion. We have within the District of Columbia 146 schools, and we're trying to get partners for all of our schools, and we do. I have some schools that have 40 and 50 partners, and of course, they're in the nice part of town. I have other schools that have one and two partners, and they're in a tough part of town. I have turned to my friends in the Department of Defense and asked them for help, and they have come through. I have partners from the Navy, I have partners from the Air Force, I've got partners from the Defense Intelligence Agency; couple of my schools have soldiers—two soldiers in the school every day to help.

Now that is a very, very minor portion of what I'm talking about, but I still believe that we can find ways to expand that, not just within my district or Bud Spillane's district, but expand it throughout the country, because we have military activity, military units—if nothing else, the National Guard; we're in this beautiful place—National Guard—that are available to help our schools, that could help our schools if given the authority and a push and some indication that they can expect approval from on high. I think it's possible.

Yes, sir.

THOMAS BENDER: I see. Now realizing that you've been out of the military for 14 years, this might not be a question you can answer directly, but I think you started to touch on this when you were talking about values. The question I have—there's a lot of discussion today about why people are pulling away from a kind of public concern. A lot of it has to do with the notion of rapid social change and uncertainty, and it at least in some people's minds, this produces a kind of tribalism in the United States and, I guess, in other places. Of course, one could turn it the other way, that all these changes and uncertainties can be emancipatory, can allow people to break traditional forms.

One of the things that intrigues me about the military is the kind of successes in integrating a huge number of very diverse people in the last 20 years or so—is that that has coincided with a period of unbelievable change in the military; that is, a demographic change; that is, a mission change; that is, a status change within the United States, and a whole new notion of how one becomes a military person with the so-called volunteer Army. And I'm just wondering whether you see all of these changes as something that helped facilitate the work that has been accomplished, or whether these kinds of changes produced levels of defensiveness, tension, uncertainty, that were counterproductive and made it even more difficult?

BECTON: I think you'll find the leadership—the military leadership no different than leadership in industry or higher ed or whatever, to recognize that change is difficult is come by. The one thing that they have different in the military that we don't have, say, in my current job—as a soldier, I could stand up in front of my command and say, 'Thou shall not,' 'Thou shall,' and they got a choice: They can do it or get out. I can't do that over in this city. I would love to, but I can't. And so you've gotta find something else. But at least in the military, we have our marching orders, we have our standards, and since it is a volunteer force, those that sign up are expected to do it, or they can be released.

I don't have an easy answer, but I do recognize that the military structure, I think, is on the right side of what they're doing, compared to the rest of society, and they're not the least bit reluctant to attack that animal, whatever it may be. Keep in mind the military—when I was a brigadier general back in 1972, I was the sixth ever fellow of color to receive flag rank. For the next 10 years, I probably knew every black officer who became a general. Today I haven't the foggiest idea who they are, and I think that's good. We have on active duty at least 31 black generals—on active duty.

With that type of structure throughout the forces, it becomes very difficult for someone who has a mind to be different than what is required or needed to act out, because someone is there. Not that you got—oh, black looking out for black; you got soldier looking out for soldiers. And the same thing could be

true of women. We have a lieutenant general, female, in the Army today. The Navy has one. The Marine Corps has one. Fifteen years ago, if you were to say that or suggest that, they would have thought you'd lost your mind. But we're growing up, and we recognize that talent comes. Talent is there. Let's be smart enough to use it. And I think that's what the Department of Defense has done; at least the Army has.

Yes, sir.

MARTIN SELIGMAN: General, you've changed my mind about an important issue. Let me say what...

BECTON: Is that good or bad?

SELIGMAN: No, I think it's good. You opened a hopeful possibility for me. Before your talk, I confess I thought something like the following: that an organization whose basic mission had to do with dying and killing and fighting was well-suited to the learning of discipline but ill-suited to the learning of values. But then, in the course of your talk, I think what I saw was that if, as a young person, every day, you're confronted with issues of life and death, of fighting, of killing, of the possibility of dying, that this may be a much better crucible for the formation of moral values than the abstract value limbo that our undergraduates are in day by day. So I wonder if I could get you to muse on the function that the military has through bringing people face-to-face with the most basic existential issues for value formation?

BECTON: Fortunately, we're not fighting every day in a war, but by the same token, in the back of the minds of every soldier is the requirement that he must go out and fight sometime—that he may be called upon. And if you take a look at our formations that we've had, our operations—and I've lost track of how many we've had in the last 10 years, but we've got soldiers in harm's way today in many parts of the world—you develop a sense of value. You develop a feeling of comradeship. You develop a reliance upon that guy or gal adjacent to you who may have to be there to defend you as you defend them.

At Prairie View, where we had about 6,000 students, in Texas, the only thing they'd defend themselves against was what they were gonna do when they go to a weekend, and the football team didn't do well that way. And I only mention it because some of you are aware of the fact that Prairie View has now 78 consecutive losses. There's a long story behind that. I won't bore you with it, but I was the guy who stopped football for one year. And to do that in Texas—well, never mind.

But I understand and I agree with what you're saying, that I think we can be a test tube or a crucible; not that the military should become a social motivator. That's not what I'm suggesting. But I am suggesting it can lead the way. And I think they've done it fairly well.

Yes, sir.

ROBERT WIEBE: I'd like to ask you to return to the high schools and to an issue you raised in terms of a generation coming of age that has no sense of giving something back to its country. That's something that the commission is concerned about, too—the difficulty of finding, even imagining, ways in which the current American society might share common values that would be called loyalty to their country or the like. And you offered a prescription of a kind of local model ROTC that would instill that. I missed the gap. I don't see where the values are coming from. I could see things like discipline and I could see camaraderie; I can envisage a number of different things coming out of the ROTC model. I don't know where the values are coming from. Maybe you can help us.

BECTON: Our Junior ROTC, in addition to talking about discipline, are able to talk about deportment. They have role models in all of the Junior ROTCs that are good. They are forced to consider teamwork, working together. They learn a respect, and that's part of discipline, but a respect for authority. They have a chance to see both girl and boy are successful; as a matter of fact, in some of our Junior ROTCs, we have more girls than boys. They are able to get away from the gang culture, at least in the District of Columbia. They're able to do things as a group for the community. None of the things I mentioned is

precluded from other groups, but they are there. They're visible. They're in uniform. And they are effective.

Now I'm gonna ask for help, because Bud has more Junior ROTCs than I have. What have I missed?

ROBERT SPILLANE: Well, I don't know if I can help more. You've already done such a marvelous job of everything so far today, but I do think that in schools, there is an initial tendency for youngsters who may need discipline, poor youngsters, youngsters of color, to join the Junior ROTCs, and it's been a real phenomenon, I think, in a county like a Fairfax County, which is probably one of the richest counties in the United States, but it is very, very diverse; 179 nations, 100 languages being spoken. And it brings a value system there because of the different types of youngsters that go into it, and it started, as I said, at probably more poor youngsters, more of the undisciplined youngsters, who are kind of 'You ought to go to Junior ROTC or, you know, may not make it out of here, or get some good counseling somewhere along the way.'

But it has, in the last several years, grown toward a stature where other types of youngsters—youngsters who are absolutely—well, 90 percent of the youngsters go to college anyway from even that system—but youngsters who will be going into Ivy League schools have joined the Junior ROTC. So it doesn't get directly to where the values come from, but the values start to grow because you have so much diversity, and the youngsters are bringing those values from their home, from others, and there's a sense of value that probably develops at the Junior ROTC level.

WIEBE: I think I probably wasn't careful enough in phrasing the query. I can see character formation and socialization in some local setting. I don't see where the values that provide a hope for national unity, for a new patriotism, for a sense of connectedness with one's country or one's broader society—maybe that's a spin-off of good character formation, I mean, maybe that's what you're telling me. But that sense that there is a generation coming of age that doesn't feel an attachment to America...

SELIGMAN: But, Bob, what if winning...

WIEBE: ...I just don't know how the A leads to B. That was really—but I'm glad to hear about the character formation.

SELIGMAN: Bob, what if winning and losing, living and dying, killing and fighting are hothouses that accelerate the formation of values?

WIEBE: In a high school ROTC...

TRILLIN: Judy has a question.

JUDITH RODIN: I just want to comment on Marty's point, because I think in at least two of the positions that you've had, you would argue the opposite thing. I think you're right, Marty, in characterizing the military as perhaps a hotbed for the formation of values for the reasons you characterize, but we can all think of junior high schools and elementary schools where issues of life and death are equally palpable every day and are the antithesis, the anathema, to value formations. So, I mean, there's a differentiating factor here that I think we need to be mindful of and not push that analogy too far.

My question is this; you talked a lot about race relations in the Army, at least, and diversity, and you mentioned a variety of variables that might be causal, and maybe it's all of them, but I'd like to push you a little harder to maybe select those that you think are most important. You talked about discipline and regulation and expectation, that there really are prescribed ways to behave that if you deviate from, there really are consequences, and everybody knows that in advance. You talked about combat and the nature of combat really being a leveler in terms of differences among people, and you also talked about the fact that the Army, and maybe the military more generally, is a meritocracy, so that if people have a level playing field, regardless of skin color or whatever, they really can rise by virtue of their merit and qualification.

Which of those is really important? Can we generalize from that to things that we can do in the broader society? And if all of them are true, why aren't women doing well?

BECTON: I'm not too sure—and I had a discussion about this last night, as a matter of fact—that women are doing all that poorly.

BECTON: I think what we see is that the problems that we're finding in sexual harassment, sexual misconduct—they're not occurring in the units; they're occurring in a training base. They are occurring where you got the—a transient; youngsters coming in, the old-boy net, the old cadre; aha! They got a target over there. And we're trying to do something about that. And I think the Army can fix that. But when you get beyond that training base, you get out to the units, you'll find women are doing very well. And I think the number will point that out.

But remember also, the women also came at a time when you still have a question on the minds of some people: Should they have the same standards? I happen to believe that there's no reason to expect a woman to do the same amount of push-ups as a guy. Their bodies are different. But that doesn't mean that they're any less qualified.

I was in charge of physical fitness for the Army in my last assignment, and we had some interesting standards to deal with. One, we were able to get our soldiers out of combat boots. Now some of you may not remember, but the Army used to run in combat boots, and the reason for it was because we always fought in combat boots. Well, that's a dumb answer. Running is for something different. Put on running shoes. And we'd got 'em in there.

But you've seen these ladders that go rung to rung; my old-boy cadre said, 'We cannot move the arm closer because it'd make it too easy.' If you're gonna go from one end to the other end, whether you've got 20 or 30 doesn't make any difference. But if we move them closer to each other, you help the women, because they can't make that big adjustment. Again, a standard that didn't make a lot of sense.

I am suggesting that there are a lot of things that we can do to make an adjustment for gender. The Air Force made an amazing discovery. They have the great big toolboxes and they gotta carry it from plane to plane. And they said, 'Well, the women can't carry that.' Well, someone said, 'Why, give 'em

a dolly, something to pull on. How much more is that gonna cost? Not much.'

Are we willing to go and get out of that box that we've been in? And I would submit that, in too many cases, we're not, particularly outside of the military.

TRILLIN: We're running close to our time. We're gonna give—Cass, you wanna go last—he's famous for his push-ups. I was gonna give him the last question, but if not...

BECTON: I did my 50 this morning.

TRILLIN: And so did he, General, I assure you.

BECTON: Well, that's why he's...

TRILLIN: So did we all. If not, I want to thank you for coming, and for a presentation that was enlightening to all of us. Thank you.

BECTON: Thank you.

RODIN: Let me just do a little bit of housekeeping. What we've done is really tried to bring together, from our last three meetings, including today's, a series of six or seven—are we up to seven, Steve?—seven sets of statements and concepts and precepts that will really be, I think, quite helpful in guiding our lunchtime discussion. It tries to organize what we've said, what the recommendations have been from the plenary sessions and thinking from some of the working groups, and I think—and we'll hand these out now so that you can look at them.

We'll take a break before lunch, and then at lunch, we can use the occasion to review these, discuss them, and each of them, I think, will stimulate us to organize some of the many suggestions we've had about potential next steps in several of these areas, and I think we ought to try to come to some conclusions about potential next steps in these areas and recognize that any decision we make today is up for change, that this an iterative process because, of course, the working groups will keep meeting and our

deliberations will continue. But the sense that there may be already outcomes that we wish to move towards is something that we all feel or many of us feel strongly, and we at least should have the occasion now to deliberate about that while recognizing that we move forward and will have others as well.