Marine Commandant: 2018 Recruiting Goal Met, but Dearth of Qualified Youth 'Should Scare You'

WASHINGTON – The Marine Corps met its recruiting goal in fiscal 2018, said the service's commandant, Gen. Robert B. Neller, despite a more challenging recruiting environment.

"We've made our recruiting goal every year," Neller told reporters Oc. 10 at a Defense Writers Group breakfast.

The Marine Corps met 100 percent of its goal in 2018, while the Army failed to meet its goal for the first time since 2005.

The improving U.S. economy, with the lowest unemployment rate since 1969, is adding to the stress of military recruiters.

Neller said the Corps achieved its goal without lowering standards.

"If anything, we've raised our standards," he said.

Neller pointed out that today less than 30 percent of the nation's youth are qualified – physically and otherwise – for military service.

"That should scare you," he said.

He said that in the Marine Corps, 62 percent of the force – about 120,000 of 186,000 Marines – is 25 years old or less. The average age of Marines is the youngest of the U.S. armed forces.

"We're getting good folks," he said.

As a manpower-intensive service, the Marine Corps spends 65 percent of its budget on personnel costs.