

Bleak U.S. job market boosts military recruitment

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WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Aided by a bleak job market, the U.S. military met all of its recruitment goals in the past year for the first time since it became an all-volunteer force in 1973, the Pentagon said on Tuesday.

Military services have been stretched thin by conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, giving added weight to recruitment efforts as President Barack Obama considers sending another 40,000 U.S. troops to Afghanistan next year.

The United States already has 67,000 troops in Afghanistan and about 119,000 in Iraq.

Pentagon officials said recruitment gains were fueled by the deepest U.S. recession since the Great Depression and an unemployment rate nearing 10 percent.

"For the first time since the advent of the all-volunteer force, all of the military components, active and reserve, met their number as well as their quality goals," said Bill Carr, deputy undersecretary of defense for military personnel policy.

The U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force sent a total of about 169,000 active duty recruits to training in the 2009 fiscal year that ended on September 30, beating their 164,000-member goal, the Pentagon said.

National guard and reserve forces sent about 128,000 recruits to training, beating their goal.

Carr said rising private sector unemployment was a force behind the increase in military recruitment but was not the only factor that "allowed us to be, for much of the year, in a very favorable position."

Curtis Gilroy, a senior Pentagon official, said a 10 percent increase in the national unemployment rate generally translates into a 4 percent to 6 percent "improvement in high-quality Army enlistments."

Recruitment does not come cheap. On average, the military spends between \$9,000 and \$10,000 per recruit, a figure that includes the high cost of advertising and of employing thousands of recruiters across the country, Carr said.

The Army spends far more, about \$22,000 per recruit.

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