

MCPON on Recruiting: 'Pond Has Less Fish in It,' Service Needs 'Good Stories' About Navy



NAVAL SUPPORT ACTIVITY NAPLES, Italy (Nov. 4, 2022) Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy James Honea speaks to Sailors assigned to Naval Support Activity Naples, Italy during an all-hands call, Nov. 4, 2022. Honea conducted a fleet visit to answer questions and discuss his priorities on topics that included: warfighting competency, mental health, education, and quality of life. (U.S. Navy Photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Almagissel Schuring)

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy is working hard to address recruitment and retention but struggles with the fact that “the pond has less fish in it,” so more “good stories” need to be told about the Navy, said the Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy at the Surface Navy Association’s annual symposium here on Jan. 10.

Navy Recruiting Plan

During a media roundtable, MCPON James M. Honea told reporters that recruiters “have a really good plan” but can only do so much.

“I need more of our good stories to be told about who we are and the good things we have going on,” he said. “Serving our nation in any capacity possible is a great thing.”

Military officials have blamed external factors such as a low unemployment rate for difficulty in recruiting, although

retention has lagged as well.

When asked about how the Navy is dealing with retention, Honea said that he has toured Norfolk to “understand what the barriers were” and interact with sailors directly about their concerns.

“We’ve been addressing those concerns and finding sensible ways to solve those problems,” he said. “Along the way we’re trying to decide what are the quick and easy solutions to some of those problems.”

Suspending High-Year Tenure

The Navy has taken some steps to try to deal with the problem of retention. In December, the service reportedly suspended enlisted high-year tenure for two years – a policy that moved active-duty sailors to the reserve if they did not meet benchmarks.

Honea said that addressing issues like access to quality medical care, eliminating bureaucracy, and doing other things to ensure a positive experience for sailors are some of his top priorities for helping with retention.

“We can do better as a Navy,” he said. “We’re getting better – not as quickly as I’d like. ... Those are very basic things we should be much better at, so it hurts me that we are not as good as [we can be].”