

Inequities in the Draft



Jan Faust

By EDWARD M. KENNEDY

WASHINGTON—Although I share with many of my colleagues a deep and abiding respect for the concept of voluntarism in a democratic society, I cannot believe it should be raised above the demands of social justice. For that reason, I remain unalterably opposed to a volunteer army in wartime.

While Americans continue to die in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, the inequities inherent in a volunteer army far outweigh any of the benefits described by its promoters.

Adoption of the volunteer army proposal would mean that the economically disadvantaged would form the bulk of the entries into the armed forces under the inducement of higher pay. Even more repugnant is the special \$3,000 bonus for combat service which would program most of these less affluent youths into the divisions where there is the highest risk of death.

Some dispute the argument that given the limited opportunities available in the private sector, we would be channeling the poor into the front lines to fight the battles based on decisions made by others in our society. Yet I would challenge any of the proponents of a volunteer army to travel to college campuses, as I have, to ask for volunteers. Nearly all raised their hands when I asked how many favored a volunteer army but there were almost none who kept their hands up when I asked: "Would you volunteer?"

If this nation repeals the draft today while men die in Indochina, it will be saying that the best option for the less affluent is front-line duty. I cannot believe this nation wants to rely upon such an inequitable policy

The Case Against a Volunteer Army of The Disadvantaged

when some citizens are being called upon to give their lives.

So it is that if we are to force some of our young men to fight the continuing war in Indochina, then the responsibility must be spread evenly throughout all sectors of the society. Failing that, we face the risk of muting the most articulate and the most resourceful voices in this land, voices that have proved vital in dissent and effective in causing some change in the direction of the war's escalation.

The wisdom of insulating middle and upper middle class men from the horrors of war by shifting the burden of the draft from their sons to those of the less affluent is open to serious question in a democracy.

On the other hand, in a nation at peace, the concept of a volunteer army can be considered without addressing the moral question of whether only certain segments of society are being called upon to risk their lives.

There is one element, however, in the all-volunteer plan that is vital to the future course of this nation's foreign policy deliberations. The Goldwater-Hatfield legislation would require the President to come to the Congress to request a reinstatement of the draft. By so doing, it reasserts the constitutional responsibility of Congress to raise the armies.

However, that goal can be just as effectively written into the draft law, as I have sought to do this year, by legislating a ceiling on the number of men the President can draft.

I would place that limit at 150,000, which is less than any year since 1964. Any request for more men to be drafted would have to be ratified by Congressional action. In so doing, the President might request, but the Congress would decide.

But placing a ceiling on the draft would not remedy the defects of the draft mechanism. Reform is needed. The bill which I have introduced seeks to end existing inequities.

First, it requires by statute that the random selection system be operated on a national basis.

Second, the bill also would end current student deferments. The present undergraduate college deferment permits too many to escape the draft. It means that the university student may postpone induction until there is no Vietnam; but the mechanic must face the draft immediately.

Third, there must be guarantees of due process, including the right to personal appearances and legal counsel.

Fourth, the regulations and practices of the Selective Service system must more accurately reflect the recent Supreme Court decisions on the definition of conscientious objectors. Contrary to the assertion of Senator Goldwater that there has been an enormous increase since that decision, the proportion of C.O. deferments in the 1-A pool has risen by less than a single percentage point.

Finally, by reorganizing the system and taking the classification decision out of the hands of the 4,000 volunteer local boards, greater uniformity can be assured.

These are the reforms that are needed to establish a draft system that is fair and certain and just.

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