



It's Time to Get Rid of the Selective Service System

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On a warm summer morning in 1972 I was waiting in a long line outside of the Military Entrance Processing Station in downtown Denver. The line consisted of young men, mostly conscripts commonly referred to as draftees, reporting on their assigned date to begin two years of active duty with the U.S. Army.

I was 17 and had just finished my junior year of high school. The prospect of going back to finish high school was of little interest to me. After all, my father had enlisted in the military during WWII at the age of 15 after misrepresenting his age. I was relentless in exploiting that fact with my parents in order to convince them to give me permission to join the Army and reluctantly they yielded.

As the line moved slowly forward I listened to the conversations around me. Many of the draftees were rehearsing what they would say once they got inside to convince the Army why they were unfit for military service. Little seemed to work for them and after a full day of being poked, prodded, and filling out reams of paper work, we boarded buses for the airport to begin our military life.

The next eight weeks were comprised of basic combat training – punctuated by desperate attempts by a number of my fellow platoon members to find a way out of the Army by doing everything from visiting the Chaplain's office to self inflicted injuries. Unfortunately, my next two years on active duty didn't get any better. Many of the soldiers that I served with intentionally and repeatedly violated orders hoping to be such a burden to the Army that they would eventually be thrown out.

The conscript Army that I joined in 1972 had retreated from the war in Vietnam; was fractured along racial lines; broken from drug and alcohol abuse; and suffered from a fundamental lack of discipline and low morale.

In 1973, the draft ended and the Selective Service System was dismantled. By 1975, the last of the draftees had completed their military obligations and the U.S. Army was now an all volunteer force. Every year since then the Army has greatly improved in the quality of its personnel, training, and professionalism.

In late 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and in 1980 President Jimmy Carter sought to demonstrate the resolve of the United States against the Soviet incursion. President Carter temporarily embargoed the U.S. export of wheat to the Soviet Union, banned the U.S. participation in the 1980 Summer Olympic Games to be held in Moscow, and sought Congressional approval to stand up the Selective Service System. To this day, all males are required by law to register with the Selective Service System within 30 days after their 18th birthday.

However, conscription has not been requested by our military as a viable option during the first Gulf War, the Iraq War, or for Afghanistan – despite periodic shortages of military personnel. And while many draft age males have failed to meet registration requirements, no one has been prosecuted for the failure to comply with this law since 1986. We have a requirement on the books that isn't used and clearly doesn't merit enforcement.

The Selective Service System was never meant to be permanent. Now, 31 years and over \$700 million later, Congress never having given serious consideration to establishing a conscripted force, it is finally time to end the registration requirement and dismantle the Selective Service System.

I have recently introduced legislation to do just this. The bill will allow the President, if needed, to reinstate the Selective Service System by executive order. Until then, ending the Selective Service System will not negatively affect our defense in the least, will save the taxpayers over \$24 million a year, release military personnel currently working needlessly on the Selective Service System to more pressing duties contributing to our national security, and remove an obviously moribund and outdated program that was never more than a symbolic gesture to the Soviet Union 31 years ago.