
Defense Report

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Selective Service— A Shambles That Must Be Rebuilt

Amid rumors that the Carter Administration may be considering steps to help the Selective Service System with some extra money in the Fiscal Year 1979 Budget the current skeletonized system is being called a "shambles" in House Armed Services Committee hearings.

Ever since the All Volunteer Force became a reality and draft calls were stopped the Selective Service System has been the victim of successive budget cuts that reduced it from 2,445 employees in 626 offices in 1974 to a mere 100 employees (70 in the Washington headquarters and 30 in five regional offices). President Ford stopped registering 18-year-olds and the rolls of young men who might be screened for service in an emergency are rapidly dwindling. In response to a Department of Defense requirement for the first 100,000 selectees to reach training bases within 60 days after a mobilization the managers of the skeleton system say they *might* be able to get them together in 110 days—and other experts say the realistic figure is *at least* 180 days. Allowing a minimum of three months for training, the first draftee replacements would not be available to units in combat for between seven and nine months after a mobilization order. That in no way meets the absolute minimum requirements of our active and reserve component forces.

Perhaps the most ridiculous facet of this whole problem is the relatively small amount of money involved. At the height of the Vietnam War the Selective Service budget was \$80 million. Today it is just \$6 million. Somewhere in between those figures is a spending level that would permit re-institution of registration and reconstruction of the machinery that could produce those first selectees in timely fashion. Taken in the context of the overall Defense Budget this is pocket money.

Granted there are some philosophical hangups. Many are still hopeful that the All Volunteer concept can be made to work for both the Active and Reserve Forces. There are some who are convinced that any renewed draft must include women. The fact remains that even if the volunteer idea works to sustain our peacetime forces it will not provide enough mobilization manpower. And if women should be subject to the draft, so be it. No more will be called than are needed.

The national trauma attending the end of the Vietnam War and the advent of volunteerism put the squeeze on the Selective Service System. One of them is long behind us and the other has not entirely proved its viability, even in peacetime. A sudden call to mobilize will not provide time to rebuild the Selective Service machinery. It must be reconstructed now and kept well-oiled and instantly available.