
Defense Report

AUSA



Increasing the Selective Service Budget—A Pitiful Step in the Right Direction

Congress is now considering an administration proposal to grant the Selective Service System an increase of \$2.9 million in its budget for Fiscal Year 1979. This would bring the total amount of money available to operate the emasculated system for a year to just \$9.5 million.

In case you might have forgotten, the budget for the system in 1972, the year in which draft call-ups were ended, was about \$90 million, still a mere pittance when compared to the over-\$100 billion budget of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare or the \$75 billion Defense budget that same year. That \$90 million bought a fully operational draft mechanism, capable of registering, classifying and inducting the manpower the U.S. armed forces might need in an emergency.

You could not have forgotten how, in the aftermath of the war in Vietnam, *Selective Service* became an ugly term or how the nation rushed to support a volunteer armed force concept. The nation quickly forgot how the selective service machinery, long abused by concessions to political goals and for several years manipulated by those who sought to avoid service, had been straightened out and operated fairly during the last months it functioned. The system has now shrunk to a skeleton of just 100 employees, incapable of anything more than making grandiose plans.

And with the stripping away of the selective service meat came the predictable loss of capability to react in a military manpower emergency. The absence of draft-induced pressure slowed the flow of recruits into the reserve forces and cut off the supply of former draftees available for the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR). The Army Reserve and the Army National Guard have been on a downward glide path in strength ever since and the IRR has grown so small that it is incapable of providing the trained manpower needed to fill active and reserve units at the outset of an emergency. It would not even be an adequate source of replacements for early combat casualties.

A ready, responsive Selective Service System is the only logical source of manpower. It must be able to produce the first bulk groups of inductees within 30 days and, in order to do that, it must be able to register young people who became eligible to serve at their country's call. The present skeleton of a system cannot even come close to meeting that goal.

The question now being debated by Congress should not be, "Is 9.5 million too much?" but, "How much must we spend to restore the Selective Service System to a realistic level of capability?"