
Defense Report

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The Resurrection of the Selective Service System: The Right Steps Are Being Taken

Thanks to the hard work of many people in every corner of the United States there has been a dramatic shift in the public and political attitudes toward Selective Service. For several years after U.S. involvement in Vietnam ended and the nation rode on the hopeful crest of the All Volunteer concept, "Selective Service" were words that triggered strong negative emotions.

But throughout that post-Vietnam period concerned people could see the damage being done to the reserve forces by the lack of draft-based motivation to serve and the concurrent diminution of our mobilization capability. They worked patiently to broaden public awareness of just what was happening and about a year ago that low-key educational effort began to pay off. Members of Congress began to recognize the problem. Editorial writers began to put their concerns on paper and a Harris public opinion poll taken late in 1978 showed substantial support by the "man on the street" for an operable Selective Service System. Finally, the Secretary of the Army and the Secretary of Defense, both ardent supporters of the All Volunteer concept, announced their support for a re-born system.

Legislation designed to put the system back on its feet has appeared in the Senate and in the House, some of it most noteworthy for its lack of full understanding of all that must be done. It is easy to overlook the fact, for example, that the Military Selective Service Act which is still the law of the land has been violated every year that a succession of Presidents, with the tacit support of Congress, has failed to keep the Selective Service System in operating condition. Some of the legislation also overlooks the potential benefit of an operable Selective Service System to the reserve forces and dodges the issue of drafting women.

For a time supporters of a viable Selective Service System were faced with the necessity of melding many bills into one that would get all the needed jobs done but now a bill has been introduced into the House by Congressman G. V. "Sonny" Montgomery of Mississippi which wraps up all the loose ends. It would assure the continued independence of the Selective Service System from any executive department. It would clarify language that makes the resumption and continuation of registration mandatory. It would deal with the issue of sex by having all young people register and be available for selection. It would also take the important step of inducting people for a brief period of training to be followed by service in the Individual Ready Reserve. This straightforward approach will go far to strengthen our national defense posture and to give substance to our deterrent against war.