
Defense Report

AUSA



The President Once Again Fails to Support a Workable Selective Service System

Of all the trends that have developed over the past year, one, public appreciation of the need for an operable Selective Service System, has been very easy to identify. But by including barely enough money in his proposed Fiscal Year 1980 Budget to maintain the existing emasculated system at its present level, President Carter shows that he either failed to appreciate the swell of public support for realistic Selective Service funding or decided to run headlong into this strong shift in public opinion.

The most recent evidence of this shift came from a Harris Poll in December, 1978 which found that 66 percent of the Nation would support the immediate registration of all young people between the ages of 18 and 28 so they would be available if needed in an emergency. An even greater number, 76 percent, supported the notion of having a pool of people available for training and use as needed in a military emergency. These percentages are too significant to be overlooked and yet the President seems to have done just that.

The present Selective Service System, as described by its own Director, by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and by the Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, cannot begin to meet the documented need of the military services for large numbers of selectees quickly in the event of a military mobilization. With our Army reserve units short by at least 150,000 people, with the Individual Ready Reserve decimated by a six-year absence of draft calls there is no source of the manpower that would be needed to carry the Army through the early weeks and months of a mobilization. The Selective Service System, as it would be continued under the President's latest budget, could not produce trained replacements in sizeable numbers for at least seven months after a mobilization order was given.

Estimates of the cost of upgrading the Selective Service System to the point at which it could register and classify 18-year olds and have them available for speedy final screening are in the neighborhood of \$50 million. This is about five times as much as the President has requested for the next fiscal year but, in the context of the entire amount requested to support our national security needs, a miniscule sum.

There are many issues in the Federal Budget of a half trillion dollars that involve making hard choices, not the least of which is the basic decision of how much to allocate to provide security for our way of life. More often than not, the President is beset by conflicting views over how the defense share of the budget should be allocated but in this case the only dissent against spending more money for a reliable source of mobilization manpower seems to be in the White House.