
Defense Report

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Congressman Les Aspin and Low Aptitude Soldiers—Once Again He Talks Before He Listens

Once again gadfly Congressman Les Aspin (D-Wis.) has come forth with a statement that the armed forces could solve personnel problems by simply lowering their standards and taking more people with low aptitude. Claiming that lowering standards would obviate the need to reinstitute the draft, Aspin claims current service aptitude criteria would make it impossible for World War I hero Sgt. Alvin York to enlist in the Army today.

In his alarm over increasing sympathy for revitalizing the Selective Service System, Aspin fails to take at least two things into consideration. He totally ignores the changes in warfare since Sgt. York performed his single-handed feat in the 1918 battle of the Argonne in France. Sgt. York was an Infantryman but the tools of the foot-soldier's trade in that setpiece war were his entrenching tool and his rifle. There were no tactical radios, no armored personnel carriers, no sophisticated anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles to be fired from the Infantryman's shoulder. If, as Rep. Aspin infers, Sgt. York would have scored poorly on today's aptitude tests, it is entirely possible that he could not absorb current infantry training.

The second overlooked point is far more compelling. None of the pressure to bring the Selective Service System back to useable form is based on an intention to begin drafting people immediately into the active forces. The prime need for improvement in the system's capabilities is to provide a mobilization asset that is now entirely lacking. If a war started in Europe this week, there is no source of people in the reserves or elsewhere to keep our combat units at fighting strength. The existing Selective Service System would be so slow that substantial numbers of trained personnel would not be available for at least seven months after a mobilization was ordered. Sgt. York could not be called in time.

There are other ways in which Mr. Aspin shows ill-informed opinions of the draft. He rejects the concept of citizen service to the nation, one of the foundations, of our country. He implies that draftees would be paid at some lower rate than the volunteers in the ranks, an idea that has had no part in the current discussion and only arises when cost becomes a prime factor in deciding how our military ranks should be filled. He is concerned that the people drafted would be overtaken and passed in the civilian job progression by those who are not serving. Of course, in anything short of total mobilization, he is right but this is why absolutely random selection would be used as the fairest way to choose those who would serve. The security of the nation demands that Mr. Aspin inform himself better before he speaks out on an issue as critical as this.