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# Defense Report

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## Universal Service — It Won't Stand Up to a Close Look

As the debate over the viability of the All-Volunteer method of filling our military ranks grows more intense some people have begun looking for alternatives to the hard choice between the high cost of volunteerism and the arbitrary choice of soldiers by draft. One of the frequently discussed alternatives is universal service, which theoretically requires every citizen to share in the burden of obligated service to the nation and avoids the difficult choice of who serves when not all are called.

Often overlooked in this simplistic approach is the fact that within the total number of young people who reach the age of 18 each year — about four million men and women — some would have to be enticed into the more demanding military jobs. That enticement could take the form of monetary incentives, educational opportunities or other blandishments similar to those proposed for or available to the recruiters for the present volunteer force. We would, in effect, be recruiting within the universal service population.

The advocates of universal service like to point to the vast stretches of timberland that need better care, to the unrealized reclamation projects, to the inadequate staffing of facilities for the care of the sick and the aged and are intrigued by the prospect of a bonanza of committed young people. More often than not the advocates fail to ask themselves how big the bill for all this will be. The young people will have to be fed, clothed and housed and probably paid at least a minimal wage. If there are big forestry and reclamation projects untouched now it is probably because no one has been able to find the funds for them and the availability of a couple of million strong backs would not obviate the need to buy bulldozers and concrete.

As far as it is known, too, none of the advocates of universal service has ever approached the Departments of Agriculture, Interior, Health or Education and asked for recommendations on how they might use the lion's share of four million people each year. (Of course, if the people were called to serve for more than 12 months the gross number serving at any given time would be much larger.) Only the Department of Defense has demonstrated the clear need for a continuing flow of new people and its peacetime needs would amount to less than one fourth of the 18-year-olds each year.

Unquestionably, there is comfort in hearing politicians proclaim the duty of every citizen to serve the nation. There is even more comfort in the certain knowledge that, given a real threat to that nation, our fellow citizens would rally to its defense by whatever happened to be the fastest means. The hard fact is that, while the threat exists just below the surface as it does today, we don't *need* to press four million young men and women into national service every year.

What we *do* need is to have our political leaders, once and for all, make the hard choice between giving our volunteer forces the financial resources they need to attract and retain enough good people or shifting to selective service as the source for each year's required number of new soldiers. Universal service is not a viable alternative.