
Defense Report

AUSA



The President-Elect Wants a Stronger National Defense — Draft Registration Must Be Part of It

One of the major points made by President-elect Reagan and most of the Republican candidates for national office during the recent election was their intent to strengthen our defense posture. This promise struck a responsive cord in the minds of many voters and undoubtedly had a substantial impact on the Republicans' victory margin. But hidden behind the philosophical commitment to a stronger defense is another one, more emotional than logical, to do away with the newly reinstated registration for possible selective service. If this second commitment is carried out, it will result in a serious diminution of the effectiveness of the basic commitment. Our defense capabilities will only be weakened by abandoning our readiness to use selective service quickly in an emergency.

President-elect Reagan and the Republican platform pledge to improve the military compensation system so a career of service in the armed forces of the United States is at least as alluring as one in private enterprise. This is a commendable goal. Unless we achieve that kind of comparability between military compensation and civilian pay we have little hope of attracting and keeping sufficient numbers of the right kinds of people to operate our increasingly complex weapons and to serve under conditions of hardship, peril and repeated separations from family. But Governor Reagan and the people who erected the Republican platform have missed the major argument in favor of being ready to use the Selective Service System — our very obvious inability to man and sustain our forces in the critical first months of a military emergency.

After several years of often-heated argument over the efficacy of our all-volunteer recruiting system, President Carter and Congress were not driven toward renewed registration by difficulties encountered in recruiting young men and women in peacetime. They were pushed in that direction, rather, by the final realization that, should a war be thrust upon us, we could not rapidly find, train and deploy the people needed to fill the ranks. The active Army, although it is meeting the strength authorized by Congress, is still 25,000 to 50,000 below the number of people it would need to fill its ranks for combat. Army National Guard and Army Reserve units, which would play a vital part in the early stages of any mobilization, are 135,000 below the numbers they should have when mobilized. The Individual Ready Reserve, the Army's only source of trained individual soldiers to be used as replacements for combat losses or to fill the ranks of mobilizing units, is somewhere between 300,000 and 500,000 understrength.

Candidates for political office, and the parties that support them, often make campaign promises based on what they think some of the voters want to hear rather than on the realities involved. Governor Reagan and the Republican platform have misjudged both the need for selective service registration and the public attitude toward it. The need is very real and the polls show that the majority of the voting public support being ready to use the draft if necessary.