
Defense Report

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Registration for Selective Service — A Mobilization Asset We Must Keep in Working Order

In the spring of 1980, Congress passed legislation to renew registration for Selective Service and President Carter signed it into law. There were a few cries of woe from those who are suspicious of anything they view as even a remote infringement on unfettered personal freedom, but public sentiment was broadly pro-registration. The numbers of young men who signed up under a program that had little coercion built in and seemed almost impossible to enforce was gratifyingly substantial.

In December, 1981, President Reagan, who says he does not want a draft and is not enamored with registration, will have a chance to let the ongoing program die by simply not asking Congress to renew it. We hope that no matter how strongly he feels about this issue he takes the time to make himself fully aware of the need for registration. He should know, for instance, that the active military services are already stretched past their ability to meet their worldwide commitments.

The President should know that the Army Reserve and National Guard are substantially understrength, despite the reliance being placed on them as critical parts of the Total Army. He should know that the Individual Ready Reserve, the Army's only source of pre-trained individual manpower to fill existing gaps and provide replacements until trained men are available through the draft, is more than a quarter-million understrength. He should know that, contrary to the cries of the anti-registration lobby, a working registration program will save upwards of three months in getting the first draftees into combat service. He should already be aware that the Selective Service System has shown it would take about 60 days to restart a registration program after a mobilization became necessary.

We don't agree with but must accept the fact of the President's opposition to actually drafting men into the services in peacetime. We are convinced, however, that he is too concerned about our accumulating military problems to turn his back on a working solution to the vexing problem of how we get enough manpower in a hurry when we must mobilize. The existing registration program should stay in place, and fully operational.