
Defense Report

AUSA



Compulsory National Service—Impractical and Unnecessary

Since the draft was abolished in 1973, each session of Congress has brought forth some sort of proposal for a program of mandatory universal national service on the part of young Americans. Unfortunately, the offerings in this arena have yet to give indication of being well thought out.

The reasons given for the concept of universal national service are numerous and varied. There are some who view this notion as a way of filling the ranks of the military at a time when the pool of new 18-year-olds is dwindling. Some see a need to instill a sense of service in the country. Other proponents say a period of military or civilian service is the ideal manner in which to foster in our youth a new spirit of citizenship and patriotism. Still others consider this a good way to nurture a work ethic while meeting many of the nation's domestic needs.

Except for the requirement to adequately man the armed forces, all the responsibilities mentioned above belong in the family, the church, the schools and the local communities. It is philosophically against our American value system to usurp at the national level these responsibilities which traditionally belong closer to home.

Earlier national service proposals have languished in the legislative abyss primarily because their proponents have been unable to agree on ways to accomplish their indistinct objectives. The revelant Congressional committees have been unable to reach agreement on the questions of cost and enforcement. For example, should national service be mandatory or voluntary? Should women be required to serve? What period of service would be required?

If given the choice between military and civilian "duty," would the youth who spends a few hours a week planting pine saplings receive identical credit and possibly the pay of a young man who completes Army Ranger training or who mans a lonely outpost in the Black Forest or in Korea?

The idea of a program of national service does indeed have an appealing political ring, but it has not been thought through very clearly. The evidence on the record would indicate that, short of all-out war, national service need not be inflicted on the nation.