
Defense Report

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The Effort to Kill Selective Service— A Big Step Backward

Last month the House of Representatives took a giant step backward in its constitutional obligation to "provide for the common defense." The members voted to delete \$24 million from next year's budget of the Selective Service System, leaving \$5 million for the purpose of closing the agency down. Fortunately, there is still time for the Senate to correct this error by voting to restore Selective Service funding.

Retention of the Selective Service System is good for the nation on two counts. First, it is needed to undergird the results of the National Military Strategy review now under way by the Clinton administration. Second, it is consistent with the ideal of selfless service to our great nation.

Defense Secretary Les Aspin is completing his important "Bottom-Up" review which will shape our National Military Strategy for years to come. For certain, the size of our military forces will shrink below the Bush administration levels. The net result will be less forces in being—Active, National Guard and Reserve.

The smaller the force structure, the less room we have for error in force calculations. Weapons of advanced technology and mass destruction are available in the world arms market. Third, fourth and even fifth-rate armies can obtain small quantities of highly-lethal weaponry that could inflict substantial levels of casualties on U.S. forces.

A functioning Selective Service System is an important backstop should our forces suffer unexpected high casualties. The ability to rapidly call young men to duty for training could, indeed, deter wrong-headed despots. It thus becomes a meaningful part of our deterrence system.

Today, with the agency fully funded and with ongoing peacetime registration, the first draftee could be serving in uniform within 13 days. But, if the entire agency and all its programs are terminated, a future draft would have to start from scratch. It could take a year or more to get it going again.

This action is not yet final. The Senate can reverse the House's incautious move. Let us hope that this Congress will muster the courage and farsightedness to insure America's mobilization capabilities by preserving the Selective Service System.