

READERS' FORUM

Let's run Selective Service up the flagpole and see if anyone salutes

Longtime activist wants to see an end to draft registration

As the only person since the end of the draft for the Vietnam War to have been prosecuted in Massachusetts for refusing to register with the Selective Service System, I was pleased to see Jeff Jacoby's column calling for an end to draft registration ("Women don't register for the draft, and men shouldn't either," Ideas, June 20).

Prosecutions of draft registration resisters were abandoned as ineffective after the handful of show trials in the 1980s served only to encourage resistance. Bernard Rostker, former director of the Selective Service System, testified to the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service in 2019 that widespread noncompliance makes the current database so incomplete and inaccurate as to be "less than useless" for an actual draft. As I pointed out in my testimony to the commission, any proposal to continue or expand draft registration "is a naive fantasy unless it includes a credible enforcement plan and budget," and current proposals don't.

The bipartisan Selective Service Repeal Act of 2021 is pending in Congress, and this issue is likely to be taken up by the House Subcommittee on Military Personnel next month. Several previous proposals to end draft registration were cosponsored by then-representatives Barney Frank, Democrat of Massachusetts, and Ron Paul, Republican of Texas. Senator Rand Paul, Republican of Kentucky, is one of the original sponsors of the current bill, along with Representative Peter DeFazio, Oregon Democrat and Massachusetts native.

New England has long been a center of draft resistance and antiwar activism, and there are many New England members on the House and Senate Armed Services Committees to which these bills have been referred. But no New England representative or senator has yet endorsed the current proposals to end draft registration.

As other anti-draft activists and I said in an open letter to the Armed Services Committee leadership this year, calling for a congressional hearing — which has yet to be held — on this issue, "Expanding draft registration to women would bring about a semblance of equality in war (although women in the military would likely still be subject to disproportionate sexual harassment and abuse). Ending draft registration would bring about real equality in peace and freedom."

EDWARD HASBROUCK
Wellesley Hills

In face of coercion, he listened to his conscience instead

I appreciated Jeff Jacoby's column "Women don't register for the draft, and men shouldn't either," and my thoughts are not dissimilar to his. However, this is not about gender equality or the lack thereof. Coercion itself is wrong. No public good can come from the Selective Service, and for me the issue is personal.

In 1980, I was supposed to register. I did not do so, intentionally and with malice. As years passed, I got letters telling me to register or be punished (five years in prison and a potential \$250,000 fine). The punishment is over the top. I was not moved by their threats until 1986, when, in a rare move, the FBI came to "visit me" in Tallahassee in the middle of grad school, where I was studying,



Edward Hasbrouck, who refused to register for the draft, talks with reporters outside federal court in Boston on Jan. 14, 1983.

funny enough, criminology.

The local American Civil Liberties Union negotiated a deal. I signed under protest, made a public event with the press and supporters, and stayed out of prison. At school, I faced harassment that I did not foresee. I didn't care. My voice was heard.

That experience strengthened me. I went on to lecture about the Selective Service at high schools and colleges after returning to my native Bay State, all while working as a correctional counselor at the Department of Correction.

Jacoby writes, "As a philosophical matter, it is far from clear how society can square the defense of individual liberty as a core value with a requirement that young people be made available for involuntary conscription." That point resonates with me. A person's conscience in not being willing to prepare for war should be more important to us as Americans, even in times of relative peace. This shouldn't be overlooked in putting an end to the Selective Service.

STUART M. WAX
Watertown

Period of national community service would be great

Jeff Jacoby's solution to ending the discriminatory practice of registering only men for the draft is short-sighted. Maybe compulsory *military* service isn't what the country needs, but a stint of required national service, whether in the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps, a modern-day Civilian Conservation Corps, or some other community service entity, for people in their late teens or early 20s, would be a great thing. Both young men and women should participate; registering for a "draft" would be a start.

No one should be exempt from working in some way for the good of the nation. The notion that we as a society have no obligation to the greater good of the country is a lesson we shouldn't teach. I'm proud of my own service as a VISTA volunteer in the 1970s, and I know that others who have done the same feel it was a defining experience, something that has stayed with them throughout their lives.

A year or two of service is good for those who participate, the communities they serve, and the nation as a whole. Don't shrink the

idea of national service — expand it.

RICHARD YOSPIN
Newton

This could be a vital rite of passage

I am not in disagreement with Jeff Jacoby that the "requirement that young people be made available for involuntary [military] conscription" should be eliminated. That said, I would like to propose mandatory national service as a serious consideration.

Many, if not most, young people are uncertain about their future. Wouldn't it be helpful to give young people a timeout from the academic and vocational treadmills and allow them to express and explore their talents and inclinations in new and different ways? Who better to help paint bridges, assist professional staff in nursing homes, hospitals, and child care facilities, and yes, join the military, if so desired?

National service that offers choices would give young people travel and work opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable to them. Wealthy parents can subsidize so-called 13th-year experiences for their children. Why not make it a rite of passage for all?

NANCY MORRISON
Beverly

Our liberty is at stake without the pull of a draft

Once again, the Selective Service System (mandatory registration for the draft) and the draft itself are being called into question, this time by Jeff Jacoby, on the basis that individual liberty can't be squared with involuntary conscription.

Let us discard the high moral posturing. In truth, the real reason for the draft's anathema is that most young men and women in the United States today don't feel like giving up two years to Uncle Sam to do the country's work, especially since it might turn out to be dangerous.

In any event, Jacoby seems to have the sequence in reverse order. Without conscription to defend it, eventually there may be no individual liberty.

CHANNING WAGG
Bozborough



MELISSA GOLDEN

Army cadets sort the spent shells and machine gun links collected after a training exercise, at Fort Benning, near Columbus, Ga., April 30, 2017.

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