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A DRAFT SOLUTION

By Kenneth M. Quinn
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DES MOINES— One of the first decisions that Ronald Reagan will face as President will be whether to continue draft registration. It will be a tough choice. Will he listen to defense advisers who counsel him to retain the present system, or fulfill his campaign pledge to end peacetime registration? Is there a way out of this seeming dilemma?

There may be, through a voluntary registration system in which each person would choose whether to participate in the draft of not. It would work something like this: On their 18th birthday, all young men and women would be required to fill out, at the local post office, a form providing for standard biographical information but also indicating whether they wanted to be eligible to be drafted. Those opposed to military service on principle, against a peacetime draft, or simply not wishing to spend time away from their careers, could check the box marked "no," and would be excused from service.

Individuals who believe a draft is necessary to ensure peace and who are willing to defend their country would make themselves eligible to be called.

The chief risk in such a system is that at first so few persons may check the "yes" box that the manpower pool would be inadequate if a draft call-up were necessary. Moreover, if only a small number signed up, that might be an untimely message both to our friends and adversaries that America is not prepared to defend its interests.

The plus side is that this type of voluntary system would allow draft registration to continue; would enable the Selective Service System to have a list of all 18-year-olds (including those who checked the "no" box) in case a compulsory universal draft were needed in an all-out war; and, perhaps most importantly, would cast service in the armed forces in a positive light.

One legacy of the Vietnam War era is that military service has come to be viewed by many as something to be avoided, or, at best, endured. Many, perhaps most, persons comply with the registration laws for negative reasons: They do not want to get in trouble with the law, or fear embarrassment. The compulsory nature of the draft, imposed by the President and Congress in far-off Washington, only reinforces these negative feelings.

If the draft were optional, the burden of the decision would shift to the individual. No longer would anyone be forced to defend the country. Rather, each would have to make a personal choice about what obligation is owed one's country and one's fellow citizens. Those deciding to participate in the draft would thus be making a positive choice for positive reasons. This process should lead to a significant change on the way military service is viewed.

Another attractive feature of a voluntary registration system is that it would offer an opportunity to resolve the question of whether women should be included in the draft. Opening the process to females would give young women the chance to decide for themselves whether they want to be drafted or not. Women who believe they should stand beside men in full equality could make themselves eligible. Those not in favor of compulsory service for women need only mark "no" to be true to their beliefs. This compromise, which allows each side to retain its basic principles, would seem far

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