

Draft Vs. Incentives

IN a recent news conference, Secretary of Defense Laird again made crystal clear the importance which Defense leaders attach to the maintenance of fully-manned, rapidly-deployable Reserve Forces as an indispensable element in the National defense structure. He did this by saying that Congress soon must make a choice between drafting men into the Reserves or providing new Federal enlistment and reenlistment incentives to keep manning levels high.

He conceded that men cannot be drafted into the National Guard, but expressed the view that the threat of being drafted into the Reserves would induce some to join the Guard voluntarily.

Unfortunately, many news accounts put the wrong emphasis on his comments and gave the impression that the Secretary will recommend a Reserve draft. Such is not the case. His remarks made it quite clear that the Administration and the Department of Defense strongly favor the use of such positive new incentives as enlistment/reenlistment bonuses, expanded medical/dental/death benefits, improved retirement and survivor benefits, and full-time Servicemen's Group Life Insurance to keep the ranks of the Reserve Forces filled. They view the use of the draft only as a very poor alternative, to be adopted only if Congress is unwilling to provide the necessary new incentives.

He expressed the Administration view in these words: "The incentive program is given preference by the President and by me, and that is our recommendation to Congress—I will recommend the payment incentives as the best means of filling the Guard and Reserve. I will recommend against use of Selective Service, but that is the other alternative that is available if incentive legislation is not."

This Association, and Guard leaders at every level, wholeheartedly endorse the Secretary's views, but would express it even more forcefully.

We cannot believe that Congress will seriously consider, or Americans at large accept, the folly of imposing the draft on the Reserve Forces after it has been discontinued as a means of manning the Active Services.

The Administration, the Congress and the public at large have very largely accepted the proposition that we should eliminate peacetime conscription and man our Armed Forces by voluntary means. The target date for achieving this objective is next July, when draft induction authority expires.

Several billion dollars already have been spent, and a great deal of effort exerted, to attain that goal. Higher pay, better training, more emphasis on job satisfaction, greater consideration of individual needs, and revitalized recruiting and retention programs have put our objective of an all-volunteer force almost within reach. Even for the Guard and Reserves, where the problem is greatest, there is much evidence to suggest that the proposed incentives may tip the scale in the right direction.

No one can be sure at this point that we can indeed dispense with the draft and maintain Armed Forces of adequate size by voluntary means alone. Only time and experience can tell us whether we can attract enough men and women into both the Active and Reserve Forces to satisfy the requirements of National security without resort to compulsion. But we long since are committed to making a maximum effort to attain the goal and we should not handicap ourselves with such inequitable, unworkable schemes as a draft for the Reserves after it has been discontinued for the Active Forces.

Incentives, Yes! A Reserve draft, no! ♦



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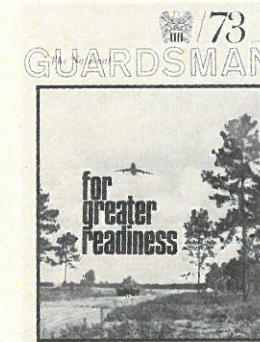
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Army and Air, Active and Guard, played important roles in significant readiness tests.

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