T he jungle drums of Washington are surely one of the most devas-
tating—and effective—means of transmitting signals over dreaded
man. And in these hot, muggy days in the nation’s capitol, the message
going around where defense issues are studied and debated is that, fol-
lowing a period of “benign indifference”, the newborn program of draft
registration may be allowed to lapse. We find a strange dichotomy in all
this. On the one hand, there is no doubt of this Administration’s dedicat-
ion to the proposition that the U.S. defense posture must be strengthened.
The Reagan Administration, working with the Congress, has committed itself
to something like $1.5 trillion for defense over the next five years.
To field the enhanced force, which is apparently envisioned by the Presi-
dent and his defense advisors, it is said that we will probably see the
authorization of four new Army divisions, 150 ships to be added to the
fleet and five more Air Force wings. Since it seems to flow quite directly
from the evidence at hand that such an enlarged force would require far
more manpower than the all-volunteer, lean-and-mean draft force concept
has yet been able to produce, it seems sensible to con-
clude—as many superlative observers and wistful thinkers apparently have
concluded—that the Administration is pursuing a strategy that will result in
the resumption of the draft to produce the needed manpower.
But the fact of the matter is that every signal emanating from the White
House and from the spokespeople for the Administration tends to empha-
size the fact that the President and his closest advisors remain firmly
opposed to resumption of the draft.
There are three bills in the Congres-
sional hopper this year which point to the
Congressional concern in this vital area. We have already commented on them and, as an association, we
support Congressman G.V. “Sonny”
Montgomery’s proposal for continued
registration plus examination, classi-
fication and the actual draft of all
young men to insure the reconstitut-
on of an Individual Ready Reserve
(IRR) of sufficient size to meet current
needs.
Some of the reasons for concern must be restated from time to time even if it seems wearisome to review the same numbers. The fact is that the
28th day of mobilization! Because registration has been resumed it is
possible, within the 28-day window, to be drafted and start to train about
100,000 men.
Further, the fact that we have regis-
tration serves notice to the effect that we are cognizant of the need that may
arise. To cease registration would be a signal of entirely the wrong sort. It
would be a signal that we are not really ready to commit ourselves to a serious
undertaking in the best interests of the United States.
According to the influential News-
week magazine, a poll, which it con-
ducted, shows that U.S. public sup-
port for the draft “has dwindled” and
that now only 43 percent of Amer-
icans favor its return.
At the outset, we said that we
thought there was a very profound
dichotomy in all this. This is how we
see it.
We have the utmost respect and
admiration for what the President and his Administration are seeking to
do to strengthen U.S. defense. We never-
theless believe that an unwillingness to confront the realities of manning
the force could negate the entire effort.
We believe that if indeed public support for a return to the draft has
dwindled to 43 percent (after the peak support indicated by the polls during
the Vietnam era), this is a serious concern in Iran and at the
time of the Soviet invasion of Afghan-
istan, then it is up to dynamic Ameri-
can leadership to convincingly fill the
public with what we need and why we
need it.
Without access to a more broad-
based cross section of military-age
men, we would have to doubt very
seriously that the U.S. will ever be
able of meeting the ambitious
goals that the Administration is in the
process of establishing, as the foun-
dation for the new U.S. defense
strategy.