

**Testimony for National Commission on Military, National, and Public  
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**Selective Service Hearing: Expanding Selective Service Registration to  
All Americans**

**Dr. Jason K. Dempsey, Senior Advisor to the Center for Veteran  
Transition and Integration, Columbia University**

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Chairman Heck, Vice Chairs Gearan and Wada, members of the Commission:

Thank you for the opportunity to engage in this important discussion. At a time when American society appears to be descending into a vicious tribalism, it is important to discuss the meaning and shared obligations of citizenship. While the military offers but one of many means of service, it is an essential element both of our national security and to our identity as Americans.

As public trust and confidence in other national, public institutions such as the courts, the Congress, and the presidency continues to collapse, the reputation of the military remains high. Add to that the ongoing and, at times, contentious national conversation around gender equality and it is natural that emotions run high during discussions about the composition and nature of our most venerated national institution.

I first started thinking and writing about military efforts at gender integration while I was a student at West Point and a junior infantry officer in the 1990s. At the time there were few examples of women in the American military, particularly of women serving in ground combat operations. As such, arguments for and against the service of women in the military relied heavily on emotional appeals, symbolism, and the insights of older veterans who, while they may not have experienced combat in a gender-integrated force, at least had some insight into the nature of warfare. It was all we had.

Today we are in a much different place. The intervening decades have seen fundamental shifts in the nature of warfare and the composition of the American military. We have also experienced nearly twenty years of constant conflict, during which women have played an integral role in our armed forces. We can therefore move beyond emotional appeals and symbolism to the reality of women in the military. Women can serve. Women are serving. And our national security absolutely depends upon their continued service.

It is therefore surprising that many of the arguments against the equal treatment of women in military service have not changed since the 1990s. Most of these arguments are either about unit cohesion or the ability of women to meet military standards. But the situation is no longer hypothetical. During the long and continuing years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan the American military has dealt with the reality of men and women serving together on a daily basis. Our forces are stronger as a result. Women have proven that they can meet the standards of military service, including when given the opportunity to prove themselves in our most physically challenging combat specialties.

On the role of the Selective Service, or even mandatory universal service, as a path to reinvigorate a shared commitment to citizenship, practical questions remain. However, I see no valid argument for treating men and women differently in this endeavor. As America prepares for future conflicts it therefore seems absurd that women would not be equally included in every aspect of our national defense, including mandatory registration for selective service. When a staggering number of American youth are ineligible for military service it makes little sense to arbitrarily exclude women from the shared responsibilities of citizenship.

And to be clear, this is more than an argument for fairness. This is an argument about fully utilizing the talent and potential of American citizens to meet the challenges of a changing, yet continually dangerous, world. America is simply stronger when we all engage in the obligations of citizenship. But more than that the continued, full and integrated service of women is no less than essential to the ability of America to meet our national security challenges.

I look forward to your questions.