

**Testimony before the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service  
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**Selective Service Hearing: Should Registration be Expanded to  
All Americans? – Arguments against expansion**

**“Expanding Selective Service Registration to All Americans”**

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**“Please, Let’s Not Expand Draft Registration to Include Women”**

**Mark Coppenger**

Chairman Heck, Vice-Chairs Gearan and Wada, and Commissioners, I’m grateful for this opportunity to speak before you on this issue.

On December 1, 1969, a group of us ROTC cadets was gathered in a college dorm room to watch the first Vietnam War draft lottery. We’d enlisted, had done our basic training at Fort Sill, and we were slated for branch schools, I to the infantry course at Fort Benning. So the lottery was academic for us. Still, we asked the “what if” question. Turns out, my birthday was designated number 95 out of 366, and they took men up to 195, so that was that.

We knew that this was momentous business. Along with 10 million American draftees, my father (a naval chaplain the South Pacific) and father-in-law (a B-17 bombardier over Europe) served in a great war for the survival of Western Civilization against the grotesque tyrannies advanced by the Axis nations. And my own generation joined them in a Cold (and sometimes hot) War against Marxist/Leninist madness. Furthermore, we 1960s college students knew that our current draft was a deadly serious affair, brought home to us as two of our college’s graduate/officers had already been killed in Southeast Asia. Incidentally, as a ROTC cadet, I’d been called by the army on three occasions to play taps in the graveyard for returning casualties, after the rifles fired their volleys and the wailing of relatives ensued.

It occurred to none of us to complain that the women in the dorms across campus (or young homemakers in the community) were getting off scot free, and that a guy with draft number 150 could be spared treks through the Mekong Delta if only the government would take the ladies too. We’d have counted this complaint absurd, even shameful. (With apologies to Shakespeare and his St. Crispin’s Day, “Band of Brothers,” speech in *Henry V*, I’m confident that had women been drafted in our place and had we had found ourselves “in America now a-bed” while they were under fire in Southeast Asia, we would have “thought ourselves accursed” and “held our manhoods cheap” when people spoke of that far-off conflict.)

Over four decades later, in 2016, the Southern Baptist Convention (the nation’s largest Protestant denomination, with 15 million members and 47,000 churches) echoed this judgment, speaking

through a resolution entitled “On Women Registering for the Draft.” It began with the words, “WHEREAS, God created male and female with specific and complementary characteristics (Genesis 1:27) . . .” and, then, while acknowledging gratefully the contribution of women volunteers to the armed forces, it cited gender differences in “survivability and lethality” on the battlefield and reminded us that the military’s purpose was to “maintain a fighting force to promote the common defense and ensure national security” rather than undertake social engineering.

Of course, the Bible has much more to say on the complementary, albeit overlapping, role of men and women, including, for instance the stipulation in Deuteronomy 24:5 that an Israelite soldier must stay at home with his wife during their first year of marriage for the sake of her happiness. And, of course, there’s the description of a virtuous woman in Proverbs 31:10-31, one that pictures a remarkable wife and mother on the home front, not a warrior in armed conflict.

Some may object to bringing the counsel of scripture to bear on matters of public policy, but it is a common practice in our land, as when President Bush drew from Psalm 23 in addressing the nation after the 9/11 attacks, and when President Obama quoted Exodus 23:9 in making his case for shielding millions of undocumented immigrants from deportation: “You shall not oppress a stranger; you know the heart of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

Though I’ve noted the Southern Baptist perspective on registering women for the military draft, please don’t suppose that this is a narrowly Baptist or Protestant concern. Historically, women have not been drafted in majority Catholic countries like Italy and Ireland; in majority Orthodox countries like Greece and Romania; in majority Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Indonesia; in majority Buddhist countries like Cambodia and Thailand; in majority Hindu countries like India and Nepal; and yes, in aggressively secular France, whose 18<sup>th</sup>-century revolutionaries introduced a calendar with 1792 as “Year One,” to avoid honoring Christ with *Anno Domini*, AD—the France marinated in the atheistic perspectives of Voltaire, Rousseau, Sartre, de Beauvoir, Derrida, Foucault, Malraux, and Truffaut. Yes, there were heroines of the French underground resistance, women such as Lucie Aubrac and Simone Segouin, but they were volunteers, as they would also have been before the German occupation.

But what about Israel? They draft their women, some of whom I’ve seen carrying M-16s into a McDonald’s on the Golan Heights and others at various electronic surveillance consoles throughout the country. But surely Israel is an outlier. This little nation, smaller than New Hampshire, has been under attack from the week of its formation in 1948 (when its neighbors—Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia—as well as Yemen, and Iraq sought to end its life). And, of course, it suffers from continual rocket and artillery attacks from Hamas in the south and Hezbollah in the north. Furthermore, unlike US forces, the IDF does not deploy troops to foreign conflicts. So the women are part of a home guard in a nation facing perennial existential threats, with everyone “on the front lines.” Apples and oranges.

So what shall we say of this near-universal disdain for drafting women into the military (with a handful of exceptions, including North Korea, Chad, and Norway). There seems to be something fundamental at work here. I hope you’ll indulge me as I undertake a physical demonstration. Here’s a copy of today’s newspaper. Suppose I want to save, as a clipping, the right-side column

of this article. Beginning at the top, I can tear down the page, and the column is kept complete. But then what if I want material along the bottom and so turn the paper sideways? This time I fail. The tear won't go all the way, but rather veers to the side, off the edge of the paper.

The reason is simple. There's a grain, a directional structure, to the paper. Similarly, there's a grain to creation, or if you prefer, to nature. You can try to work around it, as I'll do here, pinching out small tears as I work my way crosswise on the page. It's messy, but I can get something like the result I'm determined to get. Still, it's a contrived tear.

I submit that drafting women into the military is an awkward, forced enterprise, indifferent to the nature of things, at odds with the created order.

Of course, much of the talk about women in the ranks is concerned with what they would be going *to*, whether combat units or other branches. Important discussion. But I'd like to shift our focus to what they would be going *from*. This chain of thought was encouraged by a number of things. First, I remember my surprise when, during a tour with OCAR (Office of Chief of the Army Reserve), I was told that, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the army began providing small-arms ammunition to the Boy Scouts marksmanship program since, in boot camp, they were finding they had to start from scratch in training a lot of recruits in the use of a rifle. And then, a few weeks ago, at the retirement ceremony of my Marine officer son, who served two tours in Iraq, I heard him give thanks to his mother (my bride of 48 years) for teaching him discipline as he grew up. I would add that she also contributed to the leadership qualities the Marines teach under the acronym, JJDIDTIEBUCKLE (justice, judgment, dependability, initiative, decisiveness, tact, integrity, enthusiasm, bearing, unselfishness, courage, knowledge, loyalty, and endurance). The point of this is to suggest that women who bear and raise kids responsibly are already serving the military if not *in* the military. And without their ministrations, we are in a terrible defense posture as a nation. Woe to the forces who must deal with draftees who have been raised, as it were, by wolves. Indeed, to undercut in any way the strategic benefits of traditional, family procreation and nurture is a fool's enterprise.

Let me point you to some verse by William Ross Wallace. Though this is poetry, indeed flowery 19<sup>th</sup>-century poetry, rather than analytical prose, there is an element of wisdom in this classic, "The Hand That Rocks the Cradle Is the Hand That Rules the World."

Blessings on the hand of women!  
Angels guard its strength and grace,  
In the palace, cottage, hovel,  
Oh, no matter where the place;  
Would that never storms assailed it,  
Rainbows ever gently curled;  
For the hand that rocks the cradle  
Is the hand that rules the world.

(Of course, this applies beyond military might, as in the biblical case of a mother Eunice and grandmother Lois, whom Paul commended for raising a child, Timothy, who would prove to be one of the mighty men of faith in the early days of the Church. Even in these formative times,

enemies in Macedonia were complaining that these Christians were “turning the world upside down.”)

No, I’m not saying that women should be consigned by the state *to* “hearth and home.” I’m saying that women, in the prime years for bearing and raising children, should not be consigned by the state *away* from hearth and home should they choose to work there. And this applies to all forms of compulsory public service, not just military duty.

Marriage is the oldest, most fundamental human institution. Its establishment is recorded in Genesis 2. It predates the church, civil government, academia, commerce, the arts, and yes, the military. Get marriage wrong, and you get most everything wrong. And a big part of getting it right is making sure there is generous, timely space for child raising by mothers.

Understand, I’m thankful for the role that many women have played in the military. One of my most gratifying reserve assignments came under the command of a woman in the Office of the Chief of Public Affairs in the Pentagon. But she had never been a draftee.

Yes, but what if we simply exempt mothers, unwed or otherwise, from compulsory service? Let me suggest that it would be a big mistake to incentivize single parenthood in a nation where the rate is 40%, and twice that in some communities. Similarly, if we exempted wives, we might well incentivize precipitous and foolish weddings. Facing the draft during the Vietnam War, tens of thousands of American men fled to Canada. One wonders how many women facing the draft would flee to the nursery or altar to avoid being called up.

In this connection, I’m reminded of the way in which scientists in the it’s-all-just-circles-out-there school of astronomy proposed tweaks—calling them equants, eccentrics, and epicycles—to keep their program going, when all they had to do was defer to Kepler, who’d observed that some very different phenomena were at play in the solar system, including elliptical orbits by circular planets. Similarly, one can play with exemptions and qualifications for the sake of preserving the draft-women cause. But I would urge them to reconsider their premise—their conviction that this is a sensible and worthy pursuit.

A benefit of coming to Washington to speak with you is the chance to see my daughter and her family, including four daughters of her own, ages three through nine. While in college, she was an intern at the Department of Labor, and thereafter a special assistant at the Department of Justice. She was also offered a position in public affairs at the White House and another as assistant to the director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Along the way, she had a full-ride in Georgetown University’s doctoral program in political philosophy.

But she chose to step away from these activities to become a stay-at-home mom, a very challenging role for which she has a sense of calling. I say this because I want to preserve my granddaughters’ freedom to do what she did should that be their preference, that is, to become homemakers and resident mothers without an interrupting call for national service, including the military.

Recently, I renewed my driver's license, and it gave me cause to review my organ donor options, whether "specific organ/tissue," "any organ/tissue" or "entire body." Of course, those who check a box may very well not be "harvested" for one reason or another. Be that as it may, one thing was clear: The state of Tennessee was not compelling me sign on. (After all, it's the Volunteer State.) Rather, it was my choice to, so to speak, put my body on the line.

Those who say it's no big deal for the government to require women to at least register for the draft are like the transplant zealot who says it's no big deal for the government to require that women sign the organ-donor card. But, however you qualify it, registration could be used to send them into harm's way, to put their bodies on the line—just like with the men. But they are not just like men, a fact made clear in Genesis 1, a fact a nation ignores, or dismisses, at great peril.

In the mid-1800s, Gregor Mendel, an Augustinian friar in today's Czech Republic, ran experiments on garden peas and founded the science of genetics. Some seventy years later, a Soviet agronomist, Trofim Lysenko, dismissed gene science, and introduced a theory of his own, declaring the heritability of acquired characteristics. Soviet collectivization had proven to be a disaster, and the government was keen to get behind the "agricultural revolution" he projected, whereby rye could transform into wheat and wheat into barley. Dissenters from the "brave new" approach were fired or imprisoned in the thousands, and the grand experiment lumbered on, with sad results, until the Soviets came to their senses in 1964.

I hope that our government will not embark upon its own season of Lysenkoism regarding the draft, where old wisdom is supplanted by unnatural conceits, which time will prove to be folly, and at serious cost.

Thank you so much for hearing me out.