

Mothers United to Stop the Draft is a network of real mothers, whose goal is to make sure all young Americans are aware that the current administration is gearing up the military draft to be ready by June 2005. We want everyone to register and VOTE in the coming election, to make their voice heard on this important issue.

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Bush Prepares Military Draft to be Ready by June 2005

Military planners in the Bush administration acknowledge the need for more men in the armed services. Expecting an ongoing U.S. presence in Iraq, Officials at the Pentagon admit that current forces are not sufficient to do the job. "We have to be realistic. Iraq is going to have a serious security threat for some time to come," Ambassador Paul Bremer said recently on CNN's Late Edition.

Unfortunately, voluntary enlistment has not grown as hoped by the U.S. military. "In the past few months, the Pentagon public relations machine has sounded the alarm about its terrible trouble recruiting and retaining personnel. All four services missed their recruiting quotas last year," according to Chris Lombardi, Communications Coordinator for the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors.

Even before the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, American forces were stretched thin. Air Force Secretary James G. Roche told the General Conference of the Indiana National Guard, in Indianapolis during August of 2001, "In fact you are the only way we can meet our current set of commitments because the stretch on our people is such that we need your help and we need it very badly... If you think about it, we are 300 percent busier than we were eleven years ago but we are 40 percent smaller. And the "we" is Active, Reserve and Guard."

And that was before the wars in Afghanistan – and Iraq. Today, in addition to recruiting problems, re-enlistment among guardsmen and reserves is expected to reach an all time low. Many have just completed double tours of duty overseas, and morale is declining. In a survey conducted by Stars and Stripes, the Army's official paper, half the soldiers in Iraq said they are "not likely" or are "very unlikely" to reenlist.

Military planners are well aware of this situation, and they're getting ready. The Bush administration has added \$28 million to the 2004 Selective Service System (SSS) budget to gear up for a military draft. The SSS is scheduled to report to Bush in the spring of 2005 that the system, which has lain dormant for decades, is ready for activation within 75 days of March 31, 2005. That is, by June 15, 2005.

Being an election year, "They don't want us to have to do it," the spokesman for the Selective Service, Dan Amon, told Dave Lindorff of Salon.com last November. "But they want us to be ready to do it at the click of a finger."

The SSS is the federal agency responsible for registering all U.S. men at age 18, and recruiting them into the various branches of the military. The agency is currently in the process of taking

applications to fill all 10,350 draft board positions and 11,070 appeals board slots, many of which became vacant recently as terms expired.

Congress is also talking about bringing back the draft. To ease the burden on the Reserves and the National Guard, Congress brought twin bills, the Universal National Service Act of 2003 (S. 89 and H.R. 163) forward. Senator Fritz Hollings (D-S.C.) carried the bill in the Senate, while Representative Charles Rangel (D-NY) carried the House version. The Act remains active in the Committee on Armed Services.

The Universal National Service Act of 2003 provides “for the common defense by requiring that all young persons in the United States, including women, perform a period of military service or a period of civilian service in furtherance of the national defense and homeland security, and for other purposes.”

The Act states: “It is the obligation of every citizen of the United States, and every other person residing in the United States, who is between the ages of 18 and 26 to perform a period of national service as prescribed in this Act unless exempted under the provisions of this Act. National service under this Act shall be performed either (1) as a member of an active or reserve component of the uniformed services; or (2) in a civilian capacity that, as determined by the President, promotes the national defense, including national or community service and homeland security.” Except as otherwise provided “... the period of national service performed by a person under this Act shall be two years.” Details of the bill can be found on the congressional website at www.congress.gov.

Rangel’s claim that conscription would make the Armed Services more equitable, racially and economically, has provoked controversy in the past. But he insists that a draft is the only way to fill the nation's military needs without exploiting young men and women from lower-income families. "The experts are all saying we're going to have to beef up our presence in Iraq," Rangel told Salon’s Lindorff. "We've failed to convince our allies to send troops, we've extended deployments so morale is sinking, and the president is saying we can't cut and run. So what's left? The draft is a very sensitive subject, but at some point, we're going to need more troops, and at that point the only way to get them will be a return to the draft."

The Center on Conscience & War disputes Rangel’s position, however, suggesting that during the draft in the Vietnam War, minorities were disproportionately serving in the front lines, while the affluent had the means to gain medical deferments or get positions that didn’t place them on the front lines of the battle.

Although women are not subject to the draft yet, the way the draft works has changed since the Viet Nam era. Today, a lottery based on birthdays determines the order in which registered men are called up by Selective Service. The first to be called will be men whose 20th birthday falls during that year, followed, if needed, by those aged 21, 22, 23, 24 and 25. According to the Selective Service System web site, 18-year-olds and those turning 19 would probably not be drafted.

Registrants with low lottery numbers are ordered to report for evaluation at a Military Entrance Processing Station to determine whether they are fit for military service. Those who pass the evaluation receive induction orders, and must report for induction within 10 days. However, within

this time a registrant can file a claim for exemption, postponement, or deferment with their local draft board. These days, college students can postpone induction only until the end of the current semester.

An individual who is conscientiously opposed to either combatant and/or non-combatant duty may apply for Conscientious Objector status. The legal definition of a conscientious objector is “a person who objects to participation in all forms of war, and whose belief is based on a religious, moral or ethical belief system.” If granted, the “CO” fulfills his service obligation as a civilian alternative service worker, or in a noncombatant position within the military. (If the Rangel bill is passed into law, however, all COs would be drafted into the military as non-combatants, and only “at the discretion of the President” can a CO transfer to a civilian job.)

Avoiding the draft by not registering is not an option for most youth, although it was a common form of resistance during the Viet Nam war. The No Child Left Behind legislation enacted in 2002 requires all high schools to give military recruiters the names and contact information for all male students. This way the Selective Service System knows just who should be registering, and sends a “reminder” to every teenage male to register at age 18.

Failure to register is a federal offense: if prosecuted and convicted, resisters face up to five years' imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine. The Selective Service may threaten prosecution, and turn names over to the Department of Justice. But according to the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors, no one has been formally charged since 1986. Yet those who don't register become ineligible for federal student aid, federal job training and civil service employment. In some states, such as Colorado, they can't get state aid for college, or even attend a state college.

Nor should draft-age Americans plan to immigrate to Canada, as many did during Viet Nam. “Dodging the draft will be more difficult,” writes Adam Stutz in his column “What's Hot Off the Press” at Project Censored, a media research group at Sonoma State University, California. “In December 2001, Canada and the U.S. signed a Smart Border Declaration, which could be used to keep would-be draft dodgers in,” says Stutz. Signed by Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs, John Manley, and U.S. Homeland Security Director, Governor Tom Ridge, the declaration involves a “30-point plan, which implements, among other things, a pre-clearance agreement for people entering and departing each country.”

According to one senior U.S. official, the need for an ongoing U.S. presence in Iraq is no surprise. “There is no question that there's a lot of instability that comes with democracy and it's the nature of the beast that it's turbulent and uncertain,” noted Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, in a May 2003 interview featured on the defense department website. Yet the need for more U.S. soldiers is most likely to increase. Wolfowitz “asks himself every day how he can limit suffering by toppling another dictator or by helping people to govern themselves,” a close associate of the deputy was quoted as saying in the December issue of Time Magazine.

The Bush administration clearly intends to expand their campaigns abroad. “America is pursuing a forward strategy of freedom in the greater Middle East,” Bush announced in January during his State of the Union address. And although military planners prefer the positive morale of well-trained volunteers and career soldiers, as Bush expands the U.S. military presence around the globe they

cannot trust that enough young men (or women) will voluntarily fill this role. To expect a draft in the spring of 2005 – after the presidential election is over – is only realistic.

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Laurie Rivlin Heller is the founder of Mothers United to Stop the Draft, a network of real mothers, based in Sacramento, California. The goal of Mothers United to Stop the Draft is to make sure all young Americans are aware that the current administration is gearing up the military draft to begin as early as June 2005. We want everyone to register and VOTE, to make their voice heard in the coming election, on this important issue. (Register online at <http://www.rockthevote.com/>.)

Mothers United to Stop the Draft supports U.S. efforts to secure peace, fight global terrorism and reduce international tension through diplomacy and collaboration with neighbors, allies and international organizations who address the needs of the world's peoples. Read more at <http://mothersunited.blogspot.com/> or email: mothersunited@rcip.com.