

Being Alert In Season and Out of Season: What To Do Regarding the Draft and Military Recruitment

The rumors persist on the Internet and through various media outlets, and the question rises in the hearts and minds of young persons: will we see a return to military conscription—a draft—in this country?

The conditions that could precipitate a draft have not changed significantly over the last year. The U.S. military continues to utilize Stop Loss orders to prevent military personnel from leaving active duty at the end of their agreed-upon terms. Recruitment efforts, particularly for national guard forces, have failed to meet goals, and the outcome of the elections in Iraq is uncertain (as of this writing). On October 5, 2004, Congress did overwhelmingly vote down the recommendation of Charles Rangle (D-NY) to re-institute conscription. However, the vote was forced immediately before the fall elections in an effort that many believe was to provide political cover before voters went to the polls. The decision made in that vote may have little bearing on future decisions.

It is possible that the outcome of the elections in Iraq will result in greater internal stability and security in that ravaged nation. If so, the United States should be able to begin drawing down the number of soldiers in Iraq and prevent the need for conscription.

Contradictory messages from the Pentagon and administration officials continue. On one hand, they have consistently stated that the volunteer army is working and will continue to provide adequate troop levels for the foreseeable future. On the other hand, the president, secretary of defense, and some members of Congress have promised that whatever the military needs for the war in Iraq, the military will receive. One can imagine a point where the level of troops and resources are exhausted and a call for a draft would soon follow.

The fact is, no one knows whether we will see a return to military conscription.

Regardless, the time for a young person to make their case as a Conscientious Objector to all war is now, not after a draft is implemented! The exercise of completing a *Christian Peacemaker Registration* form is an act of clarifying one's commitments, beliefs and convictions. This is important work whether or not a draft begins.

Whether or not a draft is ever implemented again, it is important that we continue to:

A. IMMERSE ourselves and our congregations in Christ's way of peace. Let's consider anew the challenge of giving our allegiance to God and the international body of Christ. Whatever the circumstances, how do we answer Jesus' call to nonviolence and to teach peace?

B. TAKE CARE of the people around us—relatives, friends, church members, youth in our communities. Provide opportunities for education, discussion and reflection.

Use resources such as the NEW! *Thermostat* (Mennonite Central Committee DVD and study guide with 33 sessions, phone 888 563-4676) or *Second Mile* (education resources, <http://www.gosecondmile.org>). Also rely on downloadable posters, worship resources, sermon ideas and articles at: <http://mennoniteUSA.org/peace>. Encourage all youth (male and female) between the ages of 16–25 to fill out the *Peacemaker Registration* form (for the form and other resources and links, see: <http://www.mcc.org/ask-a-vet> or call the Peace Advocate Office, 330-683-6844) and file it with their congregation, conference or MCC.

Reach out to youth who are particularly vulnerable to military recruitment, especially youth in rural and urban low-income areas and communities of color. If you know youth who have no post-high school plans, help them find jobs, job training or information about financial aid for college.

Students who have chosen to not register with the U.S. Selective Service System for reasons of Christian conscience may apply to Mennonite Church USA for help replacing lost government grants and loans. (See <http://peace.mennonlink.org/safmr.html> for guidelines or call Kathryn Rodgers, 574-523-3041.)

C. REFER conscientious objectors in the military (many are young and recent recruits) to the GI Rights Hotline (1-800-394-9544 or the web site: <http://giriights.objector.org>) or the Center on Conscience and War (202-483-2220; nisbco@nisbco.org) for counseling regarding military discharges. They can also contact Titus Peachey at Mennonite Central Committee (717-859-3889; tmp@mccus.org).

D. SPEAK OR WRITE to members of Congress or the executive branch about your concerns related to conscientious objection or a potential draft. The MCC Washington Office (202-544-6564; mccwash@mcc.org) can help with these efforts.

D. MAKE CERTAIN that your local school district makes it clear that families can forbid the school district from releasing the personal information of their children to military recruiters.

As followers of Christ, service to others is a lifestyle that we choose joyously, quite apart from any government requirement. As we oppose military conscription, let us model the joy of serving God and neighbor.



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