

# Far-Reaching Changes May Be Made In Draft and Reserve Training Laws

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Washington—UPI—Arithmetic and public opinion may lead Congress to make far-reaching changes next year in the nation's draft and reserve training laws.

Unless the world situation takes a turn for the worse, these changes are likely to be in the direction of easing the military obligation which now hangs over the heads of millions of young men between the ages of 18½ and 26.

The draft and reserve laws are due to expire on June 30, 1959. This means they will automatically come up for review soon after the new Congress meets in January. While a simple extension of the present laws is possible, there are at least two good reasons for

believing that Congress will favor substantial revisions.

The first reason is simple arithmetic, which shows that the population of draft-age youths is growing steadily while the manpower requirements of the armed forces have declined.

In 1955, when the present draft and reserve laws were enacted, the number of youths reaching the threshold age of 18½ totalled about 1,100,000 a year. Now the postwar baby boom is beginning to be reflected in the late-teen age groups. Next year more than 1,200,000 youths will reach the age of 18½. In 1960, the figure will rise to 1,300,000. And by 1965, it will jump to nearly 2,000,000 a year.

**Emphasis on Mobility**

The armed forces meanwhile are putting more emphasis on mobility and atomic firepower, less emphasis on sheer numbers of men in uniform. In 1955, the armed forces took in about 600,000 civilian youths through vol-

untary enlistments, reserve call-ups and the draft, to maintain their strength at the authorized level of 2,800,000 men. In 1958, the figure is fewer than 450,000.

Congress knew when it enacted the 1955 laws that the number of youths entering the draft-age pool each year would be substantially larger than the number drawn out of it for active service. But it assumed that up to 250,000 youths a year would enroll for the special six-months reserve training course provided as an alternative to the draft. This drain-off from the manpower pool, when added to the number of youths disqualified for military service, was supposed to bring the manpower situation roughly into "balance."

If these assumptions had been borne out in fact, the 1955 laws would have been truly "universal" in the sense that every qualified youth would sooner or later have seen military service.

But the assumptions have not been borne out. Because of budget limitations which Congress itself imposed on the size of ready reserve units drawing drill pay, the armed forces have never taken more than 100,000 youths a year into the six-months training course. This year, they are taking in only about 50,000, and deferment policies have taken up some of the slack. Fathers are, for all practical purposes, draft-proof, and deferments are granted to those who wish to continue their education, provided they are making a satisfactory school record.

In theory, anyone who gets a deferment remains draft-liable until he reaches his 35th birthday. But by executive order, no one over 26 may be called until all the younger eligibles have been taken.

How many youths are escaping military service altogether under these laws and regulations? It is virtually im-

possible to arrive at a specific figure because Selective Service records are not set up to answer that particular question. But a study by the Ford Foundation's Fund for the Republic concluded that exemptions and deferments "have been so greatly inflated that more than one half of all young men will never see any military service under the present application of the laws."

And this brings up the second reason why Congress is likely to consider a major overhaul of draft-reserve laws. Public opinion is beginning to react against a peacetime conscription system which many people regard as blatantly unfair.

What alternatives will Congress consider?

**Obvious Possibility**

Abolishing the draft outright is one possibility. It is supported by such prominent persons as Ralph J. Cordiner, president of General Electric Co., and Prof. J. K. Galbraith

of Harvard, both of whom argue that the right way to fill military manpower needs in peacetime is to raise military pay to the point where it will attract enough career volunteers.

But any such proposal will run into stiff opposition from defense officials. They contend that the draft is needed, not only for the 120,000 inductees it brings in each year, but also for the much larger number of youths who enlist voluntarily.

Another solution would be to return to the 1940 draft law, under which men were "selected" for service by lot. Supporters of this idea say that if only one youth out of two is actually needed for service, it would be fairer to

make the choice by lot that to maintain the present system under which service is supposedly "universal"—but actually is universal only for those who can't find a way of ducking it.

**Backers in Pentagon**

A third plan, which has some backers in the Pentagon, is to adopt the system used in many European countries. A youth becomes eligible for military service at a certain age—say 18—and remains liable for call for a fixed period of one or two years. If he isn't chosen for service during that time (by lot or otherwise), he is henceforth exempt.

A fourth alternative is to make national service truly universal. Every youth, except the comparatively few who are grossly handicapped physically or mentally, would be inducted as soon as he reached the prescribed age and would be assigned to some kind of training or service for a period of, say, one

year. If a youth were not physically capable of combat infantry training, he might be used to type records. One who could not read the instructions in a training manual might

still be very useful in the mess hall.

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