

Tuesday, December 17, 2019

Commission on Military, National, and Public Service  
2530 Crystal Drive, Suite 1000, Box 63  
Arlington, VA 22202

This letter is in response to the Commission's request for comments on military, national, and public service. My comments are on the performance of women in the armed forces, the draft, and combat. My views are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Air Force. In addition, I assume either draft registration of some sort will continue or there will be a draft itself in response to a deteriorating national security environment. I do not address the necessity or morality of a draft or registration.

### ***Performance***

It should not be necessary to make the argument that women can successfully adapt to military life and serve effectively in all military specialties under all conditions. The history of the last 80 years makes it extraordinarily clear they can and have.

For example, in World War II, their performance was outstanding from the unbelievably primitive conditions of front-line field hospitals in Europe, to the Women's Airforce Service Pilots in the United States (technically civilians, but nevertheless the first Americans to wear what is today known as Air Force Blue), to the western Pacific, where, unfortunately, some were prisoners of war in Santo Tomas, Philippines. I know of their performance because a former neighbor in my youth was a Women's Army Corps member who made it all the way from the hills of West Virginia to Japan. Her enthusiasm for her service matched that of my aunt who was a member of the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service, better known as the WAVES.

The humble expansion of service roles for women during World War II was culturally dramatic at the time but has since been dwarfed by spectacular achievements during the last 18 years of combat operations in the Middle East and South Asia. Contemporary events have been vividly described in numerous books, videos, and blogs, making it unnecessary to substantiate this claim by citing vignettes or statistics from recent events.

### ***Draft***

For those who might argue that requiring women to be subject to a military draft is unprecedented, note that there is no precedent for the United States either but we are here, and there *is* precedent for the Congress moving to draft women. At the beginning of 1945, the shortage of nurses in the armed forces was so severe -- a 42% shortage at Army hospitals in the United States alone -- that President Roosevelt addressed it in his January 6th radio address on the State of the Union. He said "[w]e need 20,000 more trained nurses" and called on Congress "to amend the Selective Service Act to provide for the induction of registered nurses into the armed forces." The president of the American Nurses Association supported the idea but only as a start for selective service for *all* women. The House of Representatives approved the Nurses Selective Service Act of 1945 (H.R. 2277) by 347 to 42 on March 7, 1945, and the Senate Military Affairs Committee approved a nurse draft measure on March 28th. But 41 days later, Germany surrendered, allowing the transfer of nurses from the European theater to the Pacific. This, combined with an increase in volunteers, alleviated the shortage.

### ***Combat***

The big issue facing the Commission is whether women should be drafted into combat units. Perceived reluctance to do so is cultural or, perhaps more accurately, psychological. If there is any doubt that cultural (or psychological) barriers can be overcome, look back to the Greatest Generation (birth years 1901-1924) who came of age preferring crisp gender-role definitions and yet produced the largest female industrial work force in all of American history up to that time. Today, those cultural barriers do not need to be overcome because they no longer exist. They fell long time ago, largely due to the demonstrated and proven performance of women in combat zones in the Middle East and South Asia.

Congress created the Commission after interesting legislative developments in 2016 in the House Armed Service Committee and the United States Senate. That was the year women and the draft emerged as a noteworthy political issue. Ten years ago, I wrote a OpEd for my local newspaper, The Fairfield (California) Daily Republic, rebutting a syndicated OpEd that voiced objections to assigning women to combat duties.



Copies of both are attached. The response to mine was interesting: no response at all. I wasn't surprised. The people were far ahead of the politics, and they still are.

*But the crux of this matter is no longer cultural or even political. It is now strategic: by including women in a draft, we can immediately double the potential size of the armed forces by drawing upon the full reservoir of American talent.* The unfolding international scene is increasingly risky with currently foreseeable potential threats expanding from violent radical extremists to include four nation-states. The size, variety, and geography of these increasingly aggressive actors threatens to swamp the ability of our armed forces should further conflict develop, which is a very real possibility. It is very likely that, due to circumstances beyond the United States' influence or control, we are going to need a larger armed force sooner or later, and the sooner we admit that, the better.

Any concern that some may have about women being assigned to duties that they are not capable of performing is misguided. All recruits, men and women, are tested, assessed, and evaluated for their aptitudes and abilities, and assigned to specialties for which they are qualified and capable of performing.

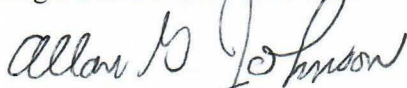
Not to include women in a draft registration requirement is to institutionally diminish the need for the talents and skills of just over 50% of the population and overtly imply they are second-class and not needed at critical historical moments, thus *de facto* denying them full citizenship and relegating them to a permanent back seat in all aspects of American life. Such a stance flies in the face of demonstrated and proven performance of women, contemptuously ignores the talent of over half of Americans, and grotesquely dishonors the service and sacrifices of those women who have served throughout our Nation's history. Omitting women from a draft registration requirement would be just plain insulting to those who have gone before and those women who have the potential to contribute, and that's all of them.

If Uncle Sam's back is to the wall, which has happened before and can happen again, every woman, drafted or volunteer, combat or support, will be needed, and, afterwards, will have been proud to have worn the uniform of one of our armed forces and performed a vital role in attaining victory for the United States of America.

I have unbounded faith in *all* the youth of America today, and "all" means ALL. If drafted, even into combat units, women will do just fine.

### *National Service*

Finally, please dispense with the notion of mandatory national or public service other than a military draft. The 13th Amendment of the United States Constitution against involuntary servitude renders the concept illegal and therefore irrelevant.



Allan G. Johnson, Lt Col, USAF (Ret.)  
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2 attachments:

Women, combat and Neanderthals, OpEd, Fairfield (California) Daily Republic, September 13, 2009

Women 'attached' to combat units, Syndicated OpEd, Fairfield (California) Daily Republic, September 1, 2009