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Citizenship: Right or Responsibility

“Since the days of Greece and Rome, when the word ‘citizen’ was a title of honor, we have often seen more emphasis put on the *rights* of citizenship than on its *responsibilities*” (Kennedy). Spoken by former US Attorney General, Robert F. Kennedy, these words rightly address the privilege of citizenship which Americans have taken for granted. To better the citizens of the United States by developing greater accountability, patriotism, and stronger unity within the nation, our current President is seeking approval of a bill requiring military service for all males for at least one year before the age of 22. This, being written on the President’s behalf, will briefly highlight the bill’s benefits and address many of the concerns that may be brought about by such a change.

When passed, the bill will establish a sense of patriotism and appreciation towards our military, increase civilian support, and bring a sense of honor and pride to those who are exercising their responsibility to serve and protect the United States. Israel, an ally of the United States, has a current law stating that, with few exceptions, “Israeli men ages 18-21 must serve in [the] IDF (Israeli Defense Force) three years while women must serve two years” (Giles). Positive results of this law are shown in the country's patriotism and pride in their military force as regularly displayed in written works, films, visual art, and even commemoration of holidays. This Israeli culture, introduced through the use of conscripted service, has strengthened and enriched their connection with their history, military personnel, and cultural values and beliefs. Israel’s ethos is benefitted as their society supports the Israel Defense Force (Giles). According

to Gregory F. Giles in his “Continuity and Change in Israel’s Strategic Culture,” there is a willingness among Israeli youth shown through conscripted service that even if the country were to transition to an all-volunteer force, it would still function well.

Objections to the draft are raised in Gary Becker’s letter, “The Case against Conscription” written in 1957. One concern Becker mentions is that “the draftee is performing ‘slave’ labor and the enlisted man ‘free’ labor, and there is evidence that slave labor is less efficient than free labor, particularly in the skilled jobs.” When Becker is saying ‘if the labor is voluntary, then the work will be efficient,’ he is partially right, though he is neglecting other possibilities. Using logic, involuntary work is not inefficient all of the time. Mandatory service presents benefits such as promoting patriotism, higher self-esteem, and greater responsibility (Chores and Children). One example of involuntary commitments would be household chores, which assist children in learning skills, developing responsibility, and bringing a sense of community to a family.

Becker also argues that the draft can be seen as a sort of slavery or involuntary servitude, which is considered immoral and unjust. However, as citizens of the United States, serving is both our responsibility and duty, as cliché as it sounds. In an interview with William Irwin, an American eligible for the 1948-1973 draft, Irwin compared the United States’ structure to that of the Christian church. Paying taxes is similar to giving tithes and offerings. Yet, just like tithing is not the whole purpose of the church, our purpose as Americans is not to solely pay taxes. We must also demonstrate our responsibility to be involved in the community through serving alongside one another. Both responsibility and rights have been given to us through citizenship. Without mandatory service, Irwin said, “We don’t sacrifice for what we get.” We regularly take

for granted the opportunities that have been provided, forgetting to contribute back to society in response to what we have received.

Mandatory military service during periods of both peace or conflict would strengthen the United States' defense infrastructure. In situations where the United States' security has been compromised, such as September 11th or Pearl Harbor, citizens felt more connected to their government and the communities they resided in. Sharing experiences of service, should similar future situations occur, would only contribute to a deeper sense of community, ownership, and patriotism. In a second interview, Steve Zeola said that he "saw mandatory service as a benefit" as it positively affected both one's "work ethic and [their overall] sense of responsibility." This responsibility, he pointed out, would also be able to transfer over to the working world outside the military (Zeola).

Another objection to the reimplementation of the draft is that the cost would not be worth it as many draftees would spend a fourth of the required year in training and the rest of the year doing the minimum required. In response to this, if the government were to potentially extend the required time to at least two years, citizens would share a common experience with one another, and as mentioned previously, these skills are transferable to future employment experiences. Also, it has been determined that for every taxpayer dollar invested in such training, at least a \$2 return on investment is created (Belfield).

In conclusion, mandatory military service, even with its challenges, is an overall benefit to the United States' culture. It increases the public's connection with the government and other citizens, encouraging unity. By serving in the military or in some other civil service capacity, individuals will have a greater sense of responsibility, patriotism, and ownership as United States citizens. As William Churchill said, "We have greater power and therefore greater responsibility.

[A nation] is not entitled to say one day, 'Hands off; no dictation in our internal affairs,' and the next day to telegraph for protection..." Our rights as United States citizens need to ultimately point us back to the responsibilities we have as citizens and our duty to serve as a nation together.

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