

Fixing the Crack in the Wall:

Why America Needs Mandatory Military Service Now More Than Ever

A house divided cannot stand. This well-known phrase, first stated by Jesus and later echoed by Lincoln, rings true in modern times. America is like a house experiencing a divide among its citizens, and those citizens are experiencing a disconnect from their nation. Patriotism is at an all-time low while polarization reaches record highs. Mr. President has presented a solution to these problems by creating a program that requires every male citizen of the United States to serve in the military for one year before the age of 22. I stand with the President in advocating for the adoption of this program due to its benefits to American individuals and our nation as a whole.

I. Individual Benefits

Serving in the military will benefit young American men at an individual level because they will gain important virtues. In the military, acting with virtue and character is not a mere suggestion; the law mandates it. US Code Title 10, Section 3583 explicitly states that any leaders in the Army must show themselves as an example of “virtue, honor, patriotism, and subordination” and “suppress all dissolute and immoral practices¹.” Furthermore, the military naturally instills values like obedience and efficiency through its well-kept system.

Another important character trait developed in the military is maturity. Military service fosters maturity by giving uncertain young men a structured opportunity to achieve greatness. Providing service to our country helps young Americans feel a sense of maturity and competence. Private Robert S. Lawrence, a veteran drafted in 1973, said, “I saw time and time

¹ U.S. Code Title 10, Section 3583

again how many young men were able to grow. I witnessed people establish a consistent role of leadership².”

Critics of a compulsory service program argue that it is a disruption of a more favorable path for maturity development: education. However, one year of service will not detract from the pursuit of education. On the contrary, serving in the military for one year can help students become more effective in a college setting. This year of service can be viewed as a gap year, typically a beneficial experience; gap year students typically have GPAs .1 to .3 higher than their peers³. Military service is like a gap year into adulthood, helping soldiers acquire character traits that will benefit them for the rest of their lives.

II. National Benefits

Increasingly extreme sides of the political spectrum refuse to agree on issues or work together. The Pew Research Center reported that partisan differences rose from 15 percentage points in 1994 to 36 points in 2017. One year of military service will allow young Americans from every background to unite, forming bonds that will last a lifetime. “We’ve been friends for fifty years plus, and that all came because we met in the military,” said Private Lawrence, “It overcomes racial [division]. It overcomes political [division]⁴.”

As a Black man serving in 1973, Lawrence knew that the military structure wasn’t perfect, but it required soldiers to work together regardless of their background. Americans will serve together regardless of race or socioeconomic status. Republicans and Democrats will serve together, fostering cross-partisan relationships and allowing those from all sides of the political

² Lawrence, Robert S. Phone Interview. 17 July 2023.

³ Nina Hoe, “American Gap Association National Alumni Survey,” gapyearassociation.org, May 2, 2016

⁴ Lawrence, Robert S. Phone Interview. 17 July 2023.

spectrum to unite for one cause. These bonds formed between young Americans are steps towards uniting our divided nation.

Additionally, mandatory military service helps our citizens take civic responsibility and protects our freedoms. Having an all-volunteer force enables Americans to be participants in optional citizenship. Optional citizenship, coined by the University of Maryland Professor William Gatson, is the belief that citizenship is granted without attached responsibilities to one's country or fellow citizens⁵. This mindset, which has taken over the American public, is extremely dangerous because it increases our nation's susceptibility to internal conflicts and weakens resilience against external threats.

Compulsory service combats optional citizenship because it helps Americans understand that there is a price to pay to preserve our country. Former Military Policeman Brian Thrush, a veteran who served in 1971, spoke with me about the duty he believes every American has. "I think everybody should serve," Thrush said, "Because we live in this country and we have a duty to protect our country. It's the patriotic thing to do⁶." Thrush also spoke about how service "inspired [him] to become a more active citizen", a sentiment that is echoed among most veterans. According to a 2020 study, male veterans have higher civic participation rates than male non-veterans by a large margin⁷. With compulsory service, citizens would become more active in the betterment of our country.

Disregarding its benefits, opponents of mandatory military service claim that it infringes on civil rights. However, just as the government necessitates that citizens must pay taxes or serve on juries, it may call for this necessary action to preserve the health of our nation. The President's

⁵ Galston, William A. "Citizenship and Civic Attachment: The Case for a Universal Service Lottery." *Public Administration Review*, vol. 72, no. 3, 2012, pp. 322–23. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41506775>. Accessed 30 July 2023.

⁶ Thrush, Brian. Personal Interview. 26 July 2023

⁷ Allen, Christie. "Civic Participation in Male Veterans." *News*, 26 Oct. 2020, news.byu.edu/intellect/civic-participation-higher-among-male-veterans-compared-to-other-men.

proposal is a short-term commitment and not a perpetual obligation. This one year of service aims to bolster national security and it is a legitimate exercise of government authority.

Our country's need for compulsory service has grown in recent years. In 2022, the Army fell short of its recruitment goal by 25 percent, about 15,000 recruits short⁸. This shortage of troops comes after an extra \$200 million in bonuses and relaxing standards, both last-ditch attempts to increase recruitment⁹. Right now, our all-volunteer force may not be sufficient in the case of a national emergency. Mandatory military service would enhance the preparedness of our country, strengthening our nation and allowing our citizens to feel safe and protected.

In conclusion, mandatory military service is not only the right step to take toward saving our country, it is a necessary and urgent step. We must take this action towards ending optional citizenship and cultivating active citizens. We must aid our all-volunteer force. We must improve the quality of individual citizens while fostering relationships between these citizens. America is not a house divided yet, but the cracks in the walls are growing. We need to fix those cracks, and we can start by implementing the President's mandatory military service program.

⁸ Vician, Todd. "Thinning Ranks." WORLD, 2023, wng.org/articles/thinning-ranks-1689044540.

⁹ Katzenberg, Lauren. "One Year of Mandatory National Service for Every American?" The New York Times, 21 June 2019, www.nytimes.com/2019/06/21/magazine/mandatory-national-service.html.