

CITIZENSHIP AND SERVICE:
The Bond of Rights and Responsibilities

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“Freedom (the rights of citizenship) make a huge requirement of a human being. With freedom comes responsibility.” - Eleanor Roosevelt, *The Wisdom of Eleanor Roosevelt*, 1962

Rights and responsibilities. When an individual is hired for a job, they are paid an income. The responsibilities of employment yield the rights of compensation. This practice is understood among all peoples and societies in modern cultures. Just as the rights of employment, such as compensation and benefits, are linked to the responsibilities of employment, so the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in a free society are ultimately bound together.

Currently, our society is focused on what rights they have rather than the responsibilities required to protect those rights. It can be difficult to fully comprehend the level of sacrifice needed to secure and maintain the right to speak freely, worship without fear, pursue provision and prosperity, and protect one’s home and those we love, until one witnesses and understands the duties and responsibilities necessary to retain such rights. For this reason, I believe it is necessary to implement a new program requiring one year of military service for every United States male before the age of twenty-two. This investment in the responsibilities of citizenship will not only foster patriotism but will benefit America in two ways.

The first way mandatory military service will benefit America is by instilling discipline and developing character through new learning experiences and service to society. In a recent interview, Louis Sims, who served as the head of INTERPOL during his career, reflected on his time in the military. During the interview, Louis explained that he was grateful for being drafted. He explained that the experience of serving in the military was a powerful and formative experience for him. “It was all a learning experience and an opportunity to serve.” These words sum up just how important, impactful, and helpful military service was in his life. The experience of Louis Sims reminds society that military service adds value or purposefulness

to an individual's claim of citizenship. Military service often infuses focus and purpose into the lives of individuals serving their country far beyond those years of service.

The second way America will benefit from mandatory military service policy is by creating a new appreciation for the rights we enjoy as individuals and a society. George Washington said, "It must be laid down as a primary position and the basis of our (democratic) system, that every citizen who enjoys the protection of a free government owes not only a proportion of his property, but even his personal service to the defense of it." In simple terms, if you are required to serve one year protecting your country, you will understand and appreciate the importance of individual liberty inherent to American life. Mandatory military service would call people back to the responsibilities of citizenship in a country defined by inalienable rights such as freedom and liberty. Whether that appreciation comes from serving on the frontlines, or some other capacity, witnessing the effort required to protect our country would establish a deep understanding of the cost of securing those rights. While interviewing a local community leader, Joe Chandler (eligible for the draft in 1958), shared his thoughts on military service. Military service is designed to "protect a person's individual rights and those of one's neighbors. And if it was necessary, I would lay my life on the line to do so." If this same mindset were present in even half of adult males in America, it would dramatically change the view of rights and responsibilities of American citizenship.

Although there are multiple benefits of mandatory military service, there are often two arguments that arise in contrast to those benefits. The first is the belief that mandatory military service is too great of a personal risk. However, the foundational rights of this country were built on the responsible actions, sacrifices and personal risk of our forefathers. Rights and responsibilities, reflected in their most ideal form, our bound hand in hand. Rights are prevalent

because responsibilities are met, especially with regards to citizenship. Is it too great a personal risk to ask the citizens of America to participate in the responsibilities of citizenship if they are to enjoy the rights of citizenship? I imagine for anyone who has experienced life without access to such rights, the answer is, “No.”

The second argument against mandatory military service named by military officials is the risk imposed on America’s ability to respond successfully when working with novice soldiers, should a time of conflict arise. This would not be the case if there were proper training and protocols put in place. Proper training ensures individuals are prepared for the service they provide during their term of service. Proper protocols for military service are practiced with regularity to ensure all military personnel, whether foot soldier, military engineer, or chaplain, can, with reasonable safety, enact their duties.

In review, American society is focused on what rights they have and not what actions are necessary to protect those rights. A policy of mandatory military service for young men will benefit American individuals and society. Such service will instill discipline and develop character through new learning experiences. Mandatory military service would call people back to the responsibilities of citizenship in a country defined by inalienable rights such as freedom and liberty. Americans have been focused on rights over responsibilities. If Americans are to enjoy the rights of citizenship, they must accept the responsibilities of citizenship as well. Then as a country we would begin to embody John 15:13 which declares “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends”. If, according to Scripture, this is the greatest form of love, how much greater would a society filled with people willing to do this be? Such a change of focus would have a nearly incalculable ripple effect, touching the lives of all socio-economic levels, races, and cultures in America.

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