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Reigniting the Responsibilities of American Citizenship: The Case for Mandatory Military Service

All Americans grow up reciting the Pledge of Allegiance in grade school, but how many truly understand the responsibility that this pledge evokes? It is often taken for granted that we live in an indivisible nation with liberty and justice for all, and as such, we have seen a recent decline in American pride. According to a survey, less than half of American adults claim to possess extreme pride in their country since 2018, which dipped to a record low of 38 percent in 2022. Many people may blame the pandemic for this decline, but considering pride began decreasing in 2018 and briefly increased in 2021, that clearly isn't the case (Brenan).

Consequently, there has also been a decline in military recruitment, with the army missing its 2022 recruitment goal by 15,000, or 25 percent of their goal (Barno and Bensahel). A solution for both of these issues can be found in the American Citizens Enlisted in Service (or ACES) policy, which requires all men between the ages of 18 and 22 to serve at least one year in the military. This policy will restore honor and civic responsibility to the American citizen while providing opportunities for young men through service experience.

A benefit of mandatory military service is a boost in patriotism and civic duty among American youth. According to the previously mentioned survey, the people with the least amount of pride in America were between the ages of 18 and 34 (Brenan). Regardless of the statistics, many older people also recognize the lack of citizenship among American youth. "All they seem to want is handouts," says Jim Tomlinson, 73, a veteran of the Vietnam War. Tomlinson enlisted

in the Navy while he was in medical school and served as a doctor in the war. He served for three years and claims that, as a result of his time in service, he became more “civic-minded” and went on many mission trips.

Through the ACES policy, all young men will have a strong foundation of citizenship and American virtues, including comradeship, national awareness, accountability, and a sense of giving back to their communities. With these virtues ingrained at the beginning of adulthood, men will leave the service with a desire to better their country through services including volunteer work, continued military service, and mission trips. Implementing this policy will reemphasize civic responsibility and American virtue across all peoples, not just the men who are serving.

The ACES policy would also act as a bridge between people. Since all young men will be required to enter service regardless of race, background, social status, beliefs, or any other specifics, everyone will have a connection to the military because, for at least a year, all of them served. This will also affect women because, even though they will not be required to serve, their fathers, brothers, and husbands will have all served. This policy will act as a collective tether in a country that has become so divided.

When this policy was first discussed, many claimed that required service is a violation of American freedom. What if some people don't want to serve on the frontlines? Will this policy interfere with college life or potential career paths? What about the people who can't serve? All of these concerns have been addressed within the framework of the ACES policy.

There are a variety of military jobs that support different career pathways. While all of these jobs will require men to go through basic military training, there are jobs that don't involve combat. Technical, medical, and scientific jobs are standard in military affairs, but there are many jobs that most don't consider when thinking of military service. The army alone has a

variety of jobs, including musicians, plumbers, culinary specialists, electricians, firefighters, financial managers, and audio-visual specialists (“Browse Army Jobs and Careers”). If a war were to break out, these men may be required to fight, but in peacetime, the military has plenty of opportunities away from the frontlines.

Military service through the ACES program will give young men valuable work experience in various fields. With this real-world experience, these men will have an easier time finding careers after service. However, many people have voiced concern that mandatory service would interfere with potential college and employment plans, but there is a solution. With the implementation of the ACES policy, many colleges across America will be integrating military service into their curriculum. During their time of service, men will receive internship credits towards college or apprenticeship certifications towards employment, as well as financial benefits that can be used to pay for college or to help jumpstart careers.

Perhaps the biggest concern with mandatory service is the eligibility of American youth. Gary Rigsby, 70, who was drafted during the Vietnam War but received a 4-F due to a severe head injury, said that “not everyone is fit for the military, just the physically and mentally fit.” In fact, the army has reported that 77 percent of young Americans are not eligible to serve in the military, with obesity, substance abuse, and mental health issues being the leading causes (Novelly). While the ACES policy will hopefully lead to an increase in eligibility by preparing boys for service by modifying physical education requirements, alternatives will be provided through pre-existing programs like AmeriCorps. Those who do not meet the physical requirements for military service will be required to obtain a year’s worth of civil service in order to fulfill their duties as citizens.

John F. Kennedy once said, “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.” This statement remains true even in times of peace, which is why the ACES policy seeks to reignite the responsibilities of American citizenship and provide opportunities to young men through mandatory service. The ACES policy will restore honor to the American citizen and reunite America, thus fulfilling the pledge that we are, indeed, one nation under God.

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