

**Subject:** FW: Connecting with NCOS: Secular Perspectives on SSS and All Americans Registering

**From:** Tim Joslyn <Tim.A.Joslyn@inspire2serve.gov>

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Timothy Joslyn

Policy Analyst

National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service

Office: (703) 571-3725

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From: David Swanson <[davidcnswanson@gmail.com](mailto:davidcnswanson@gmail.com)>

Sent: Tuesday, April 16, 2019 12:42 PM

To: Tim Joslyn <[Tim.A.Joslyn@inspire2serve.gov](mailto:Tim.A.Joslyn@inspire2serve.gov)>

Cc: Annie Rorem <[Annie.K.Rorem@inspire2serve.gov](mailto:Annie.K.Rorem@inspire2serve.gov)>

Subject: Re: Connecting with NCOS: Secular Perspectives on SSS and All Americans Registering

Testimony for the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service

Submitted by David Swanson, April 16, 2019

<http://davidswanson.org/testimony-for-the-national-commission-on-military-national-and-public-service/>

<<https://i0.wp.com/davidswanson.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/serviceSQ.jpg>>

I was more surprised that your commission [<https://www.inspire2serve.gov/>](https://www.inspire2serve.gov/) contacted me with a kind-of, sort-of invitation to speak than that you ultimately decided not to include me. I thank you for inviting me to submit testimony.

You had read my article, "Draft Registration Will Be Either Ended or Imposed on Women [<http://davidswanson.org/draft/>](http://davidswanson.org/draft/) ." I've included it below.

I understand that you had already booked these four speakers and then managed to add a fifth: Edward Hasbrouck, Diane Randall, Jude Eden, Mark Coppenger.

I agree with Hasbrouck  [<https://hasbrouck.org/draft/Hasbrouck-NCMNPS-25APR2019-final.pdf>](https://hasbrouck.org/draft/Hasbrouck-NCMNPS-25APR2019-final.pdf) (and presumably Diane Randall, and the then-Secretary of the Army  [<https://worldbeyondwar.org/even-secretary-army-questions-wisdom-keeping-selective-service/>](https://worldbeyondwar.org/even-secretary-army-questions-wisdom-keeping-selective-service/) a couple of years ago, and these 12,000  [<https://diy.rootsaction.org/petitions/pass-the-new-bill-to-abolish-the-military-draft>](https://diy.rootsaction.org/petitions/pass-the-new-bill-to-abolish-the-military-draft) petition signers) that Selective Service should be ended. I also agree with Hasbrouck that a military draft / compulsory military service would be a failure in the sense that it would be contentious and unfair and widely resisted and evaded and denounced. I'm less confident than he may be that those who want it would regard this as a failure. Any draft would get more people into the military than no draft. It is not uncommon for people in power to believe that unfair, contentious, polarizing policies benefit them. Are Trump's immigration policies a failure in his eyes because they are contentious, polarizing, cruel, criminal, impeachable, and shameful? Clearly not. But the proposals of a long thorough study can aspire to greater wisdom than the buffoonery of a fascistic unclothed emperor.

Jude Eden apparently believes  [<https://politicalanimalblog.com>](https://politicalanimalblog.com) that drafting weak, incompetent women into the U.S. military would reduce that military's ability to destroy  [<https://worldbeyondwar.org/immoral>](https://worldbeyondwar.org/immoral) places like Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Somalia, Pakistan, Yemen, Syria, or even Venezuela. And what a loss to the world that would be! With women lowering the military's standards, it would be unable to generate as much hatred  [<https://worldbeyondwar.org/endangers>](https://worldbeyondwar.org/endangers) for the United States. It would be incapable of destabilizing as much of the world, too wimpy to produce the same level of environmental and climate destruction  [<https://worldbeyondwar.org/environment>](https://worldbeyondwar.org/environment) , and just too soft to burn through over \$1 trillion  [<https://worldbeyondwar.org/2trillion>](https://worldbeyondwar.org/2trillion) a year spreading hatred  [<https://worldbeyondwar.org/bigotry>](https://worldbeyondwar.org/bigotry) , eroding liberties  [<https://worldbeyondwar.org/liberties>](https://worldbeyondwar.org/liberties) , and militarizing society. Think of it: we'd have equal rights but lack the capacity to kill as many human beings. That would, apparently, be a very sad case of taking one step forward and two back. If I agreed with Jude Eden that such would be the result of adding women to Selective Service, I'd have to seriously consider supporting that policy as preferable to the status quo. But the military has been and will continue rolling right along with signing up as many men and women as it can, and training them to murder to the extent that it is able. Many members of the military may want to keep women out, just as they may want to be welcomed as liberators in Iran or Venezuela, but there is no rational basis for such beliefs.

Mark Coppenger told  [<https://christiannewsjournal.com/female-military-draft-absurd-but-likely/>](https://christiannewsjournal.com/female-military-draft-absurd-but-likely/) a Christian media outlet that it would be "absurd, even despicable, to force our nation's mothers, daughters and sisters [to] suit up." He was not asked for any sort of explanation of the absurdity or despicableness, but it clearly was not because murdering large numbers of people with counterproductive and catastrophic results is a horrible thing to do. Rather, Coppenger would clearly prefer that fathers, sons, and brothers be forced to do it. The generous view of his attitude toward women is that he cares enough about them not to put them through hell. I agree with that view. I just want it expanded to men. In fact, failure to care about boys helps to produce men who are willing to engage in senseless violence, and I would prefer to break that vicious cycle by treasuring all

people.

One reason I was surprised to hear from a national commission on anything is that I have argued for the reduction, not the expansion, of nationality, of national-level activities. Service, real or sadistic, voluntary or compelled, can of course be provided at the local or regional or continental or global level. The key reason for making it national is that nations have militaries. I told you that, given the right circumstances, I might support compulsory service. It would have to be non-military, and not tied to a military agenda. I'd support mandatory voting in a nation or other jurisdiction with fair and open elections meeting international standards for freedom from corruption and for verifiable results, or even in the United States. I think it's telling what a struggle it is in the United States to create automatic voter registration, as compared to the priority given to draft registration. Isn't voting the very first "service" to begin with? I support compulsory jury duty. I support taxation, though not how it is now done. I think a government that can't tax the privileged should drop all pretense that it will draft them. But a legitimate service that actually served people, such as work to mitigate climate collapse, if fairly organized by a legitimate body, I might support. I'm not opposing service simply to oppose it. I'm opposing the crime of violating the United Nations Charter and the Kellogg Briand Pact, the crime of war. Here's a video [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=748&v=akP4cp2ZSQY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=748&v=akP4cp2ZSQY) of the sort of things I have to say about why.

#### Draft Registration Will Be Either Ended or Imposed on Women

A choice must now be made. It is officially unconstitutional <https://hasbrouck.org/blog/archives/002337.html> to discriminate against 18-year-old women by not forcing them to sign up to be forced against their will to kill and die for Venezuela's oil or some other noble cause.

Yes, the fine U.S. judiciary has declared for-men-only Selective Service registration to be verboten.

That's not to say there isn't debate on the matter. One side holds that women should be treasured as the delicate witless pieces of property they are because the Bible says so, and therefore they must be kept out of war entirely. The other side says that good modern liberal progressive feminists should demand the right of every woman to be forced, on pain of prison or even death, to help murder a million Iraqis for the cause of creating ISIS or some similar high purpose. Enlightened women demand not only equal pay, but equal moral injury, PTSD, brain injury, suicide risk, lost limbs, violent tendencies, and the chance to board airplanes first while everybody thanks them for their "service."

To comply with the Constitution, the U.S. government now must either . . .

1. Abide by the U.N. Charter and the Kellogg Briand Pact and stop launching wars.
2. Undo corporate-personhood and dollar-speech, eliminating the influence of war profits and stop launching wars.
3. Impeach and remove fascist warmongers and stop launching wars.

or . . .

Wait a minute, sorry, I saw the word "Constitution" and lost touch with normalized illegality. What I meant to say was: To comply with the Constitution, the U.S. government now must either . . .

1. Impose draft registration on men and women alike, or
2. Abolish draft registration.

Which brings us to an even crazier debate, that between the huge percentage of peace activists who favor not only draft registration but a draft, and those of us who want to see the draft abolished and war along with it. Those favoring a draft as a means to peace may tend to line up with those favoring the feminist right to be forced to kill and die. You'll have to ask them how comfortable they are in that company. Those of us favoring the abolition of draft registration, of course, find ourselves lined up beside misogynistic warmongers.

How do I like that company? Frankly, I couldn't care less. It's not the point. I agree, on the topic of ending wars, with libertarians who want to end wars for the same reasons they want to end schools and parks and environmental protections. I agree on withdrawing U.S. troops from Syria and Afghanistan with certain carefully selected and not acted upon statements made by the current occupant of the White House. "You can't help people being right for the wrong reasons," said Arthur Koestler. "This fear of finding oneself in bad company is not an expression of political purity. It is an expression of a lack of self confidence."

But how can I be so confident that ending Selective Service is the right thing to do?

The military draft has not been used in the United States since 1973. Neither has the War Powers Resolution, but that could very well change this month. The draft machinery has remained in place, costing the federal government about \$25 million a year. Males over 18 have been required to register for the draft since 1940 (except between 1947 and 1948, and between 1975 and 1980) and still are today, with no option to register as conscientious objectors or to choose peaceful productive public service. The only reason for keeping Selective Service in place is because the draft might be started up again. While most states' governments claim that making voter registration automatic would be too much trouble, they have made draft registration automatic for men. This suggests which registration is seen as a priority.

We're all familiar with the argument behind peace activists' demand for the draft, the argument that Congressman Charles Rangel made when proposing to start up a draft some years back. U.S. wars, while killing almost exclusively innocent foreigners, also kill and injure and traumatize thousands of U.S. troops drawn disproportionately from among those lacking viable educational and career alternatives. A fair draft, rather than a poverty draft, would send – if not modern-day Donald Trumps, Dick Cheneys, George W. Bushes, or Bill Clintons – at least some offspring of relatively powerful people to war. And that would create opposition, and that opposition would end the war. That's the argument in a nutshell. Let me offer 10 reasons why I think this is sincere but misguided.

1. History doesn't bear it out. The drafts in the U.S. civil war (both sides), the two world wars, and the war on Korea did not end those wars, despite being much larger and in some cases fairer than the draft during the American war on Vietnam. Those drafts were despised and protested, but they took lives; they did not save lives. The very idea of a draft was widely considered an outrageous assault on basic rights and liberties even before any of these drafts. In fact, a draft proposal was successfully argued down in Congress by denouncing it as unconstitutional, despite the fact that the guy who had actually written most of the Constitution was also the president who was proposing to create the draft. Said Congressman Daniel Webster on the House floor at the time (1814): "The administration asserts the right to fill the ranks of the regular army by compulsion... Is this, sir, consistent with the character of a free government? Is this civil liberty?"

Is this the real character of our Constitution? No, sir, indeed it is not...Where is it written in the Constitution, in what article or section is it contained, that you may take children from their parents, and parents from their children, and compel them to fight the battles of any war, in which the folly or the wickedness of government may engage it? Under what concealment has this power lain hidden, which now for the first time comes forth, with a tremendous and baleful aspect, to trample down and destroy the dearest rights of personal liberty?" When the draft came to be accepted as an emergency wartime measure during the civil and first world wars, it never would have been tolerated during peacetime. (And it's still not anywhere to be found in the Constitution.) Only since 1940 (and under a new law in '48), when FDR was still working on manipulating the United States into World War II, and during the subsequent 75 years of permanent wartime has "selective service" registration gone on uninterrupted for decades. The United States had an active draft from 1940 to 1973. It didn't stop any wars. The active draft ended in '73, but the War on Vietnam continued until '75. The draft machine is part of a culture of war that makes kindergarteners pledge allegiance to a flag and 18-year-old males sign up to express their willingness to go off and kill people as part of some unspecified future government project. The government already knows your Social Security number, sex, and age. The purpose of draft registration is in great part war normalization.

2. People bled for this. When voting rights are threatened, when elections are corrupted, and even when we are admonished to hold our noses and vote for one or another of the god-awful candidates regularly placed before us, what are we reminded of? People bled for this. People risked their lives and lost their lives. People faced fire hoses and dogs. People went to jail. That's right. And that's why we should continue the struggle for fair and open and verifiable elections. But what do you think people did for the right not to be drafted into war? They risked their lives and lost their lives. They were hung up by their wrists. They were starved and beaten and poisoned. Eugene Debs, hero of Senator Bernie Sanders, went to prison for speaking against the draft. What would Debs make of the idea of peace activists supporting a draft in order to stir up more peace activism? I doubt he'd be able to speak through his tears.

3. Millions dead is a cure worse than the disease. I am very well convinced that the peace movement shortened and ended the war on Vietnam, not to mention removing a president from office, helping to pass other progressive legislation, educating the public, communicating to the world that there was decency hiding in the United States, and – oh, by the way – ending the draft. And I have zero doubt that the draft had helped to build the peace movement. But the draft did not contribute to ending the war before that war had done far more damage than has any war since. We can cheer for the draft ending the war, but four million Vietnamese lay dead, along with Laotians, Cambodians, and over 50,000 U.S. troops. And as the war ended, the dying continued. Many more U.S. troops came home and killed themselves than had died in the war. Children are still born deformed by Agent Orange and other poisons used. Children are still ripped apart by explosives left behind. If you add up numerous wars in numerous nations, the United States has inflicted death and suffering on the Middle East to equal or surpass that in Vietnam, but none of the wars has used anything like as many U.S. troops as were used in Vietnam. If the U.S. government had wanted a draft and believed it could get away with starting one, it would have. If anything, the lack of a draft has restrained the killing. The U.S. military would add a draft to its existing billion-dollar recruitment efforts, not replace one with the other. And the far greater concentration of wealth and power now than in 1973 pretty well assures that the children of the super-elite would not be conscripted.

4. Don't underestimate support for a draft. The United States has a much greater population than do most countries of people who say they are ready to support wars and even of people who say <http://davidswanson.org/node/4698> they would be willing to fight a war. Forty-four percent of U.S. Americans now tell Gallup polling that they "would" fight in a war. Why aren't they now fighting in one? That's an excellent question, but one answer could be: Because there's no draft. What if millions of young men in this country, having grown up in a culture absolutely saturated in militarism, are told it's their duty

to join a war? You saw how many joined without a draft between September 12, 2001, and 2003. Is combining those misguided motivations with a direct order from the "commander in chief" (whom many civilians already refer to in those terms) really what we want to experiment with? To protect the world from war?!

5. The supposedly non-existent peace movement is quite real. Yes, of course, all movements were bigger in the 1960s and they did a great deal of good, and I'd willingly die to bring back that level of positive engagement. But the notion that there has been no peace movement without the draft is false. The strongest peace movement the United States has seen was probably that of the 1920s and 1930s. The peace movements since 1973 have restrained the nukes, resisted the wars, and moved many in the United States further along the path toward supporting war abolition <http://worldbeyondwar.org> . Public pressure blocked the United Nations from supporting recent wars, including the 2003 attack on Iraq, and made supporting that war such a badge of shame that it has kept Hillary Clinton out of the White House at least twice so far. It also resulted in concern in 2013 among members of Congress that if they backed the bombing of Syria they'd been seen as having backed "another Iraq." Public pressure was critical in upholding a nuclear agreement with Iran in 2015. There are many ways to build the movement. You can elect a Republican president and easily multiply the ranks of the peace movement 100-fold the next day. But should you? (This was tried in 2016 and failed miserably.) You can play on people's bigotry and depict opposition to a particular war or weapons system as nationalistic and macho, part of preparation for other better wars. But should you? You can draft millions of young men off to war and probably see some new resisters materialize. But should you? Have we really given making the honest case for ending war on moral, economic, humanitarian, environmental, and civil liberties grounds <http://worldbeyondwar.org> a fair try?

6. Doesn't Joe Biden's son count? I too would love to see a bill passed requiring that congress members and presidents deploy to the front lines of any war they support. But in a society gone mad enough for war, even steps in that direction wouldn't end the war making. It appears the U.S. military killed <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/feb/16/us-military-burn-pits-chemical-weapons-cancer-illness-iraq-afghanistan-veterans> the Vice President's son through reckless disregard for its own cannon fodder. Will the Vice President even mention it, much less make a move to end the endless warmaking? Don't hold your breath. U.S. Presidents and Senators used to be proud to send their offspring off to die. If Wall Street can out-do the gilded age, so can the servants of the military industrial complex.

7. We build a movement to end war by building a movement to end war. The surest way we have of reducing and then ending militarism, and the racism and materialism with which it is interwoven, is to work for the end of war. By seeking to make wars bloody enough for the aggressor that he stops aggressing, we would essentially be moving in the same direction as we already have by turning public opinion against wars in which U.S. troops die. I understand that there might be more concern over wealthier troops and greater numbers of troops. But if you can open people's eyes to the lives of gays and lesbians and transgendered people, if you can open people's hearts to the injustices facing African Americans murdered by police, if you can bring people to care about the other species dying off from human pollution, surely you can also bring them even further along than they've already come in caring about the lives of U.S. troops not in their families – and perhaps even about the lives of the non-Americans who make up the vast majority of those killed by U.S. warmaking. One result of the progress already made toward caring about U.S. deaths has been greater use of robotic drones. We need to be building opposition to war because it is the mass murder of beautiful human beings who are not in the United States and could never be drafted by the United States. A war in which no Americans die is just as much a horror as one in which they do. That understanding will end war.

8. The right movement advances us in the right direction. Pushing to end the draft will expose those who favor it and increase opposition to their war mongering. It will involve young people, including young men who do not want to register for the draft and young women who do not want to be required to start doing so. A movement is headed in the

right direction if even a compromise is progress. A compromise with a movement demanding a draft would be a small draft. That would almost certainly not work any of the magic intended, but would increase the killing. A compromise with a movement to end the draft might be the ability to register for non-military service or as a conscientious objector. That would be a step forward. We might develop out of that new models of heroism and sacrifice, new nonviolent sources of solidarity and meaning, new members of a movement in favor of substituting civilized alternatives for the whole institution of war.

9. The war mongers want the draft too. It's not only a certain section of peace activists who want the draft. So do the true war mongers. The selective service tested its systems at the height of the occupation of Iraq, preparing for a draft if needed. Various powerful figures in D.C. have proposed that a draft would be more fair, not because they think the fairness would end the warmaking but because they think the draft would be tolerated. Now, what happens if they decide they really want it? Should it be left available to them? Shouldn't they at least have to recreate the selective service first, and to do so up against the concerted opposition of a public facing an imminent draft? Imagine if the United States joins the civilized world in making college free. Recruitment will be devastated. The poverty draft will suffer a major blow. The actual draft will look very desirable to the Pentagon. They may try more robots, more hiring of mercenaries, and more promises of citizenship to immigrants. We need to be focused on cutting off those angles, as well as on in fact making college free.

10. Take away the poverty draft too. The unfairness of the poverty draft is not grounds for a larger unfairness. It needs to be ended too. It needs to be ended by opening up opportunities to everyone, including free quality education, job prospects, life prospects. Isn't the proper solution to troops being stop-lossed not adding more troops but waging less war?

There's also the danger of the path begun with expansion of draft registration to women leading next to compulsory short-term "national service" for all. This might even be done with military and non-military options, though one can imagine what the struggle would look like to try to give the non-military servitude – excuse me, service – the same compensation and benefits as the military.

I recommend that we actually find common ground to what little extent it exists with those who say that we should treasure women so much that we would never send them off to kill or die. Then we should work to expand that admirable outlook to include men too. Can't we treasure men that much?

We should help find young women and men career prospects outside the machinery of death. Help create the universal right to free college. Repair the unfairness of the poverty draft and the stop-lossing of troops by giving young people alternatives and ending the wars. When we end the poverty draft and the actual draft, when we actually deny the military the troops it needs to wage war, and when we create a culture that views murder as wrong even when engaged in on a large scale and even when all the deaths are foreign, and even when women are equally involved in the killing, then we'll actually get rid of war, not just acquire the ability to stop each war four million deaths into it.

We need a movement with women and men from around the world to create a global treaty banning all military conscription for all people.

We need a movement to abolish sexism, racism, environmental destruction, mass incarceration, poverty, illiteracy, and war.

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