

5351 37th Street North
Arlington, VA 22207
February 27, 2019

Honorable Joseph J. Heck, MD, Chairman
National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service
2530 Crystal Drive, Suite 1000, Box 63
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Dr. Heck,

Let me, as a citizen who began 31 years of national service as an Army private and ended as the American ambassador to Somalia, offer you my views.

I have just read with interest the Commission's interim report of January 23, 2019. I regret not having offered my views to the Commission before this, but until the February 26 article in the *Washington Post* I was frankly unaware that the Commission existed.

I understand that the Commission is bound by legislation to consider in the first instance reform of the *military* selective service process [P.L. 114-328, Sec. 555(c)(1)].

We will never, unless we must in the future confront some new world war, resume the military draft, given our loss in Vietnam of over fifty thousand men, almost a third of them draftees. But we will profit by having a citizenry that has served our country.

I urge the Commission to propose a system of universal, compulsory national service of at least one year for all young Americans, male and female, when they finish high school or reach 18, except for those seriously disabled. A lottery would assign an individual to, say, a National Forest or National Park, a hospital or hospice, a school, or some other approved organization. Individuals could *volunteer* for military service.

I have discussed this idea with over a dozen older men who, like me, served in the military when service was compulsory. Without exception they agree that a *universal and compulsory system with an option to volunteer to do service in the military would be an excellent thing.* My friends and I did not like being Army privates, but we see it in retrospect as valuable experience that heightened our devotion to our country. Today, 18- year-olds have the vote, and a number of them will no doubt tell their elected representatives they oppose a compulsory system. Wise leadership—and good use of the bully pulpit—will be required to put it through.

Sincerely,



Peter Bridges
American Ambassador, retired