



NATIONAL COMMISSION ON MILITARY, NATIONAL, AND
PUBLIC SERVICE

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Subject: Selective Service Working Group, Denver
April 19, 2018

The following is a record of a meeting of the Selective Service work group, which took place on April 19, 2018 at the Denver Natural History Museum in Denver, CO. The conversation was moderated by Commission Vice Chair and SSS work group lead Debra Wada and Jud Crane. All members of the Selective Service work group were present for this conversation: Debra Wada, Ed Allard, Shawn Skelly, Tom Kilgannon, and Jeannette James. Commission staff Jud Crane and Amy Schafer also attended. This memorandum is protected by the deliberative process privilege and should be treated as For Official Use Only. This memorandum is not a verbatim transcript of the discussion.

Key Takeaways:

- The Group appears close to reaching consensus on the need to maintain some form of draft mechanism due to national security concerns, but has identified follow up research questions that may be necessary to reach consensus.
- The desire to maintain a draft mechanism in some form can be bifurcated into both need and value to the nation, with need serving as the primary driver.

Follow Up:

Members of the working group indicated they would convene another discussion in Boston, with the potential for conference calls in the interim and research tasks for staff to continue informing discussion.

Meeting Discussion:

Jud Crane and Vice Chair Wada began the discussion with an overview of the working group and the envisioned first principles framework guiding the research question, introducing the key topic for discussion: whether or not there is still a need for any form of draft mechanism. Vice Chair Wada posed the question of whether there is a need for SSS as it currently stands or more broadly, such as critical skills.

Tom Kilgannon suggested the group start with whether there is a need for a draft either now or potentially in the future, and evaluate if no, if yes, or if yes in the future.

Jud Crane clarified as the group identifies policy and structure of recommendations, it's "yes & how" or "no," with follow-up questions such as what the likelihood is of future scenarios and whether the country needs the current 'flip the breakers' model.

Tom Kilgannon noted the group can generate needs, but the current system is an insurance policy against the unknown, and the point is you don't know what could come. **Jeanette James** reaffirmed it is an insurance policy.

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Debra Wada added that this is the first order question of whether the country needs a system, yes or no, so that if the answer is yes, the group can look at set up requirements, improvements, and/or changes to the system, such as more than combat troops, or broader than military.

Shawn Skelly noted the “40 year old hacker” narrative is a distraction. **Jeanette James** noted this discussion is relevant to scenarios and the group needs to attempt to have a war plans discussion with the Pentagon. **Debra Wada** noted the Pentagon claims they don’t have plans that call for a draft. **Shawn Skelly** noted operational plans (OPLANS) are always being updated, but the issue is at what level. Not all are going to be OPLANS with a time-phased flow of units, or Time Phased Force & Deployment Data (TPFDD), some are CONPLANS. She added plans are updated cyclically with changes to the force structure. **Debra Wada** added it is currently a “one and hold” force planning structure in the National Security Strategy. **Jeanette James** added it used to be two concurrently and it is now one and a little. She noted the reason she believes they need to review is that looking at the political climate of the last twenty years, the Department of Defense won’t say they need a selective service system or conscription, but what is on paper may make the Commissioners think otherwise. **Jeanette James** asked **Shawn Skelly** if the current plans are based on projected need or the current force structure, to which **Debra Wada** and **Shawn Skelly** replied it is based on the current force structure. **Jeanette James** added that that is a flaw in the system. **Shawn Skelly** noted that legally, before conscription there is the active duty, Guard & Reserve, and Individual Ready Reserve (IRR). She and **Jud** concurred that this is an operational reserve, with **Shawn Skelly** adding that we now patchwork forces due to the enduring conflict. She noted we have been maintaining forces since Northern and Southern Watch, we pushed the dogs of war in Gulf I and scaled down afterwards and never pushed that way again, that the model of having a strategic reserve broke.

Jud Crane added that from a function standpoint, without a plan for conscription, the country is losing low-skill/high-volume source of personnel if the U.S. ever gets committed over its head. However, he mentioned there is a supply side issue for roles such a pilots, hence the suggestion of identifying critical needs. He asked is there is ever any time the country will need to pull citizens off of the street, noting it’s possible the answer is no and there are other mitigating measures available. **Debra Wada** added the SSS was an insurance policy in WWII. **Jud Crane** added in 1917 there were not enough personnel for WWI and Selective Service was used as well. **Debra Wada** continued that history has shown the need for a mechanism, the question is to what level of need the public will believe it’s necessary. She posed the question that the U.S. has had conflicts in the past that required conscription, can the Commissioners say without a doubt that the country will never need it again. If the answer is no, she noted there needs to be some form of registration.

Jeanette James concurred that until somebody proves otherwise she’s unwilling to say we’d never need it. She added quick access to large numbers is a capability that is still needed, through registration or an alternative mechanism, there needs to be a system. **Ed Allard** added it always concerned him [in his time at the SSS] that he would hate to be the one to flip the switch on the system by virtue of the unknowns of implementing today. He noted he is interested in proposals for other mechanisms of registration, but believes it is important to preserve the active element of

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registration, e.g. “I as an 18 year old have to knowingly fill out this form,” he added it has to be a decision made, rather than automatic or at birth. **Shawn Skelly** and **Jeanette James** indicated agreement, noting it’s a commitment. **Ed Allard** noted the SSS might be valuable in that it may grab someone ‘off the street’ that has tech or medical skills.

Tom Kilgannon said the argument that the SSS is a deterrent is a stupid argument. He added that taking it away, on the other hand, could send a message to other countries that isn’t good; also, it would send a terrible message to active-duty military.

Jud Crane noted it was about balance of resolve.

Jeanette James mentioned she would like to hear perspectives on this from other countries, and suggested convening Defense Attaches to ask what their countries would think, particularly if allies would view such a decision negatively. She added she would like to know if China thinks of the SSS as a deterrent, or if they consider it at all.

Jud Crane highlighted that since the U.S. hasn’t messaged or shown signs of reconsidering the SSS there would likely be no signatures from other countries on their reactions.

Tom Kilgannon mentioned the idea of metrics for Congress as well as POTUS to trigger conscription, such as end strength at x% or if recruiting fell below a certain point.

Jud Crane shared Dr. Bensahel’s feedback on this point, that it is likely the Department of Defense might resist such an option by changing their metrics to avoid the trigger.

Debra Wada at this point asks if there is consensus on the need for a draft in the future, due to the inability to foresee war plans, other nations, people on the ground, and risk of two conflicts.

Ed Allard, Tom Kilgannon, and Jeanette James all verbally agree. **Shawn Skelly** indicated she has some reservations still, and is hung up on the need or necessity versus the value of a selective service/draft system. She noted she doesn’t see the strategic value in the SSS as it exists today, noting practically she doesn’t know how it would ever work. **Jeanette James** responded that it worked in Vietnam, despite its flaws, it provided manpower. **Shawn Skelly** replied that Vietnam was a different paradigm and the force structure wasn’t what it is today. **Tom Kilgannon** asked **Shawn Skelly** if she agrees with the basic question of the draft, forgetting the current SSS, would she agree there is potential to need people ‘off the street.’ **Shawn Skelly** asked how many service members the federal government would already have access to in absence of a draft [discussing those who are currently in the active and full reserve component], and mentions that no one’s done the math to validate the needs since the draft ended in 1973. She noted she had insurance for very specific things, and that the SSS to her does not fill a need. **Jeanette James** added it is insurance against the annihilation of our nation. **Shawn Skelly** responded that having people show up to a place doesn’t do that, noting that any system must gain value in its execution.

Jeanette James picked up on the thread of the difference between need and value, noting for herself value is making young people commit to supporting and defending the nation. **Tom Kilgannon** added that value can be supplementary to need, but cannot replace need. **Shawn**

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Skelly added it would be a need to call forth uncommitted Americans to serve. **Ed Allard** added it is the job of the SSS to get people there once the need has been established.