End Selective Service registration!

Tell Congress to end draft registration, not expand it to women:

- Repeal Presidential authority to order registration.
- Repeal all Federal sanctions for nonregistration.
- Preempt all state sanctions for nonregistration.
- Abolish the Selective Service System

The U.S. is having its most serious debate about draft registration in decades – but so far, the debate has ignored the peace movement and the history of the draft, draft registration, and draft resistance.

A proposal to require young women as well as young men to register with the Selective Service System for a possible military draft has been endorsed by President Biden and a “National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service” and is included in this year’s annual “defense” bill. Congress will make a decision by the end of 2021.

The choice is not between male-only draft registration (which is likely to be found unconstitutional) and expanding registration to women. The real choice is whether to expand registration to women or to end it entirely.

This is a choice about militarism, not a choice about gender equality. Expanding draft registration to women would bring about a semblance of equality in war (although women in the military would likely still be subject to greater sexual harassment and abuse). Ending draft registration would bring about real equality in peace and freedom.

If we don’t speak up, we will miss our best chance in decades to put an end to preparations to reinstate the draft, and to the fantasy that the draft is always available as a fallback if the military runs short of troops – a myth that enables planning for larger, longer, less popular wars without concern for whether people are willing to fight them.

All male U.S. residents, regardless of citizenship, are required to register with the Selective Service System when they turn 18, and notify Selective Service every time they change their address until their 26th birthday.

The Selective Service System maintains contingency plans for both a general “cannon fodder” draft of young men (based on the current list of registrants) and a separate “Health Care Personnel Delivery System” for men and women in 57 health care professions. Draft boards to administer a draft have been appointed and trained throughout the U.S. These plans could be activated at any time that Congress decides to reinstate either or both forms of a draft.

Few young men comply fully with the draft registration law, and most men who register for the draft do so only if and when it is required for some other government program. Men are supposed to notify the Selective Service System every time they change addresses until they turn 26, but almost nobody does. Most draft notices sent to the addresses in Selective Service records would wind up in the dead letter office. Passive resistance made registration unenforceable, and has made the registration list all but useless for a fair or inclusive draft.

(CONTINUED ON REVERSE SIDE)
Will draft registration and planning for a military draft continue?
Will women be required to register for a military draft?

In 2016, Congress considered "defense" bills that would have required young women to register for the draft on the same terms as young men, and voted to appoint a National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service (NCMNPS) to study the issue. In March 2020, the NCMNPS issued its final report, recommending that draft registration be extended to women and that contingency planning for a draft of health care workers be continued.

President Biden supports expanding draft registration to women and has included members of the NCMNPS who made this recommendation in his transition team and Cabinet.

As of September 2021, both the House and Senate Armed Services Committees had voted to include provisions to expand draft registration to women in this year’s “National Defense Authorization Act” (NDAA). A bipartisan “Selective Service Repeal Act of 2021” (H.R. 2509 / S. 1139) is also pending in both the House and the Senate. By the end of 2021, Congress will make a decision either to end, or to expand, draft registration.

Why is Congress talking about this now? In 1981, the Supreme Court upheld requiring men but not women to register for the draft. The court based its decision on "deference" to the military policy which, at that time, excluded women from combat assignments. Now that this policy has changed, continued registration of men but not women could be found unconstitutional. In June 2021, the Supreme Court declined to hear a case raising this issue. But the issue could be raised in other cases, and the possibility of an embarrassing court ruling that what Congress had enacted is now unconstitutional put pressure on Congress and created momentum for a decision this year.

Congress could end draft registration entirely, rather than trying to extend it to women. Support for an end to draft registration is no longer limited to opponents of war and the draft. At a hearing before the NCMNPS in 2019, the former director of the Selective Service System testified that noncompliance has made the registration database “less than useless” for an actual draft, and recommended that draft registration be repealed.

Co-sponsors of the Selective Service Repeal Act of 2021 include Republicans and Democrats, civil libertarians and progressives, women of color (Rep. Ilhan Omar, D-MI, and Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton, D-DC), and advocates for LGBT rights (Rep. Mark Pocan, D-WI). Ask your Representative and Senators to join them!

This is our best chance in decades to put an end to plans and preparations for one or another type of draft, and to restore the eligibility of men who didn't register for the draft for student aid, government jobs and training, naturalized citizenship, and other government programs from which they are currently excluded. But if we don’t speak up now, draft registration will be continued and expanded to young women as well as young men.

- Don't register for the draft. Oppose both the draft and draft registration, for women or for men. Spread the word that the Selective Service System has admitted that enforcement of the draft registration law ended in 1988. Nobody has been prosecuted for nonregistration in 30+ years.

- Support continued resistance to draft registration as long as it remains the law. Support resistance by young women to the expansion of draft registration to women. Tell Congress that resistance will make draft registration of women unenforceable, as it has for men.

- Support the “Selective Service Repeal Act of 2021” (H.R. 2509 / S. 1139). Urge your U.S. Senators and Representative to co-sponsor this bill and to and to support proposals to include similar provisions to end draft registration in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Oppose legislation to expand Selective Service registration to young women as well as young men.

- Speak out! Educate, agitate, and organize against the draft and draft registration, for men or women.

For more about the draft, draft registration, and draft resistance, see: www.resisters.info