

HON. RON PAUL OF TEXAS BEFORE THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES November 21, 2003

Conscription- The Terrible Price of War

The ultimate cost of war is almost always the loss of liberty. True defensive wars and revolutionary wars against tyrants may preserve or establish a free society, as did our war against the British. But these wars are rare. Most wars are unnecessary, dangerous, and cause senseless suffering with little being gained. The result of most conflicts throughout the ages has been loss of liberty and life on both sides. The current war in which we find ourselves clearly qualifies as one of those unnecessary and dangerous wars. To get the people to support ill-conceived wars, the nation's leaders employ grand schemes of deception. Woodrow Wilson orchestrated our entry into World War I by first promising during the election of 1916 to keep us out of the European conflict, then a few months later pressuring and maneuvering Congress into declaring war against Germany. Whether it was the Spanish American War before that or all the wars since, U.S. presidents have deceived the people to gain popular support for ill-conceived military ventures. Wilson wanted the war and immediately demanded conscription to fight it. He didn't have the guts even to name the program a military draft; instead in a speech before Congress calling for war he advised the army should be "chosen upon the principle of universal liability to service." Most Americans at the time of the declaration didn't believe actual combat troops would be sent. What a dramatic change from this early perception, when the people endorsed the war, to the carnage that followed-- and the later disillusionment with Wilson and his grand scheme for world government under the League of Nations. The American people rejected this gross new entanglement, a reflection of a somewhat healthier age than the one we find ourselves in today. But when it comes to war, the principle of deception lives on. The plan for "universal liability to serve" once again is raising its ugly head. The dollar cost of the current war is already staggering, yet plans are being made to drastically expand the human cost by forcing conscription on the young men (and maybe women) who have no ax to grind with the Iraqi people and want no part of this fight. Hundreds of Americans have already been killed, and thousands more wounded and crippled, while thousands of others will experience new and deadly war related illnesses not yet identified. We were told we had to support this pre-emptive war against Iraq because Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction (and to confront al Qaeda). It was said our national security depended on it. But all these dangers were found not to exist in Iraq. It was implied that lack of support for this Iraqi invasion was un-American and unpatriotic.

Since the original reasons for the war never existed, it is now claimed that we're there to make Iraq a western-style democracy and to spread western values. And besides, it's argued, it's

nice that Saddam Hussein has been removed from power. But does the mere existence of evil somewhere in the world justify preemptive war at the expense of the American people? Utopian dreams, fulfilled by autocratic means, hardly qualify as being morally justifiable. These after-the-fact excuses for invasion and occupation of a sovereign nation direct attention away from the charge that the military industrial complex encouraged this war. It was encouraged by war profiteering, a desire to control natural resources (oil), and a Neo-con agenda of American hegemony with the goal of redrawing the borders of the countries of the Middle East. The inevitable failure of such a seriously flawed foreign policy cannot be contemplated by those who have put so much energy into this occupation. The current quagmire prompts calls from many for escalation, with more troops being sent to Iraq. Many of our reservists and National Guardsmen cannot wait to get out and have no plans to re-enlist. The odds are that our policy of foreign intervention, which has been with us for many decades, is not likely to soon change. The dilemma of how to win an un-winnable war is the issue begging for an answer.

To get more troops, the draft will likely be reinstated. The implicit prohibition of "involuntary servitude" under the 13th Amendment to the Constitution has already been ignored many times so few will challenge the constitutionality of the coming draft. Unpopular wars invite conscription. Volunteers disappear, as well they should. A truly defensive just war prompts popular support. A conscripted, unhappy soldier is better off on the long run than the slaves of old since the "enslavement" is only temporary. But in the short run the draft may well turn out to be more deadly and degrading, as one is forced to commit life and limb to a less than worthy cause-- like teaching democracy to unwilling and angry Arabs. Slaves were safer in that their owners had an economic interest in protecting their lives. Endangering the lives of our soldiers is acceptable policy, and that's why they are needed. Too often, though, our men and women who are exposed to the hostilities of war and welcomed initially are easily forgotten after the fighting ends. Soon afterward, the injured and the sick are ignored and forgotten. It is said we go about the world waging war to promote peace, and yet the price paid is rarely weighed against the failed efforts to make the world a better place. Justifying conscription to promote the cause of liberty is one of the most bizarre notions ever conceived by man! Forced servitude, with the risk of death and serious injury as a price to live free, makes no sense. What right does anyone have to sacrifice the lives of others for some cause of questionable value? Even if well motivated it can't justify using force on uninterested persons.

It's said that the 18 year old owes it to his country. Hogwash! It just as easily could be argued that a 50 year-old chicken-hawk, who promotes war and places the danger on innocent young people, owes a heck of a lot more to the country than the 18 year-old being denied his liberty for a cause that has no justification. All drafts are unfair. All 18 and 19 year olds are never drafted. By its very nature a draft must be discriminatory. All drafts hit the most vulnerable young people, as the elites learn quickly how to avoid the risks of combat. The dollar cost of war and the economic hardship is great in all wars and cannot be minimized. War is never economically beneficial except for those in position to profit from war expenditures. The great tragedy of war is the careless disregard for civil liberties of our own people. Abuses of German

and Japanese Americans in World War I and World War II are well known. But the real sacrifice comes with conscription-- forcing a small number of young vulnerable citizens to fight the wars that older men and women, who seek glory in military victory without themselves being exposed to danger, promote. These are wars with neither purpose nor moral justification, and too often not even declared by the Congress. Without conscription, unpopular wars are much more difficult to fight. Once the draft was undermined in the 1960s and early 1970s, the Vietnam War came to an end. But most importantly, liberty cannot be preserved by tyranny. A free society must always resort to volunteers. Tyrants think nothing of forcing men to fight and serve in wrongheaded wars; a true fight for survival and defense of America would elicit, I'm sure, the assistance of every able-bodied man and woman. This is not the case for wars of mischief far away from home in which we so often have found ourselves in the past century. One of the worst votes that an elected official could ever cast would be to institute a military draft to fight an illegal war, if that individual himself maneuvered to avoid military service. But avoiding the draft on principle qualifies oneself to work hard to avoid all unnecessary war and oppose the draft for all others. A government that is willing to enslave a portion of its people to fight an unjust war can never be trusted to protect the liberties of its own citizens. The ends can never justify the means, no matter what the Neo-cons say.