

Congressman Ron Paul March 20, 2002

Statement Opposing Military Conscription

Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce legislation expressing the sense of Congress that the United States government should not revive military conscription. Supporters of conscription have taken advantage of the events of September 11 to renew efforts to reinstate the military draft. However, reviving the draft may actually weaken America's military. Furthermore, a military draft violates the very principles of individual liberty this country was founded upon. It is no exaggeration to state that military conscription is better suited for a totalitarian government, such as the recently dethroned Taliban regime, than a free society.

Since military conscription ended over 30 years ago, voluntary armed services have successfully fulfilled the military needs of the United States. The recent success of the military campaign in Afghanistan once again demonstrates the ability of the volunteer military to respond to threats to the lives, liberty, and property of the people of the United States.

A draft weakens the military by introducing tensions and rivalries between those who volunteer for military service and those who have been conscripted. This undermines the cohesiveness of military units, which is a vital element of military effectiveness. Conscripts also are unlikely to choose the military as a career; thus, a draft will do little to address problems with retention. With today's high-tech military, retention is the most important personnel issue and it seems counter-productive to adopt any policy that will not address this important issue.

If conscription helps promote an effective military, then why did General Vladisova Putilin, Chief of the Russian General Staff, react to plans to end the military draft in Russia, by saying "This is the great dream of all servicemen, when our army will become completely professional...?"

Instead of reinstating a military draft, Congress should make military service attractive by finally living up to its responsibility to provide good benefits and pay to members of the armed forces and our nation's veterans. It is an outrage that American military personnel and veterans are given a lower priority in the federal budget than spending to benefit politically powerful special

interests. Until this is changed, we will never have a military which reflects our nation's highest ideals.

Mr. Speaker, the most important reason to oppose reinstatement of a military draft is that conscription violates the very principles upon which this country was founded. The basic premise underlying conscription is that the individual belongs to the state, individual rights are granted by the state, and therefore politicians can abridge individual rights at will. In contrast, the philosophy which inspired America's founders, expressed in the Declaration of Independence, is that individuals possess natural, God-given rights which cannot be abridged by the government. Forcing people into military service against their will thus directly contradicts the philosophy of the Founding Fathers. A military draft also appears to contradict the constitutional prohibition of involuntary servitude.

During the War of 1812, Daniel Webster eloquently made the case that a military draft was unconstitutional: "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? Sir, I almost disdain to go to quotations and references to prove that such an abominable doctrine had no foundation in the Constitution of the country. It is enough to know that the instrument was intended as the basis of a free government, and that the power contended for is incompatible with any notion of personal liberty. An attempt to maintain this doctrine upon the provisions of the Constitution is an exercise of perverse ingenuity to extract slavery from the substance of a free government. It is an attempt to show, by proof and argument, that we ourselves are subjects of despotism, and that we have a right to chains and bondage, firmly secured to us and our children, by the provisions of our government."

Another eloquent opponent of the draft was former President Ronald Reagan who in a 1979 column on conscription said: "...it rests on the assumption that your kids belong to the state. If we buy that assumption then it is for the state -- not for parents, the community, the religious institutions or teachers -- to decide who shall have what values and who shall do what work, when, where and how in our society. That assumption isn't a new one. The Nazis thought it was a great idea."

President Reagan and Daniel Webster are not the only prominent Americans to oppose conscription. In fact, throughout American history the draft has been opposed by Americans from across the political spectrum, from Henry David Thoreau to Barry Goldwater to Bill Bradley

to Jesse Ventura. Organizations opposed to conscription range from the American Civil Liberties Union to the United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society, and from the National Taxpayers Union to the Conservative Caucus. Other major figures opposing conscription include current Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan and Nobel Laureate Milton Friedman.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to stand up for the long-term military interests of the United States, individual liberty, and values of the Declaration of Independence by cosponsoring my sense of Congress resolution opposing reinstatement of the military draft.