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# Defense Report

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## **New Registration for the Draft—The Results Show Our Young People Will Do Their Duty**

When Congress approved renewal of registration for possible Selective Service it produced a registration system that made few provisions for determining the level of compliance. The registration mechanism does not even produce a card that might be used to verify an individual's obedience to the law. Under these circumstances there would have to be a detailed cross-check of Social Security numbers or some other identifying device to determine precisely who had registered and who had not.

Based on the number of young men registering during the recent period and the comparison of estimates of the draft-age population, the Selective Service System has concluded that about 93 percent of the young men in the designated age groups did, in fact, register. That percentage is expected to climb as late registrations accumulate.

The organizations and individuals who fought hard to prevent the renewal of draft registration and who, once Congress thwarted that effort, later counseled young men to break the law by refusing to register, say the Selective Service estimates are too high. They claim the figure is closer to 75 or 80 percent, but their conclusion is based on pure guesswork, with even less concrete information on hand than was available for the Selective Service System. At this juncture it is impossible to determine whether the anti-registration pique over the 90-plus percent sign-up figure is based on real evidence, exaggeration or simply reflects disappointment over their obvious lack of success at counseling to break the law.

The anti-registration arguments took many forms. On one hand they argued that our existing forces are adequate to meet the legitimate military needs of the United States—contrary to the testimony of those responsible to assess these matters—and that the existence of a potential force of draftees could be an open invitation to a new military adventure. Then there was the argument that no citizen owes any debt of service to the nation and that we should simply content ourselves with paying whatever the price might be to maintain a totally volunteer force.

The ultimate argument, though, might be the one that claims the imposition of registration for the draft will create “. . . a whole new generation of felons,” from among those who refuse to register. The law would impose a maximum sentence of five years imprisonment and a \$10,000 fine for failing to register. Admittedly, there are neater ways to punish a deliberate refusal to perform a citizen's duties—like denying some of the benefits of citizenship, such as voting, welfare or student loans—and it might be appropriate for Congress to look at alternative forms of punishment short of those associated with a felony.

But the fact remains that a very high percentage of the eligible young men saw their duty clearly and performed it without question, in spite of blandishments that could have led them toward becoming felons. It is that kind of clear insight into the strengths of our nation that will keep us free and will frustrate those who place the rights of the individual perpetually ahead of the common good.