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"TOWARD A VOLUNTEER ARMY"

By U.S. Sen. Bob Dole

(article attached)

TOWARD A VOLUNTEER ARMY

By United States Senator Bob Dole

One of the most pressing problems facing President Nixon when he took office was the need for reform of the selective service system. Serious as it was, however, this was only a part of the much larger problem of how to continue to attract and retain qualified military personnel in sufficient numbers to assure the continued strength of America's military.

Need For Reform

During the 60s most Americans, and especially those of draft age, had become increasingly disenchanted by a selective service system which had remained essentially unchanged since World War II. Its inequities had become more and more evident during this period. Coupled with the declining prestige of the military, largely the result of a long and unpopular war, the situation assumed threatening proportions, dangerous to the security of the nation. As retention rates in all the services declined and opposition to involuntary military service grew increasingly vocal, the need for reform grew urgent.

President Nixon acted quickly and decisively to defuse this highly emotional issue. He called on Congress for swift and far-reaching reform of our military manpower procurement techniques.

At the same time, he made it plain that if Congress failed to act, he would act himself by Executive Order.

Nixon Streamlines Selective Service

When Congress took no action on the legislation, the President delivered on his promise, ordering the establishment of new and streamlined selection procedures. Today, as a result, draft eligible young men are vulnerable to selection for only one year, whereas under the old system, they could be inducted at any time between their 19th and 26th birthdays. This alone represents a marked improvement over former selective service procedures. It frees young men much earlier from the uncertainties imposed upon them by an antiquated and unnecessarily imprecise system.

In addition, the newly established draft lottery has terminated previous arbitrary deferments and has equalized the vulnerability of all men regardless of where they live, who draw identical lottery numbers.

The President's action, taken early in his term, provided a highly responsive and effective alternative to the system that had been generally regarded as the cause of much student unrest.

President's Goal: All-Volunteer Army

President Nixon never maintained, however, that his reforms were any more than interim measures. He understood that what was required ultimately, was a substantial change in the process of

recruiting and maintaining American military personnel. Accordingly, the President has set as his goal the elimination of involuntary military service and the establishment, as soon as possible, of an all-volunteer army in this country.

Critics of the all-volunteer force seem to ignore the fact that a significant portion of our uniformed personnel, the officer corps, has always been filled by voluntary recruitment. The 25 year history of success of the Reserve Officer Training Corps is powerful evidence of the viability of the all-volunteer concept. Since World War II, a substantial number of junior officers have received their training and their commissions after participation in these programs. The success of individual ROTC units and of the program generally has won it the continuing support of the Congress and of several presidents. The most recent indication of this support was passage by Congress last November of legislation doubling the subsistence allowance for ROTC cadets and midshipmen and increasing the number of ROTC scholarship allocations. When President Nixon signed this increase into law he approved the first raise in compensation for ROTC participants since 1946. Effective last November 14, the monthly allowance for senior cadets and midshipmen and for those on scholarship became \$100.

ROTC Paves Way For All-Volunteerism

The effectiveness of the ROTC programs in providing well-educated, well-trained junior officers for all branches of the

service is powerful evidence that the all-volunteer concept can work. Certainly no method has proven more reliable at so small a relative cost as the Reserve Officers' Training Corps.

This was one factor taken into account by the Gates Commission, appointed by President Nixon in 1969 to examine the feasibility of an all-volunteer army. The 15-man commission, headed by former Defense Secretary Thomas Gates, reported to the President its unanimous belief that "the nation's interest will be better served by an all-volunteer force, supported by an effective standby draft, than by a mixed force of volunteers and conscripts...."

Target Date Set For 1973

Agreeing with the thrust of the Commission's report, President Nixon has set the middle of 1973 as the target date for the turn-over to an all-volunteer force. For this reason, those now in ROTC programs, awaiting their commissions this June or next, face an exciting and unprecedented challenge during their military careers. For it is these junior officers who, in large measure, can determine the success or failure of this transition. Their standards of professionalism, their expertise, and most of all, their leadership, will be the most immediate and perhaps most important influence on the enlisted volunteers who will make up the armed forces of tomorrow.

There will be other factors as well: improved living conditions for servicemen, better housing, better medical care for dependents.

All of these can be of significant influence on the success of the new volunteer armed force. But none can enhance its prospects for success so much as the quality of leadership which is encountered day to day, by the man in uniform.

The President has made and is continuing his efforts to improve the quality of life in the armed services. Congress has passed large pay raises for the military, emphasizing especially the lower enlisted and commissioned pay grades. The Administration has further plans for improving the lot of the American serviceman and the Department of Defense has set this as one of its first priorities, both as a matter of simple equity and because it is, in the final analysis, good defense policy.

Military Needs Public Support

One obstacle still remains, however, which threatens not only the success of the shift to an all-volunteer military but the future of America's defense capability. The prestige of this country's military has never been lower. It goes without saying that in a country governed as ours is, the support of the people is the final determinant of the success or failure of given policies. Our military, no matter how it is raised, can remain strong only if it has the support of the people. To be sure, Americans have never liked the machineries of war. But they have treated the military with respect and have paid the enormous cost of maintaining strength because they have been convinced of its necessity.

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Today their understandable weariness of a long and ugly war, a war that television has brought home to them more starkly than any other, has left them somewhat shaken and unfortunately, though perhaps understandably, uncertain in their support for the military.

As the war winds down, the success of our transition to an all-volunteer military will depend on nothing so much as on the renewed support of the American people for a vigorous and effective deterrent strength.

All-Volunteer Concept Dependent on Military Leadership

That, of course, brings us back to the quest of leadership. The President has committed himself to making voluntarism work in the American military. The concept of voluntarism will work, however, only if the military itself makes it work. It is the military leadership, especially that of its young and vigorous corps of junior officers, that holds the key to the success of this dramatic reform.

President Nixon has said that "with the end of the draft, we will demonstrate to the world the responsiveness of our system of government." It is the way the military leadership, itself answers this challenge, however, that will prove our system can remain at once responsive to the wishes of its people and at the same time strong enough to assure the future of freedom throughout the world.