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Statement by Senator Edmund S. Muskie on Reform of the Draft System

Edmund S. Muskie

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STATEMENT ON

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"REFORM OF THE DRAFT SYSTEM"

BY: SENATOR EDWARD S. MUSKIE
FEBRUARY, 1970

It is my opinion that the Selective Service System must be further revised to insure fair and just treatment for all. A close look must be given to the issues of selection and deferment procedures, draft board membership and appeals procedures.

We must find, as the National Advisory Commission on Selective Service advocated, a means to meet our manpower needs consistent with human dignity and fairness to all.

1969 saw the enactment of a lottery system, designed primarily to reduce the period of eligibility for the draft from eight years (between the ages of 18 and 26) to one year. Such a system is indeed a step in the right direction. Nevertheless, further refinements are necessary if we are to insure a more equitable system.

Therefore, I have proposed:

(1). That we continue to operate under the lottery system whereby all eligible young men are made subjects of the lottery at age 19. Upon selection, a young man may have the option of serving at the time of selection or of postponing his service for a period of two years or until the graduating date of his undergraduate class, whichever is shorter, in order to attend college or vocational school. To further balance this system, I would eliminate the practice of job deferments which encourage young men to seek employment in security-related professions to avoid the draft.

(2). That military service be made more attractive to those who may wish to volunteer through a military pay system reform, better use of specialized personnel, more use of civilians in place of military personnel and careful reexamination of enlistment standards.

(3). That local Selective Service Boards be strengthened through the adoption of (a) uniform national standards - to include a mandatory retirement age of 65 for members of draft boards, mandatory adherence to the national lottery system, and well-defined requirements for membership on draft boards to insure cross-sectional representation of community interests; and (b) institution of more adequate appeal procedures and better communication between draft board and draft registrant on the latter's status and timing of induction.

(4). That we carefully consider the possibility of universal national service through such constructive outlets as the Peace Corps, VISTA, and the Teacher Corps as an alternative to military service.

Adoption of these measures is by no means insured. However, if we are to erase the inequities that exist in the present system, a meaningful and fruitful dialogue on this matter must be continued.
