

**Testimony before the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service
April 25, 2019 | Washington, D.C.**

**Selective Service Hearing: Should Registration be Expanded to
All Americans? – Arguments for expansion**

Katey van Dam, U.S. Marine Corps combat veteran currently working in venture capital

Chairman Heck, members of the Committee, and fellow panelists, it is a pleasure to be here with you today. Thank you for the opportunity to be given a voice in addressing this critical issue. Our nation faces threats from non-state actors, criminal enterprises, and near-peer competitors. If any of those threats become existential, we will be unable to defend against them effectively without harnessing our greatest resource: American citizens, *all* of them.

I began my career as a Marine attack helicopter pilot fifteen years after combat aviation was first opened to women. I went to war in Afghanistan where I flew daily combat missions in support of my colleagues fighting on the ground. A generation prior, a woman's ability to fly, shoot, and stay calm under fire was hotly debated; for my generation, it is simply expected. As my career progressed, I recognized the importance of expecting the same high performance from those I served with, regardless of gender. Based on this experience, I believe the Selective Service program could be strengthened significantly if eligibility was no longer restricted by gender. In order to access the full resources of our nation, we must match individual aptitude to mission requirements.

We cannot predict what the wars of tomorrow will look like. However, one thing is certain, a nation's most critical resource is its citizenry. The greater the available pool of manpower and talent, the stronger and more adaptable a nation at war becomes. Since the Enrollment Act was signed by President Lincoln in 1863, the scale and tempo of warfare has expanded radically. This change has been particularly dramatic over the last 40 years of the information revolution with the advent of the internet and the commercialization of space. In order for our nation to meet the challenges of an uncertain future we must be able to access the depth of talent this country has to offer.

I would like to address three particular areas that highlight the importance of requiring women to enroll in Selective Service. The perspectives discussed in the following paragraphs are supported by the available data and are informed by the change of the cultural landscape since the last decision Congress made on this topic in 1981. Based on this assessment, I present the following conclusion: *The United States is ready for this change*; the time has come to demand that all citizens, regardless of gender, be held to the same expectation of service.

First, one of the primary concerns is physical ability. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Dunford recently pointed out during an Atlantic Council interview that only 30 percent of American youth are physically, mentally or psychologically capable of serving in the All-Volunteer Force. Given all male citizens, regardless of their physical fitness, are required to

register for Selective Service, many of these young men fall in the 70 percent who are unfit to serve in the All-Volunteer Force. However, should national mobilization be necessary, this 70 percent of men still possess skills which can be matched to an appropriate wartime activity; these skills could range from familiarity with Microsoft Excel to experience working in a car garage to human resource expertise to recreational drone proficiency. Therefore, female citizens should not be excluded from registration because of the concern over physicality just as the 70 percent of men are not currently excluded. National mobilization will require citizens with the widest possible range of skills and abilities.

Second, American women are far better educated today than they have been at any time in history, according to statistics maintained by the Department of Education. When the nation ended conscription and instituted the All-Volunteer Force in 1973, 28 percent of men and 21 percent of women between 18 and 24 years of age were enrolled in a 2- or 4-year college or university in this country. Women earned 20 percent of Masters degrees and 12 percent of doctorates. In 2016, 39 percent of men and 44 percent of women between 18 to 24 years old were enrolled in a 2- or 4-year college or university, while women earned approximately 60 percent of Masters degrees and over 52 percent of doctorates. Should this country need to draft its citizens, failing to include such a highly educated portion of the population would not be merely wasteful; it would be negligent.

In our country, the state functions to preserve individual liberty. These individual liberties enable any citizen to participate in their government in a variety of manners. In return, the individual is expected to protect the state during existential crises. It is the responsibility of legislators and civic leaders to create policies to protect individual liberty while enforcing the responsibility of the individual citizen. In an era with continued calls for equal access and opportunity, equal obligation should be expected.

Societal norms in the United States have historically exempted female citizens from wartime requirements; although it should be noted women have participated in every American War and their service was always voluntary. Today, women sit in c-suites and are able to hold any military job for which they are qualified. As society expects opportunity parity for women, it is time to also expect equal civic responsibility. In the event of a major war that requires national mobilization, women should serve their country to the same extent as male citizens.

In our short history as a nation, many have challenged us; it takes a quick glance at daily headlines to understand many still do. The Selective Service registration is neither a casual requirement of convenience nor a partisan talking point. America is the greatest political experiment in history, and it requires citizens to acknowledge and meet their obligations to preserve the liberty which the proceeding generations have ensured. We cannot take for granted that because America is free and we are safe, we will always be free and safe. Today our nation is stretched thin to meet the challenges of counter-terrorism, cyber warfare, and near peer competitors, to name a few. Requiring all Americans between the ages 18 and 24 to register for the Selective Service will ensure that the United States is able to tap into the largest talent pool available to protect our way of life should the dreaded day arrive we are credibly threatened. We can ill-afford anything less.