



Friends Committee on
National Legislation

A Quaker Lobby in the Public Interest

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Good morning. My name is Diane Randall and I am the Executive Secretary of the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL). Thank you for inviting me to take part in this important conversation on military conscription.

The Friends Committee on National Legislation was founded in 1943 by members of the Religious Society of Friends, also known as Quakers. From those early days – amid the Second World War -- we have opposed universal conscription based on the principle of individual conscience. Many Friends and likeminded Americans throughout history have exercised the call of their inward religious and moral conviction to oppose war and avoid coerced participation in violence that would be required by military service.

This call to refuse killing and fighting is based on Quakers' understanding of living in the Kingdom of God—as here and now; that we can have a direct relationship with Christ; and that experience with Divine Love calls us to live in peace and with integrity.

Today, the Friends Committee lobbies Congress and the administration to advance peace, racial and economic justice, and environmental stewardship. We are a nonpartisan organization, governed by a body of 180 Quakers from across the United States. FCNL seeks to live the Quaker values of integrity, simplicity, and peace as we build relationships across political divides to advance public policy for a more just and peaceful world.

FCNL seeks a world free of war and the threat of war. We oppose the militarization of our foreign and domestic policy, including the training of foreign military personnel. We oppose the use of military personnel in domestic policing, as is happening along our southern border. And we oppose treating war as another tool or instrument of foreign policy, especially when development, diplomacy, and so many other nonmilitary tools have shown to be more beneficial in both the short and long term.

These are not beliefs born of convenience or cowardice. They are the deeply held foundational moorings of our faith, a faith protected by the First Amendment.

FCNL opposes all compulsory military conscription or a draft. We disagree that there is a “continuing need for a mechanism to draft large numbers of replacement combat troops” into the armed forces. As historian Will Durant wrote in 1967, “the possession of power tempts to its use; the definition of national interest widens to cover any aim; the demand for security suggests and excuses the acquisition and arming of ever more distant frontiers.”

In other words, endless armies and endless money for the Pentagon mean endless war.

It also means endless deaths. The costs of war in terms of human lives is too expensive to ponder. Vietnam war alone killed more than 58,000 the men and women in the military. The civilian death toll is even higher.

The current U.S. global military footprint is already far too large. The United States is currently conducting military operations in 80 countries around the globe. In Africa alone, United States has in recent years conducted at least [36 military operations](#) in 19 countries. According to the [Congressional Research Service](#), the law that authorized the use of force in Afghanistan in 2001 has been used to justify 41 operations in 19 countries. These wars have [cost](#) more than \$5.9 trillion and [resulted in](#) the deaths of approximately 500,000 people, including approximately 250,000 civilians and 15,000 U.S. military personnel and contractors.

These military operations have not made the United States more secure; to the contrary, the number and capacity of violent extremist groups as well as the number and lethality of reported violent events continue to grow. Having U.S. Armed Forces deployed in so many places simply makes these forces more of a target for local grievances, and draws the United States into complicity with corrupt, undemocratic and abusive foreign security forces. For these reasons, we oppose any expansion of the U.S. Armed Forces and any expansion in the U.S. military budget, both of which would result from the adoption of a military draft.

The discrimination within the current system, based on gender, age and socioeconomic status requires only young men are required to register, and only those without significant financial means suffer the consequences of refusing to do so. The answer is not to require women to register, but to end the requirement for selective service registration and eliminate the penalties for failing to register. At a minimum, we support legal accommodation for conscientious objection to military service and military taxation. Individuals who decline to register with the selective service as an act of conscience should not be penalized from any benefits and opportunities provided by our federal government. It is important that a definition of conscientious objection continue to be included in the selective service code so that individuals who feel a moral calling to abstain from war are neither penalized nor stigmatized.

Some have argued that compulsory national service, with an option for nonmilitary service for conscientious objectors, would be more democratic than the current, voluntary system, and would make the United States less likely to use its forces abroad. We disagree. While we know public service can benefit our communities and our faith tradition upholds service to and for others as a value of the utmost importance, we believe individuals must have the freedom to discern whether and how they will serve.

Because we oppose mandatory registration and the right of every individual to abstain from service, we support legal accommodation for conscientious objection to military service and military taxation. Individuals who decline to register with the selective service as an act of conscience should not be penalized from any benefits and opportunities provided by our federal government. It is important that a definition of conscientious objection continue to be included in the Selective Service code so that individuals who feel a moral calling to abstain from war are neither penalized nor stigmatized.

The United States was founded as a haven for people of free will seeking to, at long last, toss off the yoke of oppression and find a safe harbor for those of conscience. Our founders were not

looking to set up a new and improved system of coercion and forced-violence. Some 200 plus years later, our nation is still standing. And those who choose to stand for peace above all else are still welcome and safe here. Now is not the time to change that by expanding selective service registration or creating a new system of compulsory national service. Now is the time to eliminate the registration requirements and any intentions of compulsory military service.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment, and I welcome your questions.