Women Don't Belong on Submarines

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The Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, a tax-funded civilian feminist lobby group that tries to set Pentagon policy, has been pushing for months to get women assigned to duty on submarines. Maybe the news of the Russian submarine tragedy will quiet the feminists a while, but they won't give up because feminists always push their sex-neutral agenda despite military readiness or even common sense.

Women on subs is a terrible idea. The Navy's highest-ranking admirals are strongly opposed, but the powerful feminists in the Clinton Administration are trying to get their way by executive order.

This would be grossly unfair to submariners, whose undersea life is difficult enough. Picture, if you can, 130 people living together for six months at a time, in the space of a medium-sized house.

Submariners patrol the oceans in cramped quarters that lack fresh air, sunshine, and privacy. Sleeping areas and sanitary facilities are one-half to one-third smaller than surface ships, well below requirements for the other Navy ships. Each shower serves 50 enlisted submariners, compared to 25 sailors on surface ships.

About 40 percent of the crew must "hot bunk," meaning that three sailors share two bunks in rotating shifts. Junior crew members frequently sleep on mattresses in noisy torpedo rooms.

The ship alterations necessary to accommodate women on subs would further reduce living standards or, alternatively, make it necessary to remove operational equipment. These millions of dollars would be spent just to please the civilian feminists in the Pentagon, not to improve readiness or morale.

Female sailors of childbearing age would face particular medical risks on submarines. Air in a submarine is constantly recycled and trace elements in the atmosphere, such as carbon monoxide, cannot be filtered

out. Such elements are reasonably safe for adults, but toxic for an unborn child.

When faced with a pregnant sailor who fears irreversible birth defects, a submarine captain would have to choose between two unacceptable alternatives: exposing the unborn child to toxic elements at a time of greatest risk, or compromising the secret mission by revealing the submarine's location. Mid-ocean evacuations, accomplished by means of a basket dangling from a helicopter, are dangerous for all concerned.

The attempt by the feminists in the Clinton Administration to assign women to serve on submarines has provoked considerable response and nearly all of it is negative. For example, a Connecticut newspaper published a letter from a female graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, Patty Marr, whose service includes two years in sea time and who definitely does not agree with the current attempts to assign women to submarines.

Patty Marr's letter is worth quoting. "I can speak from experience that `women at sea' is no success story. Average women do not have the upper body strength of the average man.

"I passed all my tests, but I could not lower a submersible pump into a flooded space. Who would you prefer in wartime?

"Pregnancy and sea time are incompatible. If women become pregnant, they must eventually depart the ship. Submarines must have 100 percent crew readiness even in dental health.

"Could you imagine a monthly pregnancy screening for women assigned to submarines? I was the division officer for 60 people, of which six were women, and three of those were removed during deployment for pregnancy.

"Close quarters with mixed crews produce romantic relationships. Our culture has given up on sexual purity, so why do we expect people will magically become `professional' and abstinent once they are recruited?

"Shipboard romances happen, affect good order and discipline, ruin marriages under stress from military separations, and are punished in the Navy. I know; I was there.

"The Navy discriminates against obesity, illness, disability, age, and yes, sex. The military's mission is to effectively fight wars, not be an equal opportunity employer pandering to every special interest group. Should we make submarines handicapped accessible?

"I hope our military commanders have the courage to stand up against the pressure just as they need to in the heat of a battle."

I also hope that Navy commanders and Members of Congress will have the courage to stand up against the radical feminists and defend the Silent Service, America's most effective stealth weapon. Congressman Roscoe Bartlett (R-MD) is one who does have that kind of courage; he has proposed legislation to stop Bill Clinton from putting women on submarines before Congress has a say.

The tragic loss of Russia's Kursk reminds the world that submariners operate in an extremely hazardous environment, more unforgiving than outer space. A submarine is no place for feminist experiments or civilian-mandated compromises that endanger innocent lives.