P.S. to the NEWS
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DRAFT REGISTRATION

The most controversial issue in the media and in White House incoming messages today is whether women, as well as men, should be registered for the draft. President Carter flung the issue into public debate when, in his State of the Union address, he said, "I will send legislation and budget proposals to the Congress so that we can begin registration," but failed to say of whom.

The persons who might be registered come in two kinds: male and female. Existing law (and all past draft laws in our nation's history) permit the registration of men but not of women.

If that were changed, it would have to be by Congressional statute. Debate over such an historic and unprecedented change threatens to become even more of a political football in this election year than SALT II, taxes or inflation.

The registration of women would obviously be a colossal waste of time, money, and personnel unless our nation really intends to draft women. So the real issue is, what should the role of women be in the armed forces?

Many Americans are blissfully unaware of some basic facts about the current status of women in the armed forces. Volunteer women do not serve in a separate corps where they are treated like women, housed separately, and assigned only to jobs "suitable" for women. They are integrated into the regular armed forces and treated and assigned like men, with the sole exception that federal law forbids assignment to combat jobs.

However, under pressure from the Carter Administration, the definition of "combat" is being continually narrowed to include fewer and fewer jobs. Under current Pentagon jargon, women are excluded only from "close combat," which is usually called hand-to-hand combat.

These redefinitions are an exercise in self-deception. In peacetime, it is easy

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to call most jobs "non-combat;" in wartime, most jobs become combat whether called that or not. Now that Carter has pledged U.S. military forces to defend the Persian Gulf, would you want your daughter assigned there even in a "non-combat" job?

The second fact which appears to be absent from general knowledge about the military today is the policy toward pregnancy. The services are not permitted to discharge pregnant servicewomen. Among the female soldiers in the army today, 15 percent are pregnant. Some additional statistics are revealing: 6.1 percent deliver their babies and bring them back to the post nursery; 5.3 percent have abortions; and 4.3 percent are voluntarily separated.

The army now has 8 percent females, and current plans call for increasing this to 12 percent. If this were significantly increased through a conscription, say to 50-50 male-female, the consequences of trying to move an army with tens of thousands of pregnant soldiers and new mothers carrying their babies would make us the laughing stock of the world.

Major General John K. Singlaub, USA (Ret.), opposes the drafting of women because he believes that the army already has more women than it can use effectively, and it would reduce the combat-readiness of our armed forces. Physical standards have been lowered to accomodate women's lower physical abilities. Female soldiers have twice as much lost time as males and, when pregnancy is added, females have three times as much lost time.

The turnover rates are higher for women: only 48 percent of career women reenlist, while 68 percent of career men reenlist. The attrition rates are higher for women: 42 percent of women drop out as compared to 24 percent of men.

The drafting of women would inevitably force women into tough, physical jobs women don't want to do. In the volunteer army, 85 percent of all enlisted women choose only 10 of the 31 classifications open to women.

General Singlaub concludes that "50 percent women in the military should disastrously weaken our armed forces. The armed forces of the United States should not be used for social experimentation. That would only lower our national security in a time of military crisis and send a signal of weakness to the rest of the world."

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