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WAR WIMPS

"War wimps" was the topic of a recent column by Mike Royko, a liberal journalist with a sharp tongue. A war wimp is a tough-talking hawk who, when a war is actually being fought, finds it convenient to be somewhere safe rather than where the fighting is.

The phrase was coined by Congressman Andrew Jacobs (D-IN) to show his disdain for those who talk a good fight so long as somebody else will have to fight it. Royko was amused by this and enjoyed citing a bunch of conservative Congressmen and writers who didn't fight in Korea or Vietnam although they were the right age to serve.

Royko and Jacobs have a good point. The only trouble is that they selected only conservatives to criticize, conveniently omitting the liberals who talked a hawkish line while letting others confront the armed enemy.

In World War II, many influential liberals declined to accept the invitations of their draft boards. After Hubert Humphrey (who later rose to become Vice President) was classified 1-A, he obtained a deferment because he was the campaign manager for the Democratic candidate for Governor of Minnesota. After his candidate lost, he requested another deferment as a "labor consultant." As a trained pharmacist, he would have been more valuable in battlefield first-aid stations.

Abe Fortas (who later rose to become a Supreme Court Justice) was draft age and without dependents on December 7, 1941. He took advantage of his Federal position to secure a series of deferments for himself.

Nelson Rockefeller found pressing business in South America all during World War II, then one of the safest places in the world. Theodore Sorensen, a key aide to President John F. Kennedy, escaped duty in the Korean War as a conscientious objector.

Another category of war wimps that should be mentioned is the extremist feminists who demand that the laws be repealed which exempt women from military combat duty. That issue should have been laid to rest in Rostker v. Goldberg in 1981, when the Supreme Court ruled that it is constitutional to exempt all women from the military draft because Federal law

makes them ineligible for combat duty.

However, at this year's June 12 Defense Department National Security Forum for Women, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower, Installations and Logistics Lawrence J. Korb made it clear that he supports abolishing the laws forbidding women to serve in combat. Although he vigorously defended the Reagan Administration on all other topics, Korb spoke out against existing laws and regulations on combat duty, believing that his remarks would be popular with the women present.

Admitting that he understands the "cultural" and "political" reasons for the combat prohibition, Korb predicted that, as greater and greater numbers of women rise up the promotion ladder, the pressure for permitting them to hold combat roles will be irresistible. He admitted that, under present law, women in the military can be promoted despite lack of combat service, but he said that promotion from outside the direct line of the most "meaningful" performance would be unworkable and would have to be abandoned.

Korb was blatantly pandering to a very small constituency -- those female officers in the military and military academy cadets who are openly lobbying to change the present laws against women in combat. These are the selfish, ambitious women who want military promotions even though the real burden of changing the law would be borne by the less-skilled, less-educated women who would then have to serve in the combat infantry.

Korb neglected to mention that the "pressure" to put women in combat assignments comes only in peacetime, not in wartime; and this brings us back to the interesting question of war wimps. All during the Korean and Vietnam Wars, somehow young women were not interested in serving in the military. Between 1948 and 1969, the percentage of women in the military, even including nurses, averaged 1.2% of the total active strength and never exceeded 1.5%.

We had a statutory limit of 2% women for much of that time, but the number of women never got close to that limit despite intensive recruitment efforts. Congress lifted the 2% limit in 1967, but women did not reach 2% of the Armed forces until more than five years later, in 1973, after U.S. ground troops were pulled out of Vietnam.

The desire of some women to serve in military combat positions is clearly related to whether there is any combat going on. Mr. Korb should be admonished to defend the present laws and not to use his position to agitate against them.