P.S. to the NEWS
by PHYLLIS SCHLAFLY

Box 618, Alton, Illinois 62002
Phone: 618-462-5415

RELEASE: SEPTEMBER 21, 1979

COMPULSORY NATIONAL SERVICE

James Bryant Conant was the Harvard University President who signed my master's degree years ago. In addition to his academic post, his self-appointed social mission was to persuade post-World War II America to accept Universal Military Training, then called UMT. With his Ivy League platform and prestigious connections, he gathered considerable support.

But a funny thing happened along the way to the achievement of his UMT goal. Mr. Conant was appointed High Commissioner for postwar Germany and then U.S. Ambassador to West Germany. Four years of living in the land whose adoption of UMT had resulted in defeat and devastation erased Mr. Conant's enthusiasm and we heard no more about it after his return to the United States.

The same old totalitarian idea has now been given a new suit of clothes. Today, it's not Universal Military Service, it is National Youth Service with semantic overtones of "Vista" or "Peace Corps." Buried in the fine print, however, is the mailed fist in the velvet glove: if you don't accept the government's invitation to "volunteer" for service, you go to jail or Canada.

Rep. Paul McCloskey's (R-Cal.) bill, H.R. 2206, would establish a "National Service System" under which 18-year-old males and females could either enter "voluntary" military or civilian service or take their chances on conscription in a military lottery. Rep. John Cavanaugh's (D-Neb.) bill, H.R. 3602, would set up a "Public Service System" under which all young men and women would be subject to induction by lottery for civilian, military, or military reserve service.

The military draft/national service issue has been called "the sleeper issue" of the 1980 elections because, although there has been very little public discussion of it, it is an issue charged with emotion which has the potential of overriding all others in importance.

(more)

The peculiar consortium of those promoting compulsory national service offers new proof of the old adage that politics makes strange bedfellows. Supporting it are a combination of defense-oriented conservatives who argue that the All Volunteer Army is a failure, that our combat readiness is so poor we couldn't stay in a war for 30 days, that the dropout rate is too high, and that the literacy level of the volunteers is so low that the army must give remedial reading instruction before recruits can be trained as soldiers.

Also supporting compulsory national service are the liberals who see in it a means of achieving the egalitarian society they have been seeking for years. It would promote the societal-racial mix with the same compulsion now used to achieve classroom quotas through forced busing. Besides, it would be a great system for supplying cheap labor for federal programs.

The constitutional authority for the military draft comes from the Congressional power to "provide for the common defense" and "to raise and support armies." The military draft is justified for the sake of defending our nation against those who would attack or destroy us. It is not constitutionally justified just because some social engineers think that young people would be more valuable citizens if they serve other people in some federally-directed activity at low wages. It is not justified as a giant social welfare program or for the sake of producing the desirable racial, sexual, or ethnic mix among young people.

Alternative service in Vista or the Peace Corps does absolutely nothing to improve the combat readiness of our troops. Drafting women in larger numbers than they are now volunteering can only reduce the combat readiness of our fighting troops to the physical capabilities of the average woman.

Compulsory national service for males and females will not advance toward the goal of increasing the military strength of our nation, which is the only justification for the interference with individual liberty involved in conscription. It will serve only the goals of those who want to sacrifice freedom to a regimented system in which the Federal Government will dictate our work and our wages.

(end)