

News Release

Nixon Agnew

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NEW YORK, Oct. 17 -- Republican Presidential Candidate Richard M. Nixon Thursday evening outlined in a nationwide radio address his program for abolishing the draft at the conclusion of the Vietnam War and establishment of a well-paid volunteer army to meet America's security needs.

Nixon said a volunteer army would be the fairest, most efficient, effective and economical means of meeting military manpower requirements.

Under the Nixon proposal the draft would be phased out as a permanent professional army came into being. The Selective Service System would be maintained on a standby basis for use in the event of necessity to create a large land army.

The following is the text of Nixon's radio address on the draft:

"I speak tonight about a matter important to us all, but especially to young Americans and their parents.

"I refer to compulsory military service -- or, as most of us know it, 'the draft'.

"We have lived with the draft now for almost 30 years. It was started during the dark uncertainty before the Second World War, as a temporary, emergency measure. But since then we have kept it -- through our ordeals in Korea and Vietnam, and even in the years of uneasy peace between.

"We have lived with the draft so long, in fact, that too many of us now accept it as normal and necessary.

"I say it's time we took a new look at the draft -- at the question of permanent conscription in a free society.

"If we find we can reasonably meet our peacetime manpower needs by other means -- then we should prepare for the day when the draft can be phased out of American life.

"I have looked into this question very carefully. And this is my belief:

"Once our involvement in the Vietnam war is behind us, we move toward an all-volunteer armed force.

"This means, that just as soon as our reduced manpower requirements in Vietnam will permit us to do so, we should stop the draft and put our Selective Service structure on stand-by.

"For the many years since World War II, I believed that, even in peacetime, only through the draft could we get enough servicemen to defend our nation and meet our heavy commitments abroad. Over these years it seemed we faced a Hobson's choice: either constrict the freedom of some, or endanger the freedom of all.

"But conditions have changed, and our needs have changed. So, too, I believe, our defense manpower policies should change.

"Tonight, I would like to share with you some of the reasons why I think this is so.

"First, let me talk about what we cannot do.

"First of all, we must recognize that conditions in the world today require us to keep a powerful military force. Being prepared for war is our surest guarantor of peace. While our adversaries continue to build up their strength, we cannot reduce ours; while they continue to brandish the sword, we cannot lay aside our shield.

"So any major change in the way we obtain military manpower must not keep us from maintaining a clearly superior military strength.

"In the short run, we need also to recognize the limits imposed by the war in Vietnam. However we might wish to, we can't stop the draft while we are in a major war.

"What we can do -- and what we should do now -- is to commit ourselves as a nation to the goal of building an all-volunteer armed force.

"The arguments about the draft center first on whether it's right, and second, on whether it's necessary.

"Three decades ago, Senator Robert Taft declared that the draft 'is absolutely opposed to the principles of individual liberty which have always been considered a part of American democracy'.

"I feel this way: A system of compulsory service that arbitrarily selects some and not others simply cannot be squared with our whole concept of liberty, justice and equality under the law. Its only justification is compelling necessity.

"The longer it goes on, the more troublesome are the questions it raises. Why should your son be forced to sacrifice two of the most important years of his life, so that a neighbor's son can go right along pursuing his interests in freedom and safety?

"Why should one young American be forced to take up military service while another is left free to make his own choice?

"We all have seen, time and time again, how hit-or-miss the workings of the draft are. You know young people, as I do, whose lives have been disrupted first by uncertainty, next by conscription. We all have seen the unfairness of the present system.

"Some say we should tinker with the present system, patching up an inequity here and there. I favor this too, but only for the short term.

"But in the long run, the only way to stop the inequities is to stop using the system.

"It does ~~not work~~ fairly-~~and~~, given the facts of American life, it just can't.

"The inequity stems from one simple fact -- that some of our young people are forced to spend two years of their lives in our nation's defense, while others are not. It's not so much the way they're selected that's wrong, as it is the fact of selection.

"Even now, only about 40 percent of our eligible young people ever serve. As our population grows, and the manpower pool expands, that percentage will shrink even further. Ten years ago about a million men became of draft age each year. Now there are almost two million.

"There has also been a change in the armed forces we need. The kinds of war we have to be prepared for now include not only conventional war and nuclear war, but also guerrilla war of the kind we are now experiencing in Vietnam.

"In nuclear war, huge ground armies operating in massive formations would be terribly vulnerable. That way of fighting, where nuclear weapons are in use, is a thing of the past.

"An all-out non-nuclear war, on the other hand -- that is, what we knew before as large-scale conventional war -- is hard to see happening again.

"Of course, a sudden Soviet ground attack from Eastern Europe could mix Soviet forces with the populations in the West and thereby prevent swift resort to nuclear weapons.

"But even in this situation a massing of huge ground units would be impossible because of their nuclear vulnerability. So again, even this kind of struggle would break up into smaller unit actions.

"In a guerrilla war of the Vietnam type, we face something else entirely. Here we need a highly professional, highly motivated force of men trained in the technique of counterinsurgency. Vietnam has shown us that success in such wars may depend on whether our soldiers are linguists and civil affairs specialists, as well as warriors. Also, the complex weapons of modern war demand a higher level of technical and professional skill.

"Of course, we will still need conventional forces large by standards of only a few decades ago to guard our vital interests around the world. But I don't believe we will need them in such quantity that we cannot meet our manpower needs through voluntary enlistments.

"Conscription was an efficient mechanism for raising the massive land armies of past wars. Also, it is easier -- and cheaper -- simply to order men into uniform rather than recruiting them. But I believe our likely military needs in the future will place a special premium on the services of career soldiers.

"How, then, do we recruit these servicemen? What incentives do we offer to attract an adequate number of volunteers?

"One kind of inducement is better housing, and better living conditions generally. Both to recruit and to retain the highly skilled specialists the services need, military life has to be more competitive with the attractions of the civilian world.

"The principal incentives are the most obvious: higher pay and increased benefits.

"The military services are the only employers today who don't have to compete in the job market. Supplied by the draft with the manpower they want when they want it, they've been able to ignore the laws of supply and demand. But I say there's no reason why our military should be exempt from peacetime competition for manpower, any more than our local police and fire departments are exempt.

"A private in the American army is paid less than \$100 a month. This is a third of the minimum wage in the civilian economy. Now to this we should add food, uniforms and housing which are furnished free. Taken all together, a single young man can probably get by on this. But it's hardly competitive with what most people can earn in civilian life. Even with allowances, many married servicemen in enlisted ranks have actually been forced to depend on relief payments to support their families.

"These pay scales point up another inequity of the draft system. Our servicemen are singled out for a huge hidden tax -- the difference between their military pay and what they could otherwise earn. The draftee has been forced by his country not only to defend his neighbors but to subsidize them as well.

"The total cost of the pay increases needed to recruit an all-volunteer army cannot be figured out to the dollar, but authoritative studies have suggested that it could be done for 5 to 7 billions of dollars more a year.

"While this cost would indeed be heavy, it would be increasingly offset by reductions in the many costs which the heavy rate of turnover now causes. Ninety-three percent of the Army's draftees now leave the service as soon as their time is up -- taking with them skills that it costs some \$6,000 per man to develop. The net additional annual cost of shifting to an all-volunteer armed force would be bound to be much less.

"It will cost a great deal to move to a voluntary system, but unless that cost is proved to be prohibitive, it will be more than worth it.

"The alternative is never-ending compulsion in a society consecrated to freedom. I think we can pay a great deal to avoid that.

"In any case, in terms of morale, efficiency and effectiveness, a volunteer armed force would assuredly be a better armed force.

"Today, 7 out of every 10 men in the Army have less than two years' military experience. As an Army chief of personnel put it: 'As soon as we are able to operate as a unit, the trained men leave and we have to start all over again'.

"A volunteer force would have a smaller turnover; it would be leavened by a higher percentage of skilled, motivated men; fewer would be constantly in training; and fewer trained men would be tied down training others.

"The result would be, on the average, more professional fighting men, and less invitation to unnecessary casualties in case of war.

"The same higher pay scales needed to get more volunteers would also strengthen incentives for career service. I am sure the spirit and self-confidence of the men who wear the nation's uniform would be enhanced.

"In proposing that we start toward ending the draft when the war is over, I would enter two cautions:

"First, its structure needs to be kept on stand-by in case some all-out emergency requires its reactivation. But this can be done without leaving 20 million young Americans who will come of draft age during the next decade in constant uncertainty and apprehension.

"The second caution I would enter is this: the draft can't be ended all at once. It will have to be phased out, so that at every step we can be certain of maintaining our defense strength.

"But the important thing is to decide to begin, and at the very first opportunity to begin.

"Now, some are against a volunteer armed force because of its cost, because they're used to the draft and hesitant to change. But three other arguments are often raised. While they sound plausible, I say they don't stand up under examination.

"The first is that a volunteer army would be a black army, so it is a scheme to use Negroes to defend a white America. The second is that a volunteer army would actually be an army of hired mercenaries. The third is, a volunteer army would dangerously increase military influence in our society.

"Now, let's take these arguments in order:

"First, the 'black army' one. I regard this as sheer fantasy. It supposes that raising military pay would in some way slow up or stop the flow of white volunteers, even as it stepped up the flow of black volunteers. Most of our volunteers now are white. Better pay and better conditions would obviously make military service more attractive to black and white alike.

"Second, the 'mercenary' argument. A mercenary is a soldier of fortune -- one who fights for or against anyone for pay. What we're talking about now is American soldiers, serving under the American flag. We are talking about men who proudly wear our country's uniform in defense of its freedom. We're talking about the same kind of citizen armed force America has had ever since it began, excepting only the period when we have relied on the draft.

"The third argument is the threat of universal military influence. This, if ever it did come, would come from the top officer ranks, not from the enlisted ranks that draftees now fill -- and we already have a career officer corps. It is hard to see how replacing draftees with volunteers would make officers more influential.

"Today all across our country we face a crisis of confidence. Nowhere is it more acute than among our young people. They recognize the draft as an infringement on their liberty -- which it is. To them, it represents a government insensitive to their rights -- a government callous to their status as free men. They ask for justice -- and they deserve it.

"So I say, it's time we looked to our consciences. Let's show our commitment to freedom by preparing to assure our young people theirs.