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Built for More Than Just Combat

War has always permeated the history of humanity. From the conquests of Alexander the Great to the more recent wars in the Middle East, conflict has affected the lives of billions of people. However, the opposition to war and military service overall has become a more popular stance in America, along with numerous other countries (Absher). Military service provides discipline, fosters unity, and cultivates character. This is why the President plans to instate a mandatory draft which would require all male, American citizens to serve in the United States military for one year before the age of 22.

Because the draft is directed to a young group of citizens, military service would act as a bridge into adulthood. It kickstarts economic independence from parents and is proven to help develop maturity (“Mandatory”). Aside from personal character advancement, compulsory service instills a desire to work for a cause greater than oneself: the brotherhood of a nation (Weigel). George Weigel writes, “Living in service to the common good is essential for the good of society, as well as for the integral development of persons” (Weigel 16). At the time, Robert Haflett, who was eligible to be drafted for the Vietnam War, was thankful to not be selected. Now, years later, he has a deep appreciation for those who did serve because of their bravery. He is in favor of mandatory service because he believes it would allow all men to contribute to the freedom celebrated by Americans. For those only serving for one year, military service offers a structured means to accomplish future aspirations. It can provide educational benefits for college and real-world skills for potential careers (Absher). Some would argue that attending college or

jumping straight to a career after high school offers more benefits to the individual, and while this can be true, service to the country positively benefits thousands of people and forges unity.

As Martin Luther King Jr. wrote, “We must either learn how to live together as brothers or we are going to perish together as fools” (Bouie 1). Compulsory service would promote patriotism and encourage unity, giving citizens more pride in their country. After serving for a year, soldiers would gain a deeper appreciation and commitment to the nation, an understanding of the cost of the freedoms which are either enjoyed or exploited by U.S citizens every day (Santos). Lloyd Schell, a ninety-year-old veteran who was drafted for the Korean War when he was 20, said that during his two years of service he experienced intense discipline and training. He was taught to “just listen” and if a soldier failed to do so, he’d soon regret it. While Lloyd was serving, he did not exactly like it, but looking back on the experience, he is grateful because he was able to meet new people from all around the country, coming together for the same cause. He made relationships with people he never thought he would meet. This kind of camaraderie is what builds troop morale and brings our nation together. Mandatory service would help American citizens unite over shared experience. Some believe that sexism, racism, and misogyny are present in military settings which could harm the quality of life for those who experience that prejudice. However, if more people were to join the military, these barriers could be broken or at least made less of a prevalent problem (Barton). It is the President’s hope that mutual respect and togetherness will be achieved.

As a nation, we are upheld to a moral standard. When enemies refuse to abide by the laws of war, the United States is obligated to act with integrity. Ethics and morals are what set a military unit apart because they are vital to positive morale among soldiers (Santos). This is why individual character can affect an entire army. Serving in a military force which is upheld by

these moral obligations and is driven by a desire to “do the right thing” when others fall short develops character (Santos). George Washington stated, “If ... proper care and precaution are used ... (having more regard to the characters of persons, than the number of men they can enlist [sic]) we should in a little time have an Army able to cope with any that can be opposed to it” (Santos). There is a strength found in the building of individual character which can affect the outcome of an entire battle and serve as a basis for our country’s ethics.

Developing the character of each soldier through mandatory service will allow the United States military to continue its high standard of morality and professionalism. Serving as a bridge into adulthood, it would also cultivate maturity from a young age and an understanding of the sacrifice for the freedom of our country. The United States military is not only about fighting. It is an organization characterized by dignity, competence, and unity to which all men will be called.

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