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Congress Should Challenge Myths About Women, Combat, and the Draft



Myths about gender equality in the military are starting to crumble under the pressure of actual experience. Witness the recent [Associated Press report](#) that 6 of 7 female Marine recruits failed to qualify in training for direct ground combat assignments.

The women deserve credit for trying, but it matters that 86 percent of them, compared to 3 percent of the men, could not meet gender-neutral tests of upper body strength, stamina, and running speed. Mostly-civilian “experts” had predicted that 200 women per year would qualify for ground combat assignments. The emperor's new clothes, it seems, are getting a bit gauzy.

A few women can meet minimal combat arms standards, but the fact remains that most women cannot meet them while most men can. In a future national emergency making it necessary to reinstate Selective Service, it would not make sense to order *all* women to register as if they were the physical equals of men.

Common sense nevertheless was missing during a closed-door meeting of the Senate Armed Services Committee on May 19. Chairman John McCain (R-AZ) approved [surprise legislation](#) that would force young civilian women to register for a possible future draft. Then the full Senate rubber-stamped the McCain mandate for co-ed conscription as part of the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act, without a separate vote.

Since the [House did not approve similar legislation](#), conference committee members reconciling both versions of the defense bill should drop Chairman McCain’s “draft America’s daughters” legislation. If lame-duck President Barack Obama gets the opportunity, he will sign the McCain mandate into law, doing harm to every young woman of draft age in America.

Flawed gender-equality theories and misinformation have blurred harsh realities. It is not true, for example, that Selective Service would only induct young women for traditional positions supporting combat troops.

The last time Congress debated this issue, a Senate report clearly stated that the *only* legitimate purpose of Selective Service registration is to speed the process of finding and training “combat replacements” for troops who are fighting and dying on the battlefield. No one is drafted to play clarinet in the Marine band.

Contrary to vague claims about “equality” or “fairness,” the brutal, physically-exhausting nature of direct ground combat against ruthless adversaries is not “equal” or “fair” to anyone. It is not even civilized.

Both the 1992 Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces, and researchers conducting extensive tests for the U.S. Marine Corps from 2012 to 2015, produced definitive findings that can be summarized in one sentence: *“In the infantry and other direct ground combat units that attack the enemy with deliberate offensive action, women do not have an equal opportunity to survive, or help fellow soldiers to survive.”*

Instead of reality-based debate about national security, we hear petulance from “egalitarian sexists” and “hostile proponents” who resent feminists and blame military women for “gender diversity” quotas. “You

asked for equality,” they taunt, even though an official survey found that less than 8 percent of Army women wanted to serve in the combat arms. Civilian women’s views haven’t been sought at all.

Patriotic women have always served and sacrificed in our nation’s wars. They will volunteer to do so again. As for claims that women need close combat experience to be promoted Defense Department figures repeatedly have shown that for decades, women have been promoted at rates equal to or faster than men.

Responsible members of Congress have yet to conduct open hearings with independent experts who would explain why the Obama Administration should have respected the Marine Corps’ request to keep infantry and other fighting forces all-male.

Oversight requires an objective review of field research exercises in which all-male teams displayed greater speed and lethality in 69 percent of scientifically-monitored tests. Injury rates among women were two to six times greater than men’s, and even higher injury rates in load-bearing infantry units would seriously detract from mission readiness.

Everyone hopes it will never be necessary to reinstate the draft, but Selective Service registration of young men remains a relatively low-cost insurance policy to defend America if multiple threats overwhelm our shrinking All-Volunteer Force.

If the McCain mandate for co-ed conscription becomes law and a catastrophic national emergency makes it necessary to reactivate Selective Service, officials would have to call up both women and men, ages 18-26, in roughly equal numbers.

The administrative burden of culling thousands of women, just to find the theoretical one-in-seven who might be qualified, would actually *hinder* the speed and lethality needed to respond to an existential military threat. As stated in a previous Senate report, “[A]n induction system that provided half men and half women to the training commands in the event of mobilization would be administratively unworkable and militarily disastrous.”

In 1981 the Supreme Court deferred to Congress’ judgment and upheld the constitutionality of women’s exemption from Selective Service obligations. Women were not eligible to serve in direct ground combat, noted the Court, but Congress had the constitutional authority to decide. They still do.

Congress should recognize the absurdity of registering or drafting thousands of young women – 86 percent of whom are not qualified to be “combat replacements” in time of war. If Congress made a rational choice to exempt women from infantry assignments as well as Selective Service, the Supreme Court very likely would uphold the right of Congress to decide.

First, however, Congress should do no harm. Conferees should remove the “draft America’s daughters” language from the defense bill, and the next Commander-in-Chief should order military leaders to conduct an open, objective, and honest review of the impact of recent social experiments on military readiness. The next administration could restore sound priorities, but responsible members of Congress need to step up and help.

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