

On February 15, 1968, I received from the National Security Council its recommendations with respect to graduate school deferments, with which all of us are now so familiar. The National Security Council gave long and serious study to this very vital matter.

I think it is appropriate that I quote here from a letter I addressed to the chairman of this committee on February 15, 1968, in response to a letter from her to the President dated February 9, 1968, and a letter to me dated February 19, 1968, reviewing the testimony of earlier witnesses in these hearings and the concern of the committee. I quote:

You will note that the enclosed memorandum from the National Security Council reflects that that agency, in reaching its recommendations, thoroughly and deeply considered the impact of the policies it was recommending on graduate study and on the other hand, weighed the overall national interest and the importance of the fair and equitable distribution of the privilege and duty of military service. The decision reached by the National Security Council was a difficult one.

The National Security Council, as its memorandum shows, also recognized that this matter was one requiring continuous attention and designated certain Cabinet officials to maintain a continuing surveillance over the Nation's manpower and educational needs to identify any area of graduate study that might qualify for deferment in the national interest.

I am well aware that there has been a great deal of discussion of the age group being called and the present method of calling men within that age group, all as a part of the discussion of graduate school deferments.

In this connection, I would like to quote here from a letter which I have written to the Honorable L. Mendel Rivers, chairman of the Committee on Armed Services of the House of Representatives, in response to his letter to me of February 20, 1968, raising the same questions which so deeply concern this subcommittee. I quote:

With respect to the adoption of a so-called modified young age system, the position which I took before your Committee during consideration of the extension act of last July, that such a system was possible and workable irrespective of the many administrative difficulties and complications involved, has remained unchanged.

The present method of calling available and qualified men between the ages of 19 and 26, oldest first, is a system of selection which has been equitable and effective through more than 20 years of selective service operation.

This fact, of course, does not make change inconceivable; however, the fact that it has produced the required manpower is an excellent reason why it has been continued.

At the present time, whatever age group or groups is being called, the Selective Service System is required by law to determine the sequence of selection within any age group or groups in the same manner that it has heretofore; in other words, by date of birth, oldest first.

The Congress left untouched the authority to designate any age group or groups to be called first, second, and so on; but within those groups selective service must, under the law, continue to call individuals in the sequence presently in use.

In determining whether or not to designate different age groups or various age groups as separate categories in the sequence of selection rather than to retain the present broad group of 19 to 26, the equity to individuals, the character of the manpower provided the armed forces, the administrative feasibility of any different system than is in use now, are among matters which must be taken into account. While I have always maintained that as an operator, the Selective Service System can operate any program it is called upon to put into effect, some of the alternatives under consideration are more cumbersome and complicated than others. The gains from any change must certainly balance, and preferably outweigh, the problems created.