

Consequently, my bill makes a number of changes in provisions governing student deferments.

Under its provisions, high school students would be deferred until they finish high school, as the law now provides. The draft law should in no way contribute to the already severe high school dropout problem. If, however, a student did not finish high school until after his 20th birthday, he would upon graduation—or dropping out—be considered a 19-year-old for draft purposes, and be put into the pool of those qualified and available for selection. He would, consequently, be a “constructive 19-year-old.”

My bill would give a high school graduate another choice than facing exposure to the draft. He could choose to go on to college instead, thus postponing his entry into the pool of 19-year-old draft-eligibles and consequently his exposure to the draft. He would keep this postponement until he finished college or dropped out as the particular case might be, and would at that point be a “constructive 19-year-old.” Under no conditions could this postponement extend beyond the 26-year-old cut-off date for determining draft eligibility.

Thus, everyone who did not voluntarily enlist would at some point in his 19 to 26 year span be exposed to the chance of being drafted, equally with this contemporaries.

This system offers a high degree of flexibility to each individual in setting out his education and career plans. It offers the military a broad mix of inductees—most would get in after high school, and some after college. Thus the wide-ranging skills the military needs would continue to be made available to it.

Further, this system assures the military of a continuing supply of officers. Nearly 80 percent of each year's new officers enter military service from college sources. About half are ROTC students, and the other half enroll in a wide variety of other officer-training programs, either during college or upon graduation. There is some concern that ending undergraduate student deferments would greatly reduce this flow of new officers into the military services, with their obvious broad range of backgrounds and educational training.

Thus, this new optional feature would enhance individual flexibility and assure the military of a continuing flow of officers. But some experts have criticized this plan by pointing out that it offers those who can afford college the choice of postponing military service during times of a shooting war, like Vietnam. Most individuals would today certainly choose to go to college for 4 years, if they could, rather than be drafted and perhaps be sent to Vietnam. To meet this valid criticism, while retaining the high degree of flexibility, my bill provides that the optional student postponements be discontinued when casualties reach a certain point. It will describe the operation of this discontinuance below.

My bill would also broaden the definition of “student” to make clear that all bona fide students receive equal treatment under its optional postponement feature.

Unfortunately, today students in junior and business colleges, and students in apprentice and vocational courses, are given a different draft classification than students in colleges, in plain contravention of congressional intent. This 2-A classification makes them more liable to the draft than the 2-S college deferment. Quite rightly, these junior college and other students claim that the draft treats them as second-class students.

Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz put the issue succinctly, as he usually does, when he testified on the manpower implications of Selective Service, on March 21, 1967:

“The question will be pressed more and more strongly of why and whether there should be any different treatment of young men who are in occupational training programs. My own answer is that there cannot justifiably be any such distinction made. It would be hard to prove, and it hasn't so far, that there is a larger value—either to the public or to the individual involved—in letting Bob finish college than in letting Jim complete his apprenticeship as a carpenter or letting John work his way up the unskilled steps toward a skilled job as a punch press operator.”

It is clear that junior college and business college students should be treated similarly, and not exposed to the draft in any higher degree than college students. There may well be administrative or management difficulties when dealing with the problem of less-than-full-time students, but the principle of equality of treatment must be held to be paramount.