

We need draft reform today, just as we did last year and the year before. We have not been protecting our individual freedoms as jealously as we might in our draft law, and for that reason alone we must change it.

Mr. GRUENING. Mr. President, will the Senator from Massachusetts yield?

Mr. KENNEDY of Massachusetts. I am happy to yield to the Senator from Alaska.

Mr. GRUENING. I applaud the efforts of our distinguished colleague the senior Senator from Massachusetts to reform the draft. It has been full of inequities and injustices which are widely known, but nothing has been done about. Particularly do I applaud his thinking about the desirability of a volunteer army. I would go a little further than he has because in this particular war I think the draft itself is most unfortunate and indeed is a major inequity. We have had it before in previous wars, but I think more widely spread throughout our land in regard to this particular war is the feeling that there is less justification for it than for our previous wars in which the elements of national danger or national security were evident; whereas, in my view, these factors are not present at all in this war in Southeast Asia for reasons which I have frequently stated.

Let me say that we should consider very seriously eliminating the draft to this extent; namely, that we should allow draftees to choose whether they wish to serve in Southeast Asia or not. The reason for that is—and I think it is amply justified—if a man enlists in the regular Armed Forces, whether it be the Army, Air Force, the Navy, or the Marine Corps, he knows when he takes his oath of enlistment that he has got to go where the Commander in Chief sends him. He may not like this war. He may feel that it is wrong, but he has made a commitment. The draftee, on the other hand, does not have that choice.

I am convinced that the amendment which I have sought twice previously to introduce, without success so far, if adopted, would perhaps result in half the volunteers going to Southeast Asia for one reason or another. I can document that estimate by citing a specific example.

I have a grandson who volunteered for service in Vietnam. He is a 19-year-old. He is in the paratroopers. He believed that he should go. I think that if such an amendment were enacted perhaps half of the draftees would go to Southeast Asia and perhaps half would not.

It certainly would be a good affirmation of the principles of freedom which we allegedly espouse if that were to be done. It would strengthen support for the war in Vietnam.

I feel definitely that a volunteer army is and should be a thing of the future, that we should have a professional army composed of volunteers, adequately paid, and adequately compensated in case of injury, and so forth; but to conscript our boys to go down there and fight, in many cases against people against whom they feel they have no grievance, and perhaps die in the process, particularly when we think of the terrific corruption which the Senator from Massachusetts has recently so ably called attention to, is in my view unjust and indefensible.

Our boys are dying in Vietnam to help keep in office a corrupt regime, a regime which freely permits draft evasion of its own boys. Desertions from the South Vietnamese Army are tremendous. There were 96,000 of them in 1966. In 1967 that number rose to 110,000.

Therefore, I hope that when this proposed legislation is heard in committee and debated on the floor of the Senate, the Senator from Massachusetts will consider a modification which will make it possible to allow draftees to choose whether they will or will not go to Southeast Asia.

Mr. KENNEDY of Massachusetts. I appreciate the comments of the Senator from Alaska. I know that he has been long interested in a volunteer army, along with other Members of the Senate. He has made his case with great eloquence and great feeling. I also know that in the course of any kind of study concerning a volunteer army, the views and comments of the Senator from Alaska would be extremely valuable and will be weighed by the Members of this body.

Mr. GRUENING. I would be most happy, when the Senator holds hearings, to present my views. This is such a burning question and goes so deeply to the hearts and minds of our younger generation—as well as the older generation, for that matter, the parents of these boys—that I think we should have full discussion and exploration of the subject.

Mr. KENNEDY of Massachusetts. I very much appreciate the comments which the Senator from Alaska has just made.