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Statement of the President on Adoption of Selective Service,
September 16, 1940
America has adopted selective service in time of peace, and, in so doing, has broadened and enriched our basic concept of citizenship. Beyond the clear democratic ideals of equal rights, equal privileges and equal opportunities, we have set forth the underlying other duties, obligations and responsibilities of equal service.

In thus providing for national defense, we have not carved a new and uncharted trail in the history of our democratic institutions. On the contrary, we have merely reasserted an old and accepted principle of democratic government. The militia system, the self-armed citizenry with the obligation of military service incumbent upon every free man, has its roots in the old common law. It was brought to this continent by our forefathers. It was an accepted institution in colonial days. At the time of the adoption of the federal Constitution, nine of the thirteen states explicitly provided for universal service in their basic laws.

In those days, little was required in the way of equipment and training for the men in arms. The average American had his flintlock and knew how to use it. In addition, he was healthy, strong, and accustomed to hardship. When he reported for military duty, he brought with him his musket and his powder horn. His daily life insured him to the rigors of warfare.

Today, the art of war calls for a wide variety of technical weapons. Modern life does not emphasize the qualities demanded of soldiers. Moreover, behind the armed forces, we must have a munitions industry as a part of an economic system capable of providing the fighting man with his full requirements of arms and equipment. Many individuals, therefore, may serve their country best by holding their posts on the production line. The object of selective service is to provide men for our Army and Navy and at the same time disturb as little as possible the normal life of the nation.

Selective service consists of four steps, which singly and in the group, have been developed to operate with the fairness and justice characteristic of free, democratic institutions. These steps are: registration, classification, selection, and induction.

Yesterday, October sixteenth, has been set aside, on which day every male between 21 and 35, inclusive, will be expected to report to a neighborhood precinct to fill out a registration card and a registration certificate. The certificate issued to the individual will be carried by him as a testimonial to his acceptance of the fundamental obligation of citizenship. The registration card will be forwarded to the county clerk or similar official and will be delivered by him to the local selective service board. These boards, consisting of three men, each appointed by the President, upon recommendations of the state governors, will be set up in more than 5,000 communities. Then the states notify the national director of selective service that all of the local boards have completed this work, a national drawing by lot will determine the order of priority of the registrants in each local board area. The national priority list will be furnished to the local boards and the corresponding order of selection will be entered on the registration cards in their custody.
The priority established by the drawing will determine the order in which questionnaires will be mailed to the registrants. Upon receipt of these questionnaires the registrants will enter on these forms pertinent facts on the basis of which their final classification will be determined.

There will be organized in every community in our nation advisory boards for registrants, composed of patriotic citizens, civilian volunteers, to assist registrants in presenting fairly the facts to be used in determining the place of each individual in the scheme of national defense.

After the return of these questionnaires, the local board, after due consideration, will place the registrants in one of four classes. In Class I will be those who are available for immediate service; in Class II, those who are deferred because of the essential character of the service they are rendering in their present occupations; in Class III those individuals who should be deferred because of individuals dependent upon them for support; in Class IV those specifically deferred by the terms of the Act.

The total number of individuals needed by the armed forces will be prorated among the several states. In this allocation due consideration will be given to the number of men already furnished by that state for our military forces. Within each state a quota, in a similar manner, will be divided among the local boards. Thus, each locality will be asked to furnish its fair share of individuals for induction into our armed forces.

In each of these local board areas individuals between the ages of 18 and 55 will be offered an opportunity to volunteer for a one-year period of service and training. Such applicants will be accepted before any other individuals are selected, provided they are suitable for military service. It will be the duty of the local board to select as many additional individuals as are necessary to fill the quota for that particular area.

Following the tentative selection of these individuals, a local medical examiner will examine them physically. If they are accepted, they will be sent forward for final physical examination by medical officers of the Army, Navy or Marine Corps. Those who pass will be inducted into the service.

In the military service they will be intelligently led, comfortably clothed, well fed, and adequately armed and equipped for basic training. By the time they are physically hardened, mentally disciplined and properly trained in fundamentals, the flow of critical munitions from factory to combat units will meet the full requirements for their advanced training.

In the military service, Americans from all walks of life, rich and poor, country-bred and city raised, farmer, student, manual laborer and white collar worker, will learn to live side by side, to depend upon each other in military drills and maneuvers, and to appreciate each other's dignity as American citizens.

Universal service will bring not only greater preparedness to meet the threat of war, but a wider distribution of tolerance and understanding to enjoy the blessings of peace.