

# The Passy Press

## Letter to the Editor

From: [pmbarnet@undisclosed.com](mailto:pmbarnet@undisclosed.com)  
To: Nick Gardiner [enpg@thepassypress.com](mailto:enpg@thepassypress.com)  
Date: January 17, 2016 8:27 p.m. EST  
Subject: Joseph Novitski's Essay

Dear Sir,

Joseph Novitski well frames our growing national concern about the distorting effects of unlimited money in politics and the growth of an American oligarchy.

Recent studies suggest that over two thirds of Americans decry the current levels of money in electoral politics. (We may live to equate the divisive effect of the Supreme Court's "Citizens United" decision with that of the Taney Court's "Dred Scott" decision of 1858.)

Oligarchy, coupled with gerrymandering, a dysfunctional congress with little turnover and a general lack of trust in our institutions today, has helped produce a nation divided on a myriad of political, social, foreign policy, economic and wealth disparity issues. We have to look no further than the current presidential field on the eve of the primary season. Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders' appeal to disaffected blue-collar middle aged whites and millennials respectively demonstrate frustration with our national condition and with our political class.

Novitski's proposal for two years national service, military and/or civilian for young Americans 18-30 as a tool to re-unify Americans in common national responsibility and to bridge the current gap between disparate demographic groups is a thoughtful one. He argues persuasively that national service is a counterpunch to the divisions that money and oligarchy have helped produce.

The debate over the virtues of a return to a military draft has been ongoing for years. The argument "against" has centered on the military's preference for an all volunteer force, the higher cost and inefficiency of a draft and its lack of fairness as there are far more draft aged men and women than the military needs. The argument "for" centers on the unifying effect of military service on disparate youth and the braking effect it would have on consideration to go to war when every son and daughter is at risk and when the children of the rich and powerful and elected representatives have "skin in the game".

I am persuaded that the argument for a return to the draft is the more compelling and that higher cost and some military inefficiency is worth it. Further, Novitski's proposal for a civilian component to national service assures that all young people will serve, not just the few who get drafted into the military.

There are two "1 percents" in American society today: the rich oligarchs and the military. Many believe that each 1 percent is undesirable, unfair and dangerous to our democracy. Mr. Novitski's proposal does not impact the money in politics problem directly but it starts down a corrective path.

America's great strength has always been its ability to adapt; it is a self-correcting society, almost unique in the world. If the apolitical, non partisan nature of national service could get it through the Congress, who knows, maybe in time we could find the political will to stop gerrymandering, set term limits, reduce the influence of money in politics and maybe even overturn "Citizens United".

Sincerely,

Peter Barnet

Peter Barnet has been an Associate Professor of Global Communications, at the American University of Paris and former EVP and Chief Client Officer at Young & Rubicam. He is resident of Paris and a graduate of Yale College.