

The Passy Press

Letter to the Editor

From: Paul Downey pauldowney17@undisclosed.com
To: Gardiner Nick enpg@thepassypress.com
Date: January 25, 2016 at 12:52:37 AM GMT+1
Subject: Re: Joseph Novitski Essay Proposing National Service

Dear Nick,

I read Joe Novitski's essay the other day, just as I read those of all your Passy Press contributors.

My national service was limited, like most of us young men of the '60s, to obligatory military service, in my case a 3-year stint in the Navy. I went in the Navy because they offered to pay for my Yale education, and because I faced military service in any event. I am proud of my service, I remember it fondly (we seem conditioned to forget as we age the crap that went along with it), and it shaped my life in many ways.

That said, it seems unlikely that I would have served had we not had the mandatory service that Joe writes about. My three brothers, facing the same obligation, also served (Air Force, Army and Marines), but my two sisters did not. None of my four children has served in the military or in any other public-service capacity, nor have their 20+ first cousins, nor any of their spouses. However, they are all good people, and as far as I can tell all patriotic Americans who love their country.

I think we can all see the benefits that would stem from restoration of national service, military or civilian. But the massive numbers need to be examined carefully -- not just the funding, which would be staggering, but the sheer numbers of people. According to the Census Bureau we have a population of 320mm, including 128mm (40%) in the 18-44 cohort (it doesn't break out 18-30), or about 5mm/year, or 60mm 18-30 year olds, roughly the Millennials. Surely these would be phased in over a decade or so, and with two years of service only about 1/6th of the cohort would be serving at full strength, or 10mm women and men.

Currently we have about 1.4mm people serving on active military duty, and another 1.1mm in the reserves, about 7.5mm short of the numbers Joe's proposal suggests. (A few more are engaged in non-military national or state service, but I don't know the numbers.) Rep. Charlie Rangel and others have repeatedly introduced legislation over the decades (including since 9/11) to restore national service, consistently and overwhelmingly defeated in Congress. That doesn't make it wrong. It's just extremely difficult to enact absent a national emergency.

Sincerely,

Paul Downey

Paul Downey is a retired investment banker living in Healdsburg, California. He is a graduate of Yale College.