



11350 Random Hills Road, Suite 800, Fairfax, Virginia 22030 Phone (703) 934-6101 Fax (703) 352-3678

[fff@fff.org](mailto:fff@fff.org) [www.fff.org](http://www.fff.org)

## **No Draft — Ever!** **by Sheldon Richman**

Iraq has become a bottomless pit for American blood and treasure. (To the Bush administration, Iraqi casualties seem unworthy of counting.) Congress will provide the treasure, compliments of the taxpayers. But who will provide the blood? At the moment, there are not enough men and women under arms. Troops are being made to stay in Iraq beyond their promised tours. Reservists and national guardsmen have been called up. And the discharges of several thousand military personnel have been delayed; they are now in the armed forces against their will.

It's still not enough. That's why we're hearing talk of conscription. Sen. Chuck Hagel, a senior Republican, is the latest to say the draft may be needed to fight the war in Iraq. As he put it, "Why shouldn't we ask all of our citizens to bear some responsibility and pay some price?"

The first thing to notice about this statement is how idiotic it is. How does drafting, say, 18-to-26-year-old men (and women?) equal "all of our citizens"? Ironically, if a draft reduced the budgetary cost of the military, it would relieve taxpaying non-draftees of a burden they would bear if the army were filled with professional volunteers. But let's not expect logic or common sense. That was a U.S. senator talking.

Also, notice that he said we should "ask" citizens to assume responsibility regarding the fighting in Iraq. But he's not talking about *asking* anyone to do anything. He's calling for conscription. I assume Senator Hagel knows that conscription means forcing people into the army. If they don't go, they are sent to prison. Today people are being asked to join, and apparently too few are saying yes. Why else would there be talk about the draft?

If politicians are going to discuss reviving conscription, could they please have the decency to do so honestly? Draft advocates want the president to order young people into the army and to send them to Iraq where they may have to kill and may be killed (or maimed as so many have already been). There. Was that so hard to say?

Now let's say something else: The draft is slavery. No patriotic euphemisms about service to one's country and shared responsibility can hide this fact. When the government says you must

surrender a portion of your life (not to mention perhaps life itself) — for whatever purpose — that is slavery. No one has ever come up with argument to refute that statement.

Remember, President Bush says he is keeping Americans in Iraq because it is his calling to bring freedom to the world. *Freedom*. If Bush decides to reinstitute the draft, he will be destroying Americans' freedom so that he can spread freedom to Iraq, the Middle East, and beyond. Does that make sense?

It makes as much sense as anything else about the Iraq operation — namely, none at all.

Some backers of conscription cleverly argue that it may turn the public against the war. As middle-class kids face getting shipped off to the Middle East, their parents will suddenly have a reason to oppose Bush's policy. It seemed to work that way with Vietnam, when college deferments were abolished. But even if it worked in this case, it wouldn't change the fact that the draft is slavery. The end can't justify *that* means.

Besides, the volunteer army has its own way of stopping a war: people refuse to join. That may be happening now. Every day on cable television retired military officers lament that the government is running out of soldiers. Every person who would have joined the army but didn't is voting against the war. Let's make sure the politicians get that message.

But let's have no draft. This is America, remember? — the land people historically fled *to* in order to escape conscription. The imperialist war party is trying to make us forget that. We shouldn't let them get away with it.

Sheldon Richman is senior fellow at The Future of Freedom Foundation in Fairfax, Va., author of *Tethered Citizens: Time to Repeal the Welfare State*, and editor of *The Freeman* magazine.

**This article was originally published in May of 2004.**