

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:

ARMED SERVICES

BANKING, HOUSING, AND  
URBAN AFFAIRS

ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

VETERANS AFFAIRS

August 12, 2016

The Honorable John McCain  
Senate Armed Services Committee  
228 Russell Senate Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mac Thornberry  
House Armed Services Committee  
2216 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jack Reed  
Senate Armed Services Committee  
228 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Adam Smith  
House Armed Services Committee  
2216 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman McCain, Chairman Thornberry, Ranking Member Reed and Ranking Member Smith,

As a conferee for the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2017, I write to express my strong concern with the provisions of Section 591 of S. 2943 that would require all U.S. citizens to register with the selective service. Specifically, I believe that such provisions are premature and that a policy change of this magnitude should be preceded by more extensive debate.

As you know, the Selective Service System exists under the authority of the Military Selective Service Act, originally enacted as the Selective Service Act of 1948. Despite our nation's long history with conscription to include the timeframe of the Selective Service Act of 1948, we have not conscripted persons for military service since the early 1970s. Further, there is no compelling reason to conclude we will need to return to conscription any time soon.

Assuming it is even required, our Selective Service System is in need of modernization. In 2012, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) recommended that the DOD periodically reevaluate its requirements for the Selective Service System in light of changing threats, operating environments and strategic guidance. The DOD concurred with the recommendation, but to date, no action has been taken on it. Since GAO provided its recommendation, DOD's gender-related policy changes have further altered the context for the Selective Service System. In short, its future is a complex issue made more so by these recent policy changes.

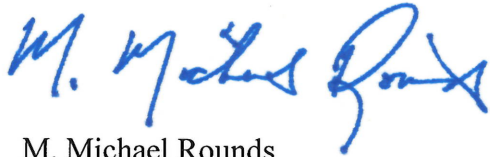
In case of future need, we should not take a requirement for all Americans to register off the table. However, we should first carefully answer two questions: (1) Do we still need a selective service system? (2) If the answer to the first question is yes, should we require all persons, regardless of gender, to register? In the absence of a military manpower emergency, which seems unlikely any time soon, we have the time to get this right. I have cosponsored and continue to

support legislation that would establish a commission to study these questions and provide recommendations to Congress. The guiding consideration for Congress should be what is best for our national security, and the commission's work could help place that consideration front and center.

For the NDAA 2017 conference report, I ask that the Senate recede to the House on this issue, thereby enabling Congress to more extensively debate and decide the future of our selective service system before implementing any change of the magnitude envisioned by the Senate-passed NDAA.

Thank you for your time and attention to my request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "M. Michael Rounds". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

M. Michael Rounds  
United States Senator