

Byrd's Eye View
A Public Service Column by
Senator Robert C. Byrd

ANTI-DRAFT PROTESTS

Selective Service announcements that the Department of Defense has asked for a March draft call of 32,900 men were made simultaneously with warnings that, should draft quotas remain over 30,000 monthly, the Selective Service would tighten college student deferments. Criteria (test scoring and determination of class standing) would be employed similar to that used during the Korean War, when monthly draft calls peaked at 30,000.

The prospects of increased levies and tightening of deferments would appear to raise the possibility of increased anti-draft protests. Many thoughtful Americans have been alarmed by the highly publicized actions of the 1965 draft-and-war protestors, and criticisms have been widespread of the character and moral structure of the individuals and groups involved.

That compulsory military service has often met with popular protest in this country is confirmed by many historians. Riots occurred in opposition to conscription into the Union Army during the Civil War, with a candidate for the governorship of Ohio involved in one violent display; and there were vociferous protests voiced by so-called "pacifists" and "America First-ers" when the first peacetime draft was passed in 1940. By contrast, there does not seem to have been any concerted action on any scale to thwart the registration of young American males during the First World War.

The nature of the opposition to the draft today has been the subject of many articles and studies, at private and official levels. It is apparent from facts developed and generally available that there is a definite political basis for the beliefs of some groups opposing military service since the crises in Viet Nam and Santo Domingo. Many of these groups are composed of general critics of American foreign policy and American society who are on the far left end of the political spectrum. And extreme gestures have been

made by some individuals and groups, which have been played up by the daily press, and which have become regarded as reflecting a generally mounting spirit of lawlessness in the entire anti-draft movement.

Also, some strong amounts of organization among these protestors have been noted by authorities, with close scrutiny being made to determine any proof of a general direction of the campaign by communistic, or other subversively dissident, elements within our country.

For the general public, with responsibility for helping to determine our national policies, and for those American youths faced in increasing number with a call to military service in defense of this Nation and its conscientiously determined policies, it is well to reflect that 20 million Americans have mothballed their civilian garb to wear the uniform of their country since that September day in 1940 when Congress passed the Universal Military Training and Service Act, and that our reservoir of manpower, and the instruments for its effective and timely use, have contributed to keeping our Nation strong at home and abroad and our citizenry at an all-time high level of social and economic security.

The watchword should be: "Think where the moral and humanistic values truly lie."