

CONSCRIPTION, CONSCIENCE, & WAR UPDATE #7

12 December 2005

Dear Family & Friends,

Conditions in Iraq and other areas of world tension have not improved. Military recruiters are still facing the same problems with achieving their quotas. Here is a summary since my last update.

SUMMARY SINCE LAST UPDATE

Conditions in Iraq seem to be more of the same. The Bush administration continues to tout numbers of Iraqi security troops being recruited while saying little or nothing about the quality in training & equipment and how they are being infiltrated by insurgents. Sunni insurgents are as active as ever, as are Kurdish and Shi'ite militias. A Constitution of sorts, very favorable to US oil interests, has been approved. And, as I write this, Iraq is on the threshold of a Parliamentary election (December 15th).

After that election we will see how US policy turns. Opposition to occupying Iraq is rising and the pressure for the White House to set a timetable for withdrawal is intense. That pressure is not just coming from the US – it is also coming from other countries and all factions in Iraq – Sunni, Shi'ite, and Kurd. The White House seems to be softening its stance but we must remain wary. The Bush administration is not going to abandon Iraq's oil.

Here at home, recruiting problems are growing worse. Counter-recruitment activities are sweeping many US colleges. The military simply cannot meet its personnel requirements. For a detailed report on recruiting goals and quotas see Government Accountability Office report GAO-06-134, dated November 2005.

To lessen recruiting shortfalls the education standards for new recruits has been lowered to accept some high school dropouts. The Pentagon is also trying to raise the age level for new recruits. Last March (2005) the new-recruit age limit cutoff for the National Guard and Reserve was raised from the 36th to 40th birthday. But Congress has set the age limit for new recruits in the active duty forces and the Pentagon cannot arbitrarily change it. Nevertheless, on 18 July 2005 the Pentagon petitioned Congress to raise the age limit for new recruits to 42 – through their 41st year. (Sorry, I do not have the outcome of that petition.)

Meanwhile, tensions in other parts of the world are rising. Relations with North Korea, Iran, Syria, and Venezuela are becoming more strained. This potential for military action makes the all-volunteer Army look less and less viable.

HELP FOR THE WAR RESISTER

Now I would like to present some information to help those resisting entry into the military – either from recruiting practices or a potential draft.

Notes On Opting Out.

Under the No Child Left Behind Act all schools, colleges, and universities which receive federal funds must furnish recruiters with a list of students and certain personal information about them. There is a provision in the Act which allows adult students and parents of minor students to opt-out from the release of this data. The opt-out policy is not widely advertised and the forms to do so are not always readily available. Conditions vary from school to school. Students and their parents must persist.

Submit your opt-out form to the school early. It must be in before the information is given to recruiters or it will do no good. I believe the lists usually go to recruiters around October 1st, which is the beginning of the federal fiscal year. Don't tarry. Get that opt-out form in as early as possible.

In addition, I suggest that you submit a new opt-out form at the beginning of every school year. There may not be a requirement to do so but requirements vary among the schools and colleges. So keep all your bases covered. Submit the form early and submit it every year.

A Tip for Your Personal CO File.

Young men currently registered with the Selective Service System do not receive a draft card, and they are not classified. They are just registered. But that can change fast. Immediately as Congress passes authorization for inductions, draft boards are prepared to go into action. Registrants will be classified and those fit for service will receive a notice. It is at this time that a conscientious objector must act fast to establish his claim. He must be prepared.

COs can't wait until they receive a call-up notice to start compiling material to prove their sincerity as a CO. His personal CO file must have been started much earlier, kept up to date, and maintained as complete as it could possibly be. It should reach far back to when he first started feeling opposed to war.

Paul Frazier, a Vietnam War CO, wrote a very helpful article on this subject in the August-September 2005 issue of *The Catholic Worker*. It is listed in the references and I strongly recommend that all COs obtain it and read it. I will quote here from one paragraph:

If a man chooses to register, he needs to know his choices, even though Selective Service will not acknowledge his request for a CO form or keep his CO claim if he makes it before receiving an Induction Order. If a man decides he is a CO, or even thinking about a CO claim, he will want to get a copy of the most recent CO form, fill it out, and start to set up his own draft file. He can send his form and a letter about what he believes to people who are important to him: a teacher, a friend of the family, his parish, his diocesan office, his football coach, the president, congressional representatives. He can, as needed, ask them to send a letter, testifying that he began his CO claim on such and such a date. A man can start his CO file even before he registers. He can collect material that will help substantiate his claim for CO status. He can gather letters of support that attest to his sincerity.¹

¹Frazier

Obtaining those letter can commence long before and CO form is available – make up your own declaration. Those letters would be extremely helpful in substantiating a CO claim and would be an indispensable part of any personal draft file.

I have written this section as pertaining to men because only men are now required to register. That can change quickly! I strongly recommend that women also start their personal CO file ... immediately ... today.

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REFERENCES

- Frazier, Paul; “Catholics and Conscience,” *The Catholic Worker*, August-September 2005, page 8. [36 East First Street, New York, NY 10003. Phone: (212) 777-9617 and (212) 677-8627]
- Galloway, Joseph; “Army Moves to Recruit More High School Dropouts,” Knight Ridder News Service, 4 October 2005.
- GAO-06-134, *MILITARY PERSONNEL: DoD Needs Action Plan to Address Enlisted Personnel Recruitment and Retention Challenges*, a report by the Government Accountability Office, November 2005.
- Schenwar, Maya; “Counter-Recruitment Day Sweeps US Colleges,” Common Dreams News Center, 5 December 2005. Available at <http://www.commondreams.org/cgi-bin/print.cgi?file=/views05/1205-32.htm>

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