

REMARKS BY CONGRESSMAN LES AuCOIN
IN THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON DRAFT REGISTRATION
MARCH 4, 1980

Mr. Speaker, the more we hear about the draft registration plan, the less it makes sense.

While I can support many of the steps the country is taking in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, a return to peacetime draft registration is not one of them.

As a reaction to the Soviet situation in Afghanistan, this idea is simply off-target. It won't remove a single Russian tank from Afghanistan. It'll cause more upheaval in American than in the Kremlin.

At the very best, it will shave only seven days off the time it would otherwise take to implement the draft in a national emergency.

Even the director of Selective Service is reported to have advised against this plan.

What registration might in fact do is give a false impression to Americans that "something is being done" and become a substitute to effective action against the Soviet challenge — such as replacing lost Iranian military bases, aiding Pakistan and Afghani resistance forces, increasing our strategic cooperation with China, establishing a regional military alliance, improving our intelligence-gathering functions and upgrading our military transport and materiel delivery capabilities.

But most important of all, Mr. Speaker, if a threat to our vital interests in the Persian Gulf is at the root of this crisis, as a result of our dependence on Arab oil, then we should first ask all Americans to take greater strides end this dependence. That should be done before calling on young people to stand in line for a call to arms.

The fact is, we're being asked to restore draft registration when this year's foreign oil import quota actually exceeds last year's imports by 400 million barrels a day.

No reasonable person can rule out draft registration under any circumstances. But registration simply doesn't fit the nature of the challenge we face today. We need bases, alliances, support initiatives — not symbolic half-steps that risk national unity at the very moment we need a resolute show of national purpose.

Mr. Speaker, if this crisis at this very moment is so awesome, so overwhelmingly urgent, then why has no one in authority moved to activate the reserves? Or at least put them on alert? The reserves, after all, are precisely the force meant to respond to military emergencies. Isn't it just possible that these reservists have more political clout than college sophomores, juniors and seniors? It's not only possible, it's certain. I don't think activation of the reserves is necessary now. I don't think draft registration is necessary now. In fact, either at this time would be dangerous and divisive.

But let me say this: If America were ever confronted with an emergency in the Middle East or elsewhere that makes the draft necessary, then it ought to be fair. It ought to apply to men and women alike.

No case for equal rights for women in this country can stand without equal obligations. I happen to be the father of a son and a daughter who are both a few years away from the proposed registration age. I love them equally. But as much as I oppose this registration proposal, I believe they have an equal obligation to their country.