

From the Office of the Sheriff: “Failure to Register is a Felony”

Last week a Fond du Lac man called me and asked who prosecutes those who fail to register under the Selective Service System (SSS). I soon reflected back 30 years and recalled my visit to the U.S. Post Office and complied by registering. I then thought of my own son who just turned 18 yrs old and made a quick call to him to get there as well. The topic was intriguing. I did not have the answers. So I went to work and conducted some research. I discovered that the rate of compliance with registration is just 91%. Now, 91% may be a great test score in school, but with Selective Service that means that 9% of men between the ages of 18-25 have not registered.

For more than 50 years, Selective Service and the registration requirement for America's young men have served as a backup system to provide manpower to the U.S. Armed Forces. From 1948 until 1973, men were drafted to fill vacancies in the armed forces which could not be filled through voluntary means. In 1973, the draft ended and the U.S. converted to an All-Volunteer military. Registration requirements were suspended in April 1975, and resumed again in 1980 by President Carter in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Registration continues today as a hedge against underestimating the number of servicemen needed in a future crisis.

Virtually all young men who are U.S. citizens and “immigrant” male aliens living in the U.S. between the ages of 18 through 25 years must register with Selective Service, in accordance with Federal law and the Military Selective Service Act. Even men with handicaps, missing a limb, blind, etc., are required to register. Late registrations are not accepted. Once a man reaches age 26, the Selective Service System cannot, per Federal law, accept his registration. The last man inducted was in 1973. Since its beginning of the SSS, 16.4 million men have been inducted into military service for the needs of our country. Let’s hope we never have to do it ever again.

By registering, a man complies with Federal law, and he also keeps himself eligible for programs and benefits Congress has connected to the registration requirement. A man must be registered “to stay eligible for” student loans and grants for college, most Federal employment, all security clearances, many state jobs, vocational training under the Workforce Investment Act, and citizenship (if he is not yet a U.S. citizen). More than one-half of the states have also now passed State Legislation requiring a man to be registered in order to obtain a new or renew an old State Driver’s License, or obtain an Identification Card. Nearly half the states have similar laws that link Selective Service registration with a man’s eligibility for state financial assistance, state jobs, or entry to state colleges and universities.

It is a felony to not register with the Selective Service System! A young man who fails to register may, if prosecuted and convicted, face a fine of up to \$250,000, a sentence of up to 5 years in prison, or both. The Selective Service does turn over the names of men who fail to register to the Department of Justice---done semi-annually. It is then the responsibility of the Department of Justice to determine whether or not to prosecute.

Recognizing that I do not recall seeing advertising for the SSS I figure out-of-site, out-of-mind. I encourage all young men to visit www.sss.gov for pertinent information. Thanks for listening, tnhls@co.dodge.wi.us.