

CTMSDL October 21, 2017 Scrimmage, Bethel Middle School, Motion:

**This House Believes That National Service should be compulsory in the United States.**

Notes & Cases by Eliza Posner, August 21, 2017

Notes on the Motion:

This motion is very straightforward, but there are some important things to keep in mind when researching the topic and writing cases. The first is that, although “national service” might *seem* like an easily definable term, many dictionaries define it as “compulsory military service” and UK refers to its military draft as National Service. So, be careful of simply using a straight out of the dictionary definition with this motion—unless you want to limit the debate! The other tricky thing about the motion is that there is not as much research on the topic as one would expect. If your students research national service and expect to find examples of other countries implementing this type of plan they will be disappointed. Instead, the most applicable information you will find is on the civilian service options available to conscientious objectors in nations that have mandatory military service. Examples of these countries include Finland, Austria, and Switzerland. Research on existing US service programs in the US like AmeriCorps, City Year, and the Peace Corps could also be helpful.

There are basically two ways to go about writing a proposition case. One way (the way I have presented it below) is to come up with a very detailed plan for how to implement compulsory national service. The downsides to this approach are that it is easy to miss important plan details and that it uses up a lot of the first proposition speaker’s time. The other way to write a proposition case is to forgo a plan completely and argue that the motion is about the values of adopting such a program and not the specifics of the program. The upside to this approach is that you avoid tricky plans and deflect plan-based refutations. The major downside to this approach is that it is extremely difficult to debate a motion without being clear on what you are defending or attacking and most good opposition teams will point this out. In my sample case I present a plan because I think that is the best way to go on proposition. My plan is long and complicated and would have to be shortened and simplified to be used in a debate.

Finally, while I have presented two sample cases below, I did not attempt to include every good argument on each side. There are many other ways to analyze the motion and attack or defend it. Arguments about national unity and partisanship could potentially be very strong and I also think that moral arguments could be persuasive on either side. There are tons of ways to debate this motion—that’s what makes it such a good topic!

THBT national service should be compulsory in the US. Prop Case:

TH: United States Federal Government

National Service: Military service or civilian service

Compulsory: Mandatory

Plan: Military or civilian service will be mandatory for men and women. A wealth-proportional tax will be levied on individuals who do not complete their service. The length of the service will vary from 6 months to one year depending on the program enrolled in and the amount of training required. Service will occur between the ages of 18 and 35. Exemptions will be given to disabled

persons, religious individuals (Mormons, Jehovah Witness's, e.g.) who must complete proselytizing missions, and others who have legitimate reasons why they cannot complete service.

The nonmilitary service option will be based on the Zivildienst (German for Civilian Service) in Austria. This program is the community service alternative to Austria's compulsory military service. Zivildienst personnel work for approved governmental or non-governmental organizations like nursing homes, refugee organizations, and emergency services. To receive a posting, applicants visit an online form that lists available positions and submit themselves for consideration for specific postings. Different training is given for different positions. Participants are entitled to a stipend, an accommodation allowance, and health insurance. A family allowance is also provided if the worker has dependent persons like children. Our program will be the same as the Austrian Civilian Service program except that, unlike the Austrian program, ours will be available to all people not just conscientious objectors from the military.

Individuals who choose the military service option will go through the normal enlistment and training processes. The only difference between our program and current military enlistment will be the time that individuals must serve.

1. National service leads to societal benefits

- a. The service that individuals will participate in is meaningful and service can be provided in areas that are currently understaffed. For example, President Franklin Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corp mobilized 3 million young, unemployed men to plant 3 billion trees, build 800 parks, and prevent soil erosion and provide drainage on 84 million acres of public land. There is currently a backlog of requested projects on our public lands and waterways that could be carried out by service participants in much the same way that the CCC did.
- b. According to the Aspen Institute, a nonpartisan think tank, 60 percent of AmeriCorps alumni reported that they worked with a public service organization.
- c. The Aspen Institute also writes that, "sixty-three percent of AmeriCorps State and National members and 78 percent of AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps members reported that they volunteered in the last two years, compared to the national average of 26 percent at the time." This means national service will lead to more individuals working or volunteering in service their entire lives, thus creating benefits past the life of the program.

2. National service improves the lives of participants

- a. Service helps individuals develop new interests and explore new career paths. According to the Aspen Institute, approximately 80 percent of AmeriCorps members reported that their service exposed them to new career options.
- b. National service leads to education, professional training, and work experience. This means national service will decrease the importance of higher education in our society because many individuals who did not have the opportunity to attend college will gain valuable skills that will make them competitive in the workforce.

3. National service yields high returns on investment

- a. According to the Aspen Institute, the economic value of the assistance provided by national service programs is sufficient to justify their costs. The Aspen

Institute also says that when national service programs increase in scale, their average costs fall but their average benefits increase.

- b. A study by Columbia University found that the economic benefits of national service for youth are four times greater than the costs of providing the programs.
- c. National service does not just benefit the individuals served, it also benefits the participants. This means that the one-time investment in the individual can yield returns for that individual's entire life. The education that this program provides will help individuals get jobs, thus reducing the cycle of poverty and reducing the amount of governmental assistance taxpayers must provide.

THBT national service should be compulsory in the US. Opp Case:

1. Compulsory service will ruin individuals' plans
  - a. There are some professions that require early dedication. Individuals pursuing careers that involve years of education (specialized neurosurgery) will have to postpone their careers. This postponement means these individuals will end up helping fewer people in their lifetimes.
  - b. We should not stop incredibly talented individuals from working towards their goals. Would you have wanted Steve Jobs to stop innovating for a year and build houses instead? A one size fits all service model will always end up hurting uniquely talented individuals and thereby create an opportunity cost that will hurt us all.
2. The program will not be cost-effective
  - a. The costs of starting the program would be exorbitant. In an article for the Brookings Institute, Bruce Chapman explains, "direct costs would include those for assembling, sorting (and sorting out), allocating, and training several million youth in an unending manpower convoy. Indirect costs include clothing and providing initial medical attention, insurance, the law enforcement associated with such large numbers...housing, and the periodic "leave" arrangements."
  - b. The federal cost for one full-time AmeriCorps member is around \$16,000. When you factor in the fact that AmeriCorps is an established program and members only serve 10-month terms, the cost of national service would be much higher—Chapman estimates it would be up to \$30,000 per member.
  - c. There is also a serious labor cost to the program. National service takes young, often highly educated individuals out of the workforce where they could be providing more benefits. Individuals in the workforce spend more and pay higher taxes so that hidden cost must be factored in as well.
3. Forced service leads to problematic outcomes
  - a. It will lead to disillusionment with the government. Federal programs are often plagued with bureaucracy (think of the VA) and do not function well. If individuals are forced to participate in programs that do not help the people they try to serve this will lead young people to be less likely to get government jobs or support government programs in the future.
  - b. It will lead to bad service. Government service programs that exist today receive huge numbers of applications and accept very small numbers. Last year, the Peace Corp received 17,000 applications for fewer than 4,000 spaces. When forced to

accommodate more individuals, programs will have to expand. This could lead to unqualified members who cannot provide beneficial service. It could also lead to programs that grow too large to administer.

- c. The government is not good at service. One former Peace Corps member said, “I was forced to leave my site in Barranquilla, Colombia, early because I was made sick by the inadequate and unprofessional medical care the Peace Corps offered its volunteers.” Many Teach for America members come away from their experiences feeling like the training they received did not prepare them to teach. This leads to bad outcomes for both the teachers and the students. If the government can’t run these small programs, they can’t run larger ones.

Sources used:

[https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/files/content/docs/franklin/FranklinProject\\_Plan\\_ofAction\\_final.pdf](https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/files/content/docs/franklin/FranklinProject_Plan_ofAction_final.pdf) A great pro national service source

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/06/the-case-against-universal-national-service/277230/> An anti national service op-ed

<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/a-bad-idea-whose-time-is-past-the-case-against-universal-service/> Anti national service piece from the Brookings Institute

<https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2013/09/i-quit-teach-for-america/279724/> Piece on Teach for America

<https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2013/09/i-quit-teach-for-america/279724/> Piece on Peace Corps

<http://www.bmi.gv.at/cms/zivildienst/> Info on Zivildienst in Austria. This source is in German