

Do you feel a draft ... or is it just me?

by Charita M. Goshay

In December, the Selective Service announced that in 2009, it will conduct "readiness" tests for a draft.

You know ... just in case.

Nationwide, draft boards have been filled since 2004.

You know ... just in case.

However, President Bush has said repeatedly there will be no draft. For those worried about the prospect, it's a good sign because Bush rarely changes his mind, even when he should.

For one thing, the all-volunteer military works. The current American soldier is the most highly skilled, best-educated and well-trained in history. The boots on the ground are not the problem.

Some argue that we should reinstate the draft because the military instills the kind of discipline so clearly needed today. Certainly, the military has turned many a boy into a man, but it isn't the government's job to instill self-control and common sense.

Despite the test, and even though the military is stretched tighter than wallpaper, officials say no draft is in the works. But to borrow from Groucho Marx, who are you going to believe, the government, or your own eyes?

MAN FROM THE MIDDLE

In the 1970s, the Beltway was agog upon learning that President Gerald R. Ford regularly made his own toast in the White House kitchen.

It made perfect sense to us, his fellow Midwesterners, our feeling being that if a guy's smart enough run the country, he ought to be able to operate a toaster, for Pete's sake.

Ford embodied the Midwestern mindset: Get off your duff and do it yourself.

It was a marked contrast from the imperiousness of Richard Nixon, who once ordered White House police to don costumes reminiscent of palace guards. After a lifetime of feeling like an also-ran, a resentful Nixon made the most of the presidency, nearly destroying it in the process.

Ford wrestled with no such demons. He understood that the presidency wasn't about him, was bigger than any one man.

Ford didn't employ spin, trot out his religion or dredge up his childhood tragedies and football heroics for votes.

That's because true Midwesterners don't whine or preen.

They just get on with it.

HIS COAT WAS 'REGULAR'

With Ford, what you saw was what you got, in all its polyester-plaid, sartorial splendor. Subsequent presidents tried on the "regular guy" sport coat, with mixed results.

Jimmy Carter was ridiculed for being too normal. Bill Clinton was flayed - rightfully so - for being more roadhouse than Rhodes Scholar, and who really believes George H.W. Bush eats pork rinds?

Most of us were clueless about Gerald Ford. We snickered at his stumbles and shanked golf shots, and laughed at comedic portrayals of him as a naive boob; ignorant of the fact that he was an All-American who threatened to quit football when a black teammate was discriminated against; that he turned down the NFL to attend Yale Law School, and that as a World War II naval officer, he deliberately sought out combat assignments.

That Ford thought enough of his country to toss his own political future overboard by pardoning Nixon, was blithely left to posterity.

This is not to suggest that Ford walked on water, but in the minds of many Americans, he was the last man to occupy the Oval Office in whom there appeared to be no guile. It's no wonder so many turned out to say goodbye.

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