114015
~~15722~~

UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

FEDERAL PERSONNEL AND
COMPENSATION DIVISION

B-201499

December 19, 1980


114015

The Honorable William Proxmire
Chairman, Subcommittee on HUD
and Independent Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

The Honorable Sam Nunn
Chairman, Subcommittee on
Manpower and Personnel
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Honorable Edward P. Boland
Chairman, Subcommittee on HUD
and Independent Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives

The Honorable Richard C. White
Chairman, Subcommittee on Military
Personnel
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

Subject: Evaluation of the Recent Draft Registration (FPCD-81-30)

The completeness and accuracy of the recent draft registration conducted by the Selective Service System has been subject to challenge by a variety of critics and organizations. This issue has been compounded by court actions on the registration of women and the questioned use of social security numbers in the registration process. Collectively, these developments have raised a serious question concerning the use of the registration program in a national emergency. This question is made even more critical because of the commitment to register yet additional youths beginning in January.

013935

(961130)

For these reasons, we evaluated the registration program and related issues, and because of the responsibilities of your Committee with respect to the Selective Service System, we believe that our findings will be of interest to you.

OBJECTIVE, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

The objective of this review was to test the accuracy and completeness of the registration program. We worked at the Selective Service System headquarters in Washington, D.C. We reviewed the system designed to conduct the registration and tested its procedures through statistical sampling of completed registration cards and data on them. Specifically, we sampled about 400 registration cards, using valid statistical sampling techniques. We reviewed data on these cards and compared them against Selective Service System computer tapes. In addition, we interviewed, by phone, 309 of our sampled registrants and compared our results with data on System files. We also assessed the accuracy of the System's registration card count by randomly selecting blocks of cards, counting them, and comparing our count against their records. (Details of our findings and a description of our statistical testing and methodology are explained in enclosure II.)

DRAFT REGISTRATION IS COMPLETE AND ACCURATE

Overall, we did not find any major problems with the manner in which registration was organized or conducted. In reviewing the sample data, however, we noted some errors, as well as some discrepancies, in keypunching (transposed address numbers, misspelled names, etc.), postal service operations, and followup procedures to verify data accuracy. In total, however, these errors did not significantly affect the registration program.

Concerning the accuracy and completeness of the registration program, we found that:

--The Selective Service System's estimate of 3.8 million as the universe of 18- and 19-year-old males that should have registered was reasonable.

--The inventory of registration cards closely approximated the 3.6 million the Selective Service System had publicly announced.

--Most of the data regarding names, addresses, dates of birth, and social security numbers on the registration cards and in the data processing system was accurate. The total errors we found, projected to the entire inventory, represent about 5 percent of the registrants, and they were predominantly caused by illegible registration data on the cards. Within the more than 3 million registration inventory, we estimated that only

--459 cards had obviously fictitious registrant names (Ronald Reagan, Jimmy Carter, etc.), another 9,000 had nonverifiable names, and another 36,000 had misspelled names;

--459 cards had obviously fictitious registrant addresses (Earth, White House, etc.), and another 81,000 had inaccurate addresses (33 percent zip code and 67 percent city/street);

--27,000 cards had date-of-birth errors which were due to inaccurate coding; and

--18,000 cards had errors in social security numbers.

Further, while these errors represent a significant number of registrants, the System corrected or was in the process of correcting most of them. Eliminating all the errors, however, is unrealistic although final accuracy levels of 98 percent do not appear to be unreasonable expectations.

Recent actions by the U.S. Supreme Court and a U.S. District Court on the questions of the constitutionality of limiting the registration process to men and the use of social security numbers in the registration process also merited our evaluation.

If the Supreme Court decides that women also must be registered, the System would have no problem in doing so. Current forms provide for identification of sex, and this data could be readily processed by the System's computers. If additional youths were registered, however, there would be added costs, estimated by the System to be about $2 a person. Thus, if the System registered about 3.6 million women, costs would exceed $7 million.

The U.S. District Court's November 14, 1980, decision that the System's use of Social Security numbers violates the Privacy Act portends greater problems for the System. If finally sustained through all legal reviews, the prohibition against requiring social security numbers would remove one of the System's internal data verification controls. Unless a final court decision is made quickly, it appears that the System will have the time to develop adequate alternative controls or to obtain legislative approval to use social security numbers in its registration efforts.

CONCLUSIONS

We believe the Selective Service System has made significant progress in designing an effective registration program and correcting the numerous shortcomings we have disclosed in our prior reports. (See enc. I.) We were particularly pleased to note the coordination achieved by an integrated labor force (other Government agencies, contractors, and Selective Service employees) and sophisticated planning methods to accomplish the registration program. We were also pleased to observe the commitment of the System's personnel to the achievement of its goals.

- - - - -

We discussed our findings with the Director of the Selective Service System. He was pleased with the advancements the System has made since registration and agreed that our prior reports were accurate in pointing out that the previous postmobilization registration plans would not have met the Department of Defense's manpower needs.

We are sending copies of this report to the Secretary of Defense; the Director, Selective Service System; Director, Office of Management and Budget; and other interested parties.

Sincerely yours,

H. L. Krieger
Director

Enclosures

ENCLOSURE I

List of Prior Reports on the Selective Service System

1. "What Are the Capabilities of the Selective Service System?" FPCD-79-4, December 14, 1978.

2. "Weaknesses In the Selective Service System's Emergency Registration Plan" FPCD-79-89, August 29, 1979.

3. "Actions To Improve Parts of the Military Manpower Mobilization System Are Underway" FPCD-80-58, July 22, 1980.

ENCLOSURE II

EVALUATION OF SELECTIVE SERVICE SYSTEM'S REGISTRATION PROGRAM

REGISTRATION SYSTEM, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

The system developed and used to conduct registration generally consisted of the following:

--The U.S. Postal Service provided the personnel and locations for the registration. Postal clerks at about 34,000 post offices were involved in the registration process.

--The Selective Service System trained post office headquarters officials who in turn were responsible for the training of local post office employees.

--Persons having to register were to report to the post office, pick up the registration card, complete it, and return it to the postal official.

--The postal official was to seek an identification to verify the data written on the registration card. If an identification was not available, the card was to be noted as such and accepted because of the need to register all individuals in the required age groups.

--Postal officials were to stamp, initial, and mail the completed cards to one of 6 predetermined Internal Revenue Service processing centers.

--Internal Revenue Service processing centers were to receive, sort, number and edit the registration cards and keypunch the information on computer tape. The cards and tapes were to be forwarded to the Selective Service System.

--The Selective Service System was to maintain control over the registration cards and make internal checks as to the authenticity of the registrant and accuracy of key registration data. They also were to provide each registrant a letter acknowledging his registration and request information with regard to changes in the originally provided data.

ENCLOSURE II

CALCULATIONS OF
REGISTRANT UNIVERSE

The Selective Service System estimate of the registrant population size is reasonable although there were some deficiencies in the data used. The Selective Service System's estimate of the registrant population size was about 3.88 million 18-and 19-year old males. This estimate was based upon 1979 population statistics published by the Bureau of Census and reduced by a calculated number of institutionalized males and those in the Armed Forces. The following table indicates the numbers derived by the Selective Service System.

	Year of birth		
	1960	1961	Total
Estimated male population	2,160,000	2,150,000	4,310,000
Less:			
Institutionalized	30,000	30,000	60,000
Service members	201,000	169,000	370,000
Total	1,929,000	1,951,000	3,880,000

In evaluating the above calculations we found that the Bureau of Census population data used by the Selective Service System did not account for U.S. civilian citizens living abroad or the population of the U.S. territories and possessions. We estimated the population of these areas and determined the total universe to be about 3.98 million.

The difference between the Selective Service System's estimate and ours is about 96,000 registrants maximum but the difference should be less because of the population decline between 1979 and 1980 which we did not take into account.

As with our estimate, any estimate involves some assumption because of data limitations and/or nonavailability. Results obtained would vary depending on the assumptions made. The additional increase of 96,000 registrants from our estimate is not that significant in that it would slightly decrease the registrant compliance rate from 93 percent to 91 percent. We believe the system estimate was reasonable considering

ENCLOSURE II

there was only a slight difference in our estimate and that of the Selective Service System's. We believe, however, that when the 1980 census data is available, the System should update its calculation and include the population from all affected areas.

NUMBER OF REGISTRATION CARDS IN INVENTORY

We sampled the registration cards on file with the Selective Service System to (1) count and verify numbers contained in Selective Service System's public statements against control documents and (2) review them for obvious fictitious names and/or erroneous addresses. We found our count agreed in all instances with that shown on the Selective Service Systems' control documents, except for one card with an obviously fictitious name and one card with an erroneous address.

Selective Service System procedures call for completed registration cards to be sequentially numbered and grouped into blocks of 100. The blocks were further grouped into batches of about 1,350 cards and boxed accordingly. There were about 2,700 boxes (37,715 blocks) on file with the Selective Service System in late September--the time we made our tests. The Selective Service System maintained control documents which showed the total cards in each block and the cumulative in each box. To verify the block count we counted cards in 82 blocks (7,846 cards) and matched our count against the System control documents. In all instances the System's count and our count agreed. Statistically our tests indicated that with a 95-percent confidence level, the number of cards on file with the Selective Service System is about 3.6 million and this agrees with the numbers published by the Selective Service System.

While counting the cards, we also reviewed them for obviously fictitious names and erroneous addresses. We found one card in each category. One card had the name Ronald Reagan, born 1907, and Republican Party as the address. The other card had Earth as the address. The cards were not found in the same block of 100 cards. Statistically this would indicate that there would be between 1 and 1,383 registration cards with obviously fictitious names and between 1 and 1,383 with obviously erroneous addresses among the 3.6 million cards. Considering that these errors were not on the same card there would be a maximum of about 2,766 cards (or .08%) with these kind of errors in the inventory.

ENCLOSURE II

SAMPLED REGISTRATIONS

We randomly sampled 406 registration cards to verify the information on them against the data transferred to Selective Service System computer tapes. We also interviewed registrants by phone. Our tests were to assess keypunching accuracy, identify procedural weaknesses, and verify the data with the actual registrant. For the most part we found the data on Selective Service System records was accurate. Most of the problems we found were caused by illegible data on the registration card and inaccurately recorded on the System's computer tapes. Most of these errors can be minimized by having local postal officials go over the cards with the registrant and reprint illegible data.

Generally, the Selective Service System designed an effective data processing system to control and maintain registration data. The methodology we employed to test data accuracy and internal procedures is described in the following sections.

METHODOLOGY

We determined that 369 of the 406 sampled registration cards had contained a complete telephone number. We were able to obtain telephone numbers for an additional 9 registrants through directory assistance, therefore, we could attempt to contact 378, or 93 percent, of the sampled registrants. Because of this high percentage we chose to interview registrants by phone to verify the information on the registration card, rather than use other data verification techniques. Also, we could test the internal control procedures to prevent erroneous data from entering the system after the actual date of registration. Also, telephoning the registrant provided a means for obtaining information quickly and consistently through the use of a standard questionnaire. Also, the 93 percent would represent about 3.4 of the 3.6 million registration cards in the inventory.

TELEPHONE INTERVIEW RESULTS

We were able to directly contact 309 of the 378 registrants. Each of these registrants provided information pertaining to their identity and their registration with

the Selective Service System. We also spoke with either a relative, friend, or roommate of an additional 37 registrants who acknowledged knowing the individual we were attempting to call. Thus, we could identify, with a degree of certainty, 347 registrants. We did not attempt to verify information about the registrant with relative, friend, or roommate because of unknowns and uncertainties associated with second hand information. Our data results pertain to the information concerning the 309 registrants that we could directly contact.

The issues we covered in our interview related to (1) the accuracy of the registration data on Selective Service System files, (2) who actually did the registering, (3) the sex of the registrant, (4) Armed Forces commitments, and (5) procedures followed by post office officials dealing with the registrant. The first issue results were shown on page 2. We used a 95 percent confidence level with a + or - 5 percent error factor. The following discusses the results of the remaining issues.

Who Registered, Sex of Registrant, and Armed Forces Commitment

We found that in the majority of cases that (1) the individual did register personally with the Selective Service System, (2) the person indicated being of the male sex which was required to register, and (3) the individual was not in the Armed Forces at the time of registration. Five people indicated they were in the Armed Forces, but it should be noted that 18- and 19-year old individuals serving in the National Guard or Reserves were required to register. We did not determine whether these five were in this category. The following table indicates the results of our inquiries into these issues:

ENCLOSURE II

Issue	No. in sample	Percent of those contacted	Projected No. in universe (000 omitted)
(1) How registered			
Registered self	305	98.7	2,740
Registered by someone else	1	.3	8
Don't know how registered	3	1.0	28
(2) Sex			
Males	309	100	2,776
Females	0	0	
(3) In Armed Forces at time of registration			
Yes	5	1.6	44
No	304	98.4	2,731

The above statistics are projected against about 2.8 million of the 3.4 million registrants. The 3.4 million represents the universe of those on which we had telephone numbers and could attempt contacting.

Postal Service Operations

The Post Office performed several tasks during the registration process including maintaining, controlling, and providing cards to registrants; reviewing the cards for completeness; and verifying certain data against a presented form of identification. We asked each registrant to recall what procedures they followed at the post offices and to verify their place of registration. These questions were asked to evaluate

the manner in which the procedures were followed. Overall, the post office officials performed those tasks they were asked to do. The following table shows the results of our questioning and as in the preceding section is projected against the 2.8-million universe.

Issue	No. in sample (note a)	Percent of those contacted	Projected no. in universe (000 omitted)
At post office, the registration card was obtained from			
Behind counter	165	53.3	1,479
Self service counter	130	42.1	1,169
Other	10	3.2	89
Completed registration card was:			
Returned to postal official directly	294	95.1	2,640
Left on counter	6	1.9	53
Mailed in	3	1.0	28
Other	2	.6	17

a/ Totals may not add to 309 because the registrant may not have been asked or may not have answered every question.

ENCLOSURE II

Issue	No. in Sample (note a)	Percent of those contacted	Projected no. in universe (000 omitted)
Postal official asked registrant to show identification			
Yes	232	75.1	2,085
No	42	13.6	377
Don't remember	20	6.5	180
Registrant showed an identification			
Yes	230	74.4	2,065
No	51	16.5	458
Don't remember	13	4.2	117

a/ Totals may not add to 309 because the registrant may not have been asked or may not have answered every question.