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Women Don't Belong in Military Combat

*Statement by Phyllis Schlafly
To the Presidential Commission on the
Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces
Washington, D.C., June 9, 1992*

The issue is not whether women *can* be assigned to combat duty in the U.S. Armed Forces, but whether they *should* be. The question we should ask is *not* whether some women can perform admirably in many military situations (they can), but whether the U.S. Armed Forces are going to rank fundamental American-family values above the feminist goal of a sex-neutral society.

When we look back on the recent Gulf War, one of the images that are seared into our memory is that of tearful soldier-mothers saying goodbye to their two-month-old breast-feeding babies. That was a national embarrassment.

How did this unnatural event happen? There was no emergency that required those mothers and those babies to make such a sacrifice. No cause in the Middle East justified this shame to our nation. There was no shortage of able-bodied men to "man" those posts in the Middle East. Those unhappy cases were not just a bureaucratic snafu.

They were the result of a deliberate Pentagon policy to acquiesce in the feminist doctrine that men and women are fungibles, that military assignments must be made without regard to the sex of the individual, and that the U.S. Armed Forces should be an instrument of social experimentation to demonstrate total sex-equality.

Pregnancy and childbirth? Oh, say the feminists, that's just a temporary disability like breaking a leg; after six weeks, a mother is fully deployable to any job, just like a father.

President Bush said that he sent our forces to the Middle East in order to defend "our way of life." Sending moms to battle is not the "way of life" Americans want to defend. That policy was developed largely by civilian

pressure groups, which view the U.S. Armed Forces as a federal jobs program and a vehicle for social mobility upwards. They propagated the false notions that military service takes priority over motherhood that, anyway, military service has little or nothing to do with war.

But the American taxpayers do not spend billions of dollars to maintain the U.S. Armed Forces so that young men and women can enjoy opportunities for education, travel, job training, and upward mobility. We maintain our military so that they can win our wars. As General Douglas MacArthur said in his great "Duty, Honor, Country" speech, "Your mission remains fixed, determined, inviolable. It is to win our wars. . . . You are the ones who are trained to fight."

Fighting wars is a mission that requires tough, tenacious and courageous men to endure the most primitive and uncivilized circumstances and pain, in order to survive in combat against enemies who are just as tough, tenacious and courageous, and probably vicious and sadistic, too. The purpose of war is to kill the enemy — to make the enemy die for his country.

Men are attracted to serve in the military because of its intensely masculine character. The qualities that make them courageous and victorious soldiers — aggressiveness, risk-taking, and enjoyment of body-contact competition — are conspicuously absent in women. Pretending that women can perform equally with men in tasks that require those attributes is not only dishonest; it corrupts the system. It discourages men from developing those skills that produce Douglas MacArthurs and George Pattons in our country's hour of need.

Combat Is Not a New Issue

May I put this women-in-combat issue in historical context for you? It is not a new issue; it has been widely debated across America. It was the cutting edge of the ten-year constitutional battle that was waged across our country from 1972 to 1982 over the proposed amendment to the U. S. Constitution called the Equal Rights Amendment. E.R.A. would have put a sex-neutral strait-jacket on our society. It would have forced (among other things) precisely the result that is before you in this Commission, namely, assigning women to combat. This military issue was the principal reason why E.R.A. was defeated — despite immense support from important politicians and organizations, ample funding, and the universal clamor of the media.

You can almost tell the age of any American by the way he or she uses the term “the war.” Many of the women who are lobbying for assigning women to military combat today are so young that, when they say “the war,” they mean last year’s Gulf War, which was practically devoid of real combat. Young people in that age group have little or no comprehension of what military combat really means. They have no shared experiences with those who use the term “the war” to mean a prolonged war with heavy casualties. Nor do they understand the enormous societal dislocations caused by the military draft, and how large a part it played for decades in the lives of those who lived through the earlier wars of this century.

The Equal Rights Amendment came before our nation during the Vietnam War, when war was bloody and the draft was a factor in every family’s life.

Why We Feel So Strongly

Let me try to tell you something of the deep, emotional feelings that we — who had draft-age daughters during that period — have about the feminist goal to draft 18-year-old girls and assign them to military combat. And, indeed, *that* was the feminists’ goal.

Their chief theoretician, Yale Law School Professor Thomas I. Emerson, laid down the official E.R.A. line in a 100-page widely-quoted article in the *Yale Law Journal* (April 1971). “As between brutalizing our young men and brutalizing our young women,” he wrote, “there is little to choose. . . Women will serve in all kinds of units, and they will be eligible for combat duty.”

Throughout many wars, our American culture has, indeed, approved of a difference of treatment between young men and young women. Yet, all the feminist leaders without exception — and I debated scores of them — always said: Yes, women must be drafted and assigned to combat; that’s what we want; that’s equality! But they could not sell the American people on that unnatural policy. That’s why E.R.A. failed. And, funny thing, not one of those feminists had a draft-age daughter.

The feminists carried their demand to the U.S. Supreme Court in the 1981 case called *Rostker v. Goldberg*. The brief filed by the National Organization for Women labeled women’s exemption from the military draft “blatant and harmful discrimination” and said it consigns women to a “second-class status.”

The reason why it is essential to review this history now is that the Supreme Court ruled in *Rostker v. Goldberg* that it *is* constitutional for Congress to exempt *all* women from the military draft and from draft registration) *for the reason that draft registration, conscription, and military combat are all one continuum*. The court based its decision on the fact that any military draft is for the purpose of raising combat troops. So, women can be constitutionally exempted from the draft and from draft registration *only because* they are not eligible for combat duty. The Supreme Court specifically cited the statutory restrictions on the participation of women in combat in the Navy and Air Force (10 U.S.C. 6015 and 8549) as the reason why girls are not required to be drafted.

There are many cultural, societal, family, pregnancy, and practical reasons why women should not be drafted. Women have more important things to do, such as taking care of their babies and keeping their families together. And, of course, women can serve as volunteers. But when the Supreme Court states that combat-exclusion is the reason for exempting women, then *that* is the law of the land, and we must make our decisions in the light of that ruling.

Combat Affects All Women

This means that a decision to assign servicewomen to military combat does not affect volunteer servicewomen only. This decision is a life-threatening and a family-threatening danger to every girl who is draft-age now or in the future. We have no crystal ball — we cannot know what the future holds in terms of war or a reinstated draft that could impose involuntary conscription on young women.

The women-in-combat decision must not be made on the basis of what is desired by volunteer servicewomen. It should be made for the welfare of the 99.8 percent of American women who have not chosen a military career. This includes women who believe that their family comes first, women who do not want to spend their childbearing years trying to do what the entire world (including Israel) has always considered man’s work, and women who believe that mothering is more important than flying a plane or driving a tank.

The American culture honors the obvious and eternal differences between men and women, and expects them to be respected by the military. American women do expect their fathers, brothers, husbands and sweethearts to defend them from the bad guys of the world, and the

American culture will not accept the image of men at home while women go off to fight the enemy.

Furthermore, we expect the military to adhere to a standard of honesty about the differentials between male and female performance, rather than deceive the public through dual standards, set-asides and quotas, combined with intimidating allegations about "sexual harassment" against men who criticize dual standards. Now that the cat is out of the bag about dual standards from the testimony of the West Point officer who was cross-examined in the Virginia Military Institute case, we expect the U.S. Armed Forces to level with the American people about the differences between men and women. Rationalizations that "equal effort" can replace equal performance are a fatal mistake because there will be no "gender-norming" in a

real combat situation.

We hear the constant refrain that "times have changed," but there is no change whatsoever in obvious facts of human nature such as that men and women differ in so many important ways, that healthy young women are apt to get pregnant, and that there is a profound difference between male-to-male bonding and male-to-female bonding — a factor that can make the difference between life and death on the battlefield. No matter what social changes are alleged to have taken place, the policies of our U.S. Armed Forces should respect the dignity and value of marriage and motherhood.

Women serve our country admirably, both on the home front and in many positions in the U.S. Armed Forces. But they should not be assigned to military combat.

Dan Quayle and the Cultural Elite

Vice President Dan Quayle has upset a lot of people by his criticisms of the "cultural elite." I watched one television interviewer badgering him. "You were born into a wealthy family," she said; "you yourself must be part of the elite."

Quayle smiled and said, no, he was just a midwestern boy with ordinary midwestern values. The TV reporter persisted: "Who are the cultural elite? Name them!" Quayle responded, "They know who they are."

Quayle was right not to name names. The inquiring reporter was laying a trap for him, and he refused to fall into it. The "cultural elite" is not synonymous with the social elite, or the financial elite, or the political elite, or the academic elite.

The cultural elite that Quayle criticized consists of the influential leftists in our society who presume to tell us what to think, what to admire, what to spend our money on, and how to act.

The targets of Quayle's attacks are particularly piqued because he fingered them with a phrase of praise rather than scorn. "Cultural elite" is not a pejorative. The yelping by the targets of his criticism, however, has turned it into an epithet.

Quayle could have called them "nattering nabobs of negativism," or "pointy-headed intellectuals," or "power-hungry purveyors of permissiveness and playboy lifestyles," or just plain leftwing radicals in the media and the movies, the arts and academia. But he didn't. Elite is a nice word — not exactly friendly, but, on the other hand, not unfriendly. It sounds important. It evokes respect, even envy.

My dictionary gives two relevant definitions for elite: "the choice or best of a group or class of persons" and "a group of persons exercising the major share of authority or influence within a larger organization." That doesn't sound derogatory, does it?

The term "cultural" is more nuanced. Again, looking to the dictionary we read: "that which is excellent in the arts, manners, etc." or "what is generally regarded as excellent in arts, letters, manners, scholarly pursuits, etc."

The cultural elite are angry at Quayle because they don't want to be known as a "group or class of persons," they don't want Americans to realize that they "exercise influence," they do want to be "generally regarded as excellent," and they don't want us to know that they are using their influence to undermine and change our morals and manners, arts and academic pursuits.

The cultural elite consists of the television networks, the newspapers with national pretensions, the movie industry, the rock music empires, the tenured radicals on university campuses, wealthy leftwing foundations, those chic sources that pompously presume to tell us what is "art" and which immoral lifestyles we must tolerate, plus those who pander to the above and pick our pockets to finance them with our tax dollars.

The most influential segment of the cultural elite was identified as the "media elite" ten years ago when pollsters S. Robert Lichter and Stanley Rothman published an extraordinary in-depth survey in the respected journal *Public Opinion*. Their findings were based on hour-long interviews with 240 journalists and broadcasters at the most influential media outlets: CBS, NBC, ABC, PBS, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street*

Journal, Time, and Newsweek.

The survey showed that the media elite are strong supporters of sexual permissiveness: 90 percent agree that abortion should be legal, 54 percent believe that adultery is not wrong, 76 percent believe that homosexuality is not wrong, and 85 percent believe that homosexuals should be permitted to teach in public schools.

The secular or anti-religious outlook of the media elite is their most striking characteristic. The survey showed that 50 percent say they have no religious affiliation whatsoever, 86 percent admit that they seldom or never attend religious services, and only 8 percent go to church or synagogue weekly.

Politically, the media elite always, by a large margin, support the most liberal presidential candidate. They even voted 81 percent for George McGovern in 1972.

So, the cultural elite tell us that serial marriages and illegitimate births are in, two-parent families are out. We must tolerate ACT-UP, but destroy Operation Rescue with RICO and police brutality.

The cultural elite decree that we must enjoy tax-funded blasphemous depictions of Christ, but express outrage at a privately-financed creche on the city square. Silent prayer must be banned from the classroom, but parents who object to their young children being subjected to classroom discussions of sexual acts, complete with pictures, videos, and plastic models, must be branded as "censors."

Thanks to Dan Quayle, the cultural elite, with all its pomposities and peculiarities, has become a topic of controversy. That's the first step toward repudiating their influence on the real American culture.

Some Things Are Wrong

The cultural elite is trembling in rage at the very thought that anyone in authority would dare to label any behavior as "wrong." Extra-marital sex and its unhealthy, expensive consequences? That's just an alternative lifestyle! Burning down Los Angeles? Don't blame the rioters; it's Ronald Reagan's fault because he didn't give enough taxpayer handouts to the poor.

In his San Francisco speech to the Commonwealth Club, Vice President Dan Quayle called for a public discussion of the fact that some "things are wrong." He said, "It's time to talk again about family, hard work, integrity and personal responsibility." He is right.

Britain's new Education Secretary, John Patten, recently made this same point even more strongly. In the British journal, *The Spectator* of April 18, Patten identified the cause of the sharp increase in crime.

Patten said, "It is, to me, self-evident that we are born with a sense of good and evil. It is also self-evident that as we grow up each individual chooses whether to be good or bad. Fear of eternal damnation was a message

reinforced through attendance at church every week. The loss of that fear has meant a critical motive has been lost to young people when they decide whether to try to be good citizens or to be criminals."

Patten added, "Dwindling belief in redemption and damnation has led to loss of fear of the eternal consequences of goodness and badness. It has had a profound effect on personal morality — especially on criminality."

Patten called on society, and especially on churches and parents, to reaffirm the concept that "evil exists, not endemically in the corridors of power, but individually; that responsibilities are as important as rights; and that there are no excuses for crime."

It is clear that the young hoodlums who torched Los Angeles and killed innocent people are not restrained by respect for other people's persons or property, or even by fear of police or prison. The various forces that have secularized America, redefined the family, and liberated our society from "Victorian values" have nothing to substitute for a fear of eternal damnation as a punishment for evil acts.

Three cheers for Dan Quayle in coming right out and saying that some things are just plain wrong.

Vice President Dan Quayle's two important speeches on the cultural elite — one given to the Commonwealth Club of California and the other to the Southern Baptist Convention — are available in booklet form from Eagle Forum, P.O. Box 618, Alton, Illinois 62002, at \$1 per copy.

Phyllis Schlafly is the author of 13 books, including five books on defense and foreign policy: *The Gravediggers* (1964), *Strike From Space* (1965), *The Betrayers* (1968), *Kissinger on the Couch* (1975), and *Ambush at Vladivostok* (1976). She was a member of the Commission on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution, 1985-1991, by appointment of President Reagan.

She is a lawyer, newspaper columnist, radio commentator, and president of **Eagle Forum**. A graduate of Washington University, Washington University Law School, and Harvard University, she worked her way through undergraduate college on the night shift at the St. Louis Ordnance Plant, firing rifles and machine guns to test ammunition before acceptance by the U.S. Government during World War II.

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