President’s draft overhaul falls short of total reform

WASHINGTON (CPS) — President Nixon last week proposed a major overhaul of the Selective Service System that would include selection of 19 year-olds first by lottery. But the President’s proposals fell far short of completely eliminating the inequities and uncertainties inherent in the draft.

He asked Congress to amend the Selective Service Act so he could make these changes:

* Change from an oldest-first to a youngest-first call-up system,
* Reduce the period of prime vulnerability from seven years to one year,
* Utilize a random, or lottery, selection system,
* Continue undergraduate deferments but place students in the prime vulnerability pool for one year after studies end,
* Permit graduate students to complete the full year instead of one term if they are ordered for induction, and
* Review guidelines, procedures, and standards related to exemptions and deferments.

The trouble with Nixon’s proposals, as even the New York Times noted, is not what is in it but what is not. The President virtually ignored the suggestions made by a 1967 White House commission that would have cleaned up uniform standards on all local boards. Moreover, Nixon declined to recommend other changes that have been urged this session in Congress.

Nixon’s reforms have a hollow ring because of the way he went about recommending them. The President has executive powers that allow him to change the order of call, end occupational deferments, make standards more uniform, and modernize the system without Congressional approval.

And he neglected to comment on the future of what many young people feel is the symbol of the antiquated draft: Director Lewis B. Hershey, with his sight getting worse and his age advancing.

The President’s call for Congressional action was full of the recent rhetoric of draft reform, aiming for equity and reasonableness: “We can do no less for the youth of our country,” he said. Young men turning 18 and others who care had hoped for more.