

The original documents are located in Box 1, folder “9/16/74 - Announcing a Program for the Return of Vietnam Era Draft Evaders and Military Deserters” of the President’s Speeches and Statements: Reading Copies at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

Copyright Notice

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Gerald Ford donated to the United States of America his copyrights in all of his unpublished writings in National Archives collections. Works prepared by U.S. Government employees as part of their official duties are in the public domain. The copyrights to materials written by other individuals or organizations are presumed to remain with them. If you think any of the information displayed in the PDF is subject to a valid copyright claim, please contact the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

STATEMENT OF THE PRESIDENT
IN ANNOUNCING A PROGRAM FOR THE RETURN OF
VIETNAM ERA DRAFT EVADERS AND MILITARY DESERTERS

IN MY FIRST WEEK AS PRESIDENT, I ASKED THE ATTORNEY
GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES AND, THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE TO
REPORT TO ME, AFTER CONSULTATION WITH OTHER GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS
AND PRIVATE CITIZENS CONCERNED, ON THE STATUS OF THOSE YOUNG
AMERICANS WHO HAVE BEEN CONVICTED, CHARGED, INVESTIGATED OR ARE
STILL BEING SOUGHT AS DRAFT EVADERS OR MILITARY DESERTERS.

ON AUGUST 19, AT THE NATIONAL CONVENTION OF THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN
WARS IN CHICAGO, I ANNOUNCED MY INTENTION TO GIVE THESE YOUNG PEOPLE
A CHANCE TO EARN THEIR RETURN TO THE MAINSTREAM OF AMERICAN SOCIETY
SO THAT THEY CAN, IF THEY CHOOSE, CONTRIBUTE EVEN THOUGH BELATEDLY
TO THE BUILDING AND BETTERMENT OF OUR COUNTRY AND THE WORLD.

**FOR AMERICAN FIGHTING
MEN**

I DID THIS FOR THE SIMPLE REASON THAT THE LONG AND

DIVISIVE WAR IN VIETNAM HAS BEEN OVER, ~~FOR AMERICAN FIGHTING MEN,~~

MORE THAN A YEAR, AND I WAS DETERMINED THEN AS NOW TO DO

EVERYTHING IN MY POWER TO BIND UP THE NATION'S WOUNDS.

I PROMISED TO THROW THE WEIGHT OF MY PRESIDENCY INTO
THE SCALES OF JUSTICE ON THE SIDE OF LENIENCY AND MERCY, BUT I
PROMISED ALSO TO WORK WITHIN THE EXISTING SYSTEM OF MILITARY AND
CIVILIAN LAW AND THE PRECEDENTS SET BY MY PREDECESSORS WHO FACED
AMONG THEM PRESIDENTS
SIMILAR POST-WAR SITUATIONS ~~SUCH AS~~ ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND HARRY S.
TRUMAN.

MY OBJECTIVE OF MAKING FUTURE PENALTIES FIT THE SERIOUS-
NESS OF EACH INDIVIDUAL'S OFFENSE AND OF MITIGATING PUNISHMENT
ALREADY METED OUT IN A SPIRIT OF EQUITY HAS PROVED AN IMMENSELY
HARD AND COMPLICATED MATTER, EVEN MORE DIFFICULT THAN I KNEW IT
WOULD BE. BUT THE AGENCIES OF GOVERNMENT CONCERNED AND MY OWN
STAFF HAVE WORKED WITH ME LITERALLY DAY AND NIGHT IN ORDER TO DEVELOP
FAIR AND ORDERLY PROCEDURES AND COMPLETED THEIR WORK FOR MY FINAL
APPROVAL OVER THIS LAST WEEKEND. I DO NOT WANT TO DELAY ANOTHER DAY
IN RESOLVING THE DILEMMAS OF THE PAST, SO THAT WE MAY ALL GET
GOING ON THE PRESSING PROBLEMS OF THE PRESENT. THEREFORE, I AM
TODAY SIGNING THE NECESSARY PRESIDENTIAL PROCLAMATION AND EXECUTIVE
ORDERS THAT WILL PUT THIS PLAN INTO EFFECT.

THE PROGRAM PROVIDES FOR ADMINISTRATIVE DISPOSITION OF CASES INVOLVING DRAFT EVADERS AND MILITARY DESERTERS NOT YET CONVICTED OR PUNISHED. IN SUCH CASES, 24 MONTHS OF ALTERNATE SERVICE WILL BE REQUIRED WHICH MAY BE REDUCED FOR MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES. THE PROGRAM ALSO DEALS WITH CASES OF THOSE ALREADY CONVICTED BY A CIVILIAN OR MILITARY COURT. FOR THE LATTER PURPOSE, I AM ESTABLISHING A CLEMENCY REVIEW BOARD OF NINE DISTINGUISHED AMERICANS WHOSE DUTY IT WILL BE TO ASSIST ME IN ASSURING THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S FORGIVENESS IS EXTENDED TO APPLICABLE CASES OF PRIOR CONVICTION AS EQUITABLY AND AS IMPARTIALLY AS IS HUMANLY POSSIBLE.

THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF THIS PROGRAM IS THE RECONCILIATION OF ALL OUR PEOPLE AND THE RESTORATION OF THE ESSENTIAL UNITY OF AMERICANS WITHIN WHICH HONEST DIFFERENCES OF OPINION DO NOT DESCEND TO ANGRY DISCORD AND MUTUAL PROBLEMS ARE NOT POLARIZED BY EXCESSIVE PASSION.

MY SINCERE HOPE IS THAT THIS IS A CONSTRUCTIVE STEP
TOWARD A CALMER AND COOLER APPRECIATION OF OUR INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS
AND RESPONSIBILITIES AND OUR COMMON PURPOSE AS A NATION, WHOSE
FUTURE IS ALWAYS MORE IMPORTANT THAN ITS PAST.

#