

Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo, and honorable members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee my name is Gina LeDuc-Kuntz. I am the mother to six children and live in Freeport, Maine. I do not support LD 706 and urge you to vote "ought not to pass."

As a mother to 6 children: three young adults and three still under 18, I, like most other parents, can safely say a 16 year old is often impulsive, often irrational and has not gained the brain development to make adult decisions in most instances. That being said, understanding the history behind younger and younger voting age is important. Recognizing that the voting age has been historically reduced, not out of an enlightened understanding of the developing young person, but for other self serving government reasons is critical.

On March 23, 1971, Congress passed the 26th Amendment to the United States Constitution pushing the voting age downwards from 21 to 18 years of age.

It was then argued and questioned if 18 year olds are old enough to be drafted and sent to war are 18 year olds old enough to vote?

Congress had the question wrong.

Instead, the question is "are 18 year olds too young to go to war?" The answer most certainly is yes particularly looking at the Vietnam War social outcomes. According to "Drugs in the Vietnam War:"

"The Vietnam war was the most televised war in this time, exposing the behavior of soldiers off duty during the war, shocking millions of Americans at home. American soldiers in Vietnam began using drugs while off duty to help cope with all their struggles during the war. The Department of Defense reported in 1971 that by that time, 51% of soldiers had smoked marijuana, 28% had consumed heroin or cocaine, and 31% had used psychedelics such as LSD or mushrooms. In addition to illicit drug use, many soldiers became heavily dependent on amphetamines and sedatives; the House Select Committee on Crime reported that approximately 225 million tablets of stimulants were consumed by the armed forces between 1966 and 1969."

(<https://www.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=b59fef8b2af345d28553d58509b365a2>)

No more than mere babies, these 18 year olds were thrust into a nightmare war, against their will, without the skills to cope with such a travesty. These 18 year olds, whom our government granted the right to vote rather than bringing home and protecting from the horror of war, not only dabbled in drugs, but brought thousands of children into this world who then went on to be abused, abandoned, bullied and dестered.

Explained in "One Man's Mission to Bring Home Amerasians Born During the Vietnam War,"

“Like many children, Jimmy Miller recalls a childhood filled with bullying and abuse. But for him it was different. The son of an American soldier and a Vietnamese woman, Miller was born in the shadow of the Vietnam War and was among the thousands of babies left behind after the U.S. withdrew from the conflict in 1975. Miller’s parents were married, but a combat injury forced his father to return to the U.S. when Miller was a baby.” These war babies – known as Amerasians — were called names like “children of the dust” and “half-breeds.” Many of them were abandoned by their mothers – dropped off at orphanages or even thrown into trash cans — amid fears they would be attacked by the Communist government.”

<https://www.npr.org/2018/07/12/628398153/one-mans-mission-to-bring-home-amerasians-born-during-vietnam-war>

Clearly, 18 year olds did not have the capacity to navigate the situation our United States Government placed them in during the Vietnam War. Subsequently, they made poor choices in an already very bad situation; drug abuse and children born into devastating situations followed.

Here we are today, nearly 50 years late, contemplating as to whether even younger children have reached the developmental capacity needed to make an informed vote. On March 23, 1971 Congress never asked the question as to whether young people have the developmental capacity to be informed voters. Instead, offering the right to vote to 18 year olds was a peace offering of sorts from the United States Government to a demographic that has been so overly exploited without their consent and against their will.

Congress never asked if 18 was too young to die in war. Congress never asked if 18 was too young to be brought to war against the individual’s will. Congress never asked if sending 18 year olds to war is child abuse.

Looking at the social fallout from the Vietnam War, clearly 18 was too young.

Thank You,
Gina LeDuc-Kuntz
Freeport, Maine