

President Obama's Selective Service Registration

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Selective Service Registration

According to The Military Selective Service Act (<http://www.sss.gov/PDFs/MSSA-2003.pdf>), Barack Obama was required to register for the draft upon the reinstatement of the Selective Service System in June of 1980. The act reads:

Male citizens of the United States and other males residing in the United States, unless exempted by the Military Selective Service Act, as amended, who were born on or after January 1, 1960, and who have attained their eighteenth birthday, shall present themselves for registration in the manner and at the time and places as hereinafter provided.

Given Obama's birthdate of August 4, 1961 he clearly fell under the requirements of this act as of his eighteenth birthday on August 4, 1979. The law went on to direct that:

Persons born in calendar year 1961 shall present themselves for registration on any of the six days beginning Monday, July 28, 1980.

This would cover the six day period from July 28, 1980 to August 2, 1980.

Requirements for Federal Employment

According to the Selective Service System (<http://www.sss.gov/FSbenefits.htm>):

FEDERAL JOBS

A man must be registered to be eligible for jobs in the Executive Branch of the Federal government and the U.S. Postal Service. Proof of registration is required only for men born after December 31, 1959.

Rumor One: "Obama did not register for the draft."

The Origin of the Rumor

The rumor that Barack Obama had never registered for the draft, and was therefore ineligible from holding a job in the Executive Branch (of which President is one) became popular on Internet blogs by supporters of John McCain or Hillary Clinton as early as February of 2008.

Resolution

On August 12, 2008 the Internet blog network and news portal Pajamas Media (<http://pajamasmedia.com/blog/obama-did-obama-actually-register-for-selective-service/2/>) announced that they had received this e-mail confirmation from the Selective Service System that Barack Obama had, in fact, registered for the draft as required by law:

Mr. Owens,

Barack Hussein Obama registered at a post office in Hawaii. The effective registration date was September 4, 1980.

His registration number is 61-1125539-1.

Daniel Amon

Public Affairs Specialist

As a result of their investigation and this e-mail they concluded that:

Barack Obama fulfilled his Selective Service obligation and has every legal right to run for the presidency of the United States.

Some concern was still expressed by bloggers over the "effective registration date" of September 4, 1980. This was more than a month after the six day period outlined in the law for men born during calendar year 1961. This was later resolved when his actual registration form was revealed to carry a postmark of July 29, 1980. The later September date corresponds to the date of data entry into the Selective Service System's information system.

Rumor Two: "Obama's draft registration was falsified."

The Origin of the Rumor

In November of 2008 Stephen Coffman, a retired Federal Law Enforcement Officer with the Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Galveston, Texas office received two documents regarding Obama's Selective Service registration as the result of a Freedom of Information Act request. They included a photocopy of Obama's original Registration Card:

 Obama SS Registration.jpg

And a copy of the computer printout that resulted from an on-line history inquiry.

 Obama SS History Inquiry.jpg

The agent noted what he believed to be a number of discrepancies on the two forms that led him to theorize that Obama had not registered for the draft until after he had commenced his run for the presidency and rumors of a failure by him to register had begun to circulate widely on the web. He theorized that the registration occurred in 2008, and was fraudulently back dated to reflect a 1980 registration with the cooperation of unnamed "friends" in the Chicago Federal Records Center where it was alleged these records are kept.

The story was broken as an "exclusive" by the conservative on-line journalist Debbie Schlusel (http://www.debbieschlusel.com/archives/2008/11/exclusive_did_n.html). She identified the following "problems" with the documents that led her to conclude that retired Agent Coffman was correct:

1. "Document Location Number Indicates Obama Selective Service Form was Created in 2008"
2. "Obama's Selective Service Registration Form is Apparently 1990 Form Altered to Appear Like 1980 Form"
3. "Barack Obama's Signature is Dated After Postal Stamp Certifying His Signature"
4. "Postal Stamp is Incorrect, Discontinued in 1970"
5. "Form Shows Barack Obama didn't have ID"
6. "The Selective Service Data Mgt. Center Stonewalled for Almost a Year on Obama Registration, Until Right Before the Election"
7. "Other Questions: Missing Selective Service Number, FOIA Response Dated Prior to FOIA Request, Missing Printout Page"

These claims were later adopted wholesale by Southern California dentist and attorney Orly Taitz (<http://www.orlytaitzesq.com>) who incorporated them into her many "Dossiers" and circulated them promiscuously to legislators, government bureaucrats and law enforcement authorities.

Resolution

The Document Locator Numbers

Agent Coffman's central claim was based on the discrepancy between the two forms regarding the "Document Locator Number" (DLN). On the original registration form the DLN is a ten digit number beginning with the digits 08, while on the History Inquiry form it is an eleven digit number identical to the other form except for having an additional 8 added at the beginning. Agent Coffman interpreted this discrepancy in this way:

Having worked for the Federal Government for several decades, I know that the standardization of DLNs have the first two digits of the DLN representing the year of issue. That would mean that this DLN was issued in 2008. The DLN on the computer screen printout is the exact same number, except an 8 has been added to make it look like it is from 1980 and give it a 1980 DLN number. And 1980 is the year Senator/President Elect Obama is said to have timely registered. So, why does the machine-stamped DLN reflect this year (2008) and the DLN in the database (which was manually input) reflect a "corrected" DLN year of 1980? Were all the DLNs issued in 1980 erroneously marked with a 2008 DLN year or does the Selective Service use a different DLN system than the rest of the Federal Government? Or was the SSS Form 1 actually processed in 2008 and not 1980?

Agent Coffman's interpretation is ruined by his first assertion; that the first two digits of the number represented "the year of issue." A simple phone call or e-mail to the SSS explicitly asking that question would have cleared up this misunderstanding. In response to an e-mail query, the following explanation was offered by the SSS:

From: "Richard Flahavan" <Richard.Flahavan@sss.gov>

To: XXXXXXX@comcast.net

Sent: Monday, March 30, 2009 12:09:51 PM GMT -07:00 US/Canada Mountain

Subject: FW: SSS Document Locator Numbers

Dear Mr. XXXXXXX:

Facts will never trump speculation by conspiracy theorists. But the reality is the following:

- a. The 10-character Document Locator Number (DLN) was placed on Selective Service Registration Forms beginning prior to the establishment of our current Data Management Center on 31 August 1981.
- b. Prior to 1981, the DLN configuration was different from what is used today.
- c. At that time when Mr. Obama registered, the first three characters (089) indicated that the form was keyed in by one of the contract keying centers - in this case 089 equated to the Internal Revenue Service.
- d. Later, an 11th digit was added to the DLN just prior to Y2K to differentiate another decade.

Thus, the first three characters of the DLN do NOT represent the year the form was keyed into the SSS registrant database, despite what some may hold dear.

Richard S. Flahavan
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Selective Service System National Headquarters

Agent Coffman was simply in error when he asserted the first two digits represented the year. In fact, the first three digits *originally* represented the data center at which the information was keyed into the database. The eleventh digit was added many years later as part of the database enhancement to support the Y2K transition.

The Form

Schlüssel asserts that "it's apparent that in February 1980, the Selective Service agency withdrew a 'Request for a new OMB control number' for SSS Form 1 -- meaning the agency canceled its previous request for a new form, and one was never issued in 'FEB 1980'."

In fact, there is no indication whatsoever that any request for a new form was canceled. All that was canceled was a request for a new OMB control number. If such a request had been canceled, that simply means that the old OMB control number would be reflected on the form.

The Dates

The original registration form absolutely is dated one day prior to Obama's own dating of the form. This requires no more explanation than Obama getting the date wrong when he filled out the form. Either date falls easily within the registration window prescribed by the law.

The "Round Dater" Postal Stamp

While it is true that the United States Post Office (USPO) became the United States Postal Service (USPS) in 1970, the older USPO cancellation stamps were not immediately discontinued. Such stamps were apparently used until they wore out, in some cases more than a decade after the change.

A poster on the Free Republic (<http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/bloggers/2131428/posts?page=53>) boards was able to demonstrate this with examples of such stamps being used as late as 1988, and simultaneously with newer USPS stamps.

 Postal Stamp 1.jpg

 Postal Stamp 2.jpg

The Missing ID

Schlüssel complains that "The SSS Form 1 states "NO ID", labeled "F". Since that's the case, then how did the Hawaiian postal clerk know that the submitter was really Barack H. Obama, who may have been on summer break from attending Occidental College in California. How would they determine whether the registrant was truly registering and not a relative, friend, or other imposter?"

Her question is a fair one, but in the context of this discussion it is also a red herring. It does not really matter who did the registering, as long as Obama was meeting his legal responsibility by being registered.

SSS "Stonewalling"

Again, this is a red herring. FOIA requests often take long periods of time before they are filled, but that is neither here nor there. The SSS eventually did provide the requested documents.

"Missing" Selective Service Number

The number is not missing. It was never entered on the form in the first place. These numbers were system generated once the information on the card was entered in the information system, and there was never a need to retroactively note them on the Registration card. The different documents were already associated by their DLN.

The Printout Date

The date of the History Inquiry predates the FOIA request by Agent Coffman. All this indicates is that whatever prompted the History Inquiry, Agent Coffman's FOIA request was not the reason. The document already existed prior to his request, and he received a copy of it.

The Missing Page Two

The History Inquiry print out reflects that it is page one of two. Schlüssel ponders "[W]here is the other page, and what's on it?"

The question is unlikely to be answered without another FOIA request. But again, it is simply another red herring as the questions relevant to Obama's Selective Service Registration are answered.

Additional Rumors:

During a 7 September 2008 interview with George Stephanopoulos on ABC's This Week with George Stephanopoulos (<http://abcnews.go.com/thisweek>), Obama said the following:

"I had to sign up for Selective Service when I graduated from high school. And I was growing up in Hawaii. And I have friends whose parents were in the military. There are a lot of Army, military bases there. "And I actually always thought of the military as an ennobling and, you know, honorable option. But keep in mind that I graduated in 1979. The Vietnam War had come to an end. We weren't engaged in an active military conflict at that point. And so, it's not an option that I ever decided to pursue."

Anti-Obama web communities such as Free Republic (<http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/2076859/posts>) portrayed the comment as a "lie" since at the time of Obama's graduation in 1979, the Selective Service System was in hiatus and no registration was possible. Given the facts that Obama had, in fact, registered for the draft (even if it was approximately a year after having graduated from high school) this issue failed to gain traction within the general anti-Obama Internet narrative.

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