

Since the law of 1792, no act of Congress has been passed, materially altering its provisions. On the other hand, the state of the country is totally changed. The sources of danger are diminished, and are more remote. The Indian tribes which hang upon our frontiers at the organization of the federal government, have either migrated to more distant regions, or have been subdued by the joint force of civilization and physical power. Our population is comparatively dense and powerful. We have no existing differences with foreign countries which are likely to lead to a breach of our relations of friendship with them.

Under this change of circumstances, a less extensive enrolment would seem adequate to all the objects for which a militia is maintained. While the committee express this opinion, they wish to be understood as advocating no change in the militia system which would have the effect of impairing its efficiency. They consider it as intimately connected with the maintenance of our internal tranquility, and with the preservation of that spirit of freedom on which the durability of our political institutions essential depends. Every citizen is, from the nature of our social organization, a part of the public defence; and he is also in the last resort, in common with his fellow citizens, the safeguard of the liberties of all, against the government itself. Thus it is that amendments to the Constitution of the United States have provided that "the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed." It seems indispensable to the accomplishment of the objects referred to, that every citizen should be armed, and that he should be subjected for a course of years to a system of exercise and discipline. The system should be limited in its application to such a period as will be sufficient to qualify those subjected to it for acting in concert, and with efficiency, on sudden emergencies, until a more permanent force can be provided.

This object may be attained consistently with that of reducing the period of enrolment, and consequently diminishing the numerical force of the militia. For instance, if the enrolment in this State were to be diminished so as to include only such persons as are between the ages of twenty-one and forty years, our numerical force would be reduced from about 190,000 to about 140,000 men, and yet every citizen would pass through nineteen years of military discipline. As has already been observed, the act of Congress of 1792, requires every citizen duly enroled to provide his own arms and equipments. This your committee consider wrong in principle and oppressive in practice.