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## CONSEQUENCES OF “DON’T ASK, DON’T TELL”

The Army Values permeate everything the Army does. You find them in Army publications, speeches, and training (from NCOES to NCOEDP). We even rate Soldiers on values on their NCOER. Yet, with all this focus on values, the Department of Defense’s policy on homosexuals in the military, commonly referred to as “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”, sends the message that integrity is unimportant, as long as you don’t get caught!

The “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy was introduced in July 1993 as a result of President Clinton’s directive in January 1993. Congress passed the policy in September 1993. The policy acknowledges that homosexuality is incompatible with military service, as per the previous policy. However, no longer would recruiters ask Soldiers if they were homosexual at enlistment. Only if Soldiers are caught in a homosexual act or if a Soldier confesses would discharge ensue.

This policy encourages Soldiers to hide illegal behavior. Can you imagine the Army writing a policy that says it is okay to do drugs as long as nobody witnesses the act? The policy endorses dishonesty, in direct contradiction to our precious Army Values. If homosexuality is incompatible with military service, as the policy states, then it is incongruous to think it is alright to be a homosexual as long as you can get away with it without anyone knowing. Right at the beginning of their military career we teach new recruits they can hide certain things—they are told not disclosing a traffic ticket can result in an erroneous enlistment but don’t have to disclose they are a homosexual!

Clinton’s justification for the policy is that sexual orientation is a personal and private matter. However, the military has long regulated personal and private matters. Does anyone

think the military should do away with its policy on adultery? The Army also dictates that officers will not have sexual relations with enlisted. So why should sexual orientation be exempt from military edict?

Besides teaching our Soldiers that the Army Values don't have to be applied in every situation, there are other compelling reasons to do away with the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. The next few paragraphs will examine the impact on our units, the physical danger to the Soldier, and the financial impact in terms of dollars.

Why does the policy agree that homosexuality is incompatible with military service in the first place? It is because of the impact it has on morale and unit cohesion. Mission success, and individual Soldier survival, depends on the bond of trust between Soldiers. Homosexuality, and especially hiding it, builds walls between Soldiers instead of trust. With this vital ingredient missing, morale goes down and a unit has the potential to go to pieces.

Next, let us consider the safety of homosexual Soldiers themselves. What happened to PFC Barry Winchell accentuates the fact that homosexual Soldiers are in danger. In July 1999, fellow Soldiers beat PFC Winchell to death with a baseball bat on Fort Campbell, Kentucky after they suspected he was a homosexual. This highlights the previous point regarding the negative impact this can have on a unit's cohesion.

Now consider the financial cost this policy has had. From 1993 to 2004, this policy has cost the Department of Defense \$191 million to replace the 9,488 service members discharged for homosexual conduct, (according to a report by the Congressional General Accounting Office released on February 23, 2005.) This is a conservative figure including only the cost of recruiting new personnel and putting them through Initial Entry Training. However, the military continues to invest in training throughout a service member's career. Therefore, the cost in replacing

*Handwritten notes:*  
You don't  
want  
to be  
killed  
by your  
fellow  
soldiers  
because  
you're  
gay

senior personnel is much higher. How much money could have been saved if homosexuals were weeded out during the recruiting process in the first place?

Since "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" has had such a negative impact, what has been done about it? As the Department of Defense policy has been mandated by Congress, it will take the Supreme Court (or Congress themselves) to change it. However, neither appear ready to do so. The Supreme Court has refused to review cases involving the policy on five separate occasions (Selland—May 1996; Thomasson—October 1996; Richenberg—October 1997; Thornton—October 1998; Holmes and Watson—January 1999). Nor does Congress seem to want to deal with issue, despite the report by the Congressional General Accounting Office.

The current policy on homosexuals is a half-measure that has done nothing to solve the problem. It appears to have been implemented to appease a vocal political minority with no consideration of its practicality nor its negative impact on the military. Either homosexuality is incompatible with military service or it's not. Since the policy itself agrees the military is no place for homosexuality, then we have to recognize that hiding it is wrong.

Instead of giving in to the political agenda of a vocal few, it is time for the silent majority to contact their elected representatives in Congress and tell them to repeal "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" and reinstate the previous policy. Or perhaps the Supreme Court needs to finally rule that the military has a right to regulate its members, even in personal and private matters, as it already does in so many other areas. This policy was a bad idea from the beginning and needs to be overturned.

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