

Don't Ask, You Won't Like the Answer

Anti-gay policy sparks another source of criticism against the military, human rights debate

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National News Reporter

American foreign policy is just the tip of the political iceberg when it comes to criticism of the United States Armed Forces. The military's Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy has come under fire once again, catalyzed by outspoken activists, ambitious politicians, and an assault on the very question over the morality of homosexuality.

Don't Ask, Don't Tell—a highly controversial Pentagon policy instigated during the Clinton Administration—states that as long as service members keep their sexuality a secret, the administration will not inquire. However, anyone “revealed” to be homosexual can be dishonorably discharged from the army.

General Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, laid out his own stance on the matter in a statement with the Chicago Union Tribune.

“Saying that gays should serve openly in the military, to me, says that we by policy would be condoning what I believe is immoral activity,” Pace said.

Pace, after facing heavy criticism, withdrew his statement, saying that he should have kept his opinions to himself.

This was just the latest part of the debate that emerged after former marine Eric Alva, the first American injured in the Iraq war, declared his support for Representative Marty Meehan's (D-MA) bill to repeal Don't Ask, Don't Tell.

Alva, 36, argued that the policy is immoral, stating that gays soldiers—including himself—should not be discriminated against by the nation they volunteered to protect.

“I ask that you give them the chance to serve openly, to have the opportunity to be judged for who they are, to see the qualifications that we have as all American citizens should be judged by,” Alva said in a public statement. “I ask that this nation look at the discrimination that we still see in our ranks, and not judge a person by that.”

Presidential hopefuls Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and Rudy Giuliani made public statements before their presidential runs condemning the policy. John Edwards has recently come out strongly against it as well, leaving John McCain, the only one with a military background, as the sole presidential nominee in favor of Don't Ask, Don't Tell.

Department of Defense (DOD) Directive 1332.14, drafted in 1982 and cancelled in 1993, stated that, “Homosexuality is

incompatible with military service. The presence in the military environment of persons who engage in homosexual conduct or who, by their statements, demonstrate a propensity to engage in homosexual conduct, seriously impairs the accomplishment of the military mission.”

Cynthia Smith, a DOD spokesperson, defended the military's stance in regard to homosexuality in an e-mail to *City on a Hill Press*.

“The Department of Defense must ensure that the standards for enlistment and appointment of members of the armed forces reflect the policies set forth by Congress,” said Smith, referring to Section 654 of Title 10, United States Code, the “Policy Concerning Homosexuality in the Armed Forces.” “Under this policy, a person who has stated that they are a homosexual or bisexual can not be allowed entry into the military services based upon the applicable laws and regulations governing sexual conduct by members of the armed forces.”

One former soldier shared her own experiences with the policy.

“A recruiter told me that if there was anything I needed to tell him, I didn't need to tell him,” joked a former soldier who asked that her name not be revealed, chuckling that this was the “don't tell” portion of the

arrangement. “Usually [soldiers who are outed] get discharged for ‘acts unbecoming a soldier,’ which is dishonorable.”

This soldier, however, managed to evade dishonorable discharge in an interesting way.

“I was caught having relations with my superior officer, who happened to be female. I was already having discharge procedures because of an injury I received, so this sped up the proceedings,” she said. “I didn't get a dishonorable, I got a medical, which is an honorable. I feel that the army let me off easy in order to protect the ‘other party.’ I got medical benefits for two years after I got discharged, so I didn't care. I got a partial pension after four months of service, so I wasn't going to complain.”

Andre Pichon, an active duty member of the Navy between 2001 and 2006, feels that the policy is unnecessary.

“I don't think that your sexual preference has anything to do with the fact that you want to fight for the United States military. It's not going to hamper your judgement, everyone is trained the same way,” Pichon said. “Regardless of sexual preference, they're still your brother; they're still your sister; you're still on the same team. If race doesn't play a part, then why should sexual preference play a part?”

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