



## **‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ Must Go — Rejection of Brave Americans’ Contributions Must End**

July 25, 2008

By **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Action Fund Executive Director Rea Carey**

I’ve rarely seen anything like it: Wednesday’s hearing was an historic day not only for the lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender community, but for congressional hearings as well.

The House Military Personnel Subcommittee’s hearing on “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” was a crucial first step toward the repeal of this discriminatory and ineffective law. The turnout was truly amazing and a reflection on the pressing need to address the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.”

With demanding schedules it is rare that so many members of a subcommittee and full committee are able to attend hearings. Congress members and staff were on time and remained with rapt attention throughout the hearing. The unprecedented attendance and participation is a clear indicator of the importance of this issue.

The success of the hearing was due to the tremendous leadership of Chairwoman Davis and Representative Tauscher, the lead sponsor of the legislation to repeal the ban. Nothing demonstrated the need for repeal of the existing law as did the powerful testimony of Sergeant Alva, Captain Darrah and General Coleman; attendees listened literally from the edge of their seats. The hearing also revealed the incredible work done by the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN), which has led the efforts on this issue and unified the advocacy community in a coordinated effort to repeal the law.

**The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Action Fund** urged for the immediate repeal of the discriminatory policy that has resulted in the expulsion of thousands of loyal American women and men from the U.S. Armed Forces.

Since 1993, lesbian, gay and bisexual service members have steadfastly pledged to defend our Constitution even while forced into silence about whom they are and whom they love. That they are ejected from the military when their sexual orientation is discovered is a disservice to them and their families and a disgrace to our country. This categorical rejection of our country’s brave and trustworthy Americans and the continued squandering of their contributions must end.

Sixty years ago this week, the desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces was achieved by President Truman’s executive order. Congress should follow suit and act immediately, recognizing and honoring all of the members of today’s military forces — including the lesbian, gay and bisexual people who serve.

**The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force has long been a leader in advocating for lesbian, gay and bisexual service members to openly and proudly serve this country in both peace and war.**

**1977:** At the historic March 1977 meeting with the White House Office of Public Liaison, community leaders included discrimination in the military as a top priority for action by the Carter administration.

**1988:** The Task Force convened the Military Freedom Project to overturn the ban on military service for lesbians, gay men and bisexual people and to campaign for women's right to serve free of sexual harassment. The Task Force exposed instances of women being called "dykes" and "lesbos" for refusing to have sex with men, which propelled the issue before the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Service (DACOWITS). DACOWITS recommended that the Department of Defense expand existing leadership training to include dealing with accusations of homosexuality against women service members and to address these accusations as a form of sexual harassment.

**1993:** Task Force leaders participated in strategy-setting sessions with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) organizations, non-LGBT allies and Clinton administration political advisors to end the ban on openly lesbian, gay and bisexual service members. This effort, ultimately led by the Campaign for Military Service, resulted in the establishment of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue" policy that has accounted for thousands and thousands of discharges, at the expense of national security interests in a post-9/11 world.

**1999:** The Task Force Policy Institute released a report that shows that 70 percent of U.S. residents support the right of lesbians, gay men and bisexual people to serve in the military, up from 55 percent in 1992. This figure included 57 percent of self-identified conservatives, 70 percent of moderates and 91 percent of liberals.