

## The New York Times

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At War

Notes From the Front Lines

# Veterans' Group Backs Repealing 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell'

By James Dao December 3, 2010 1:18 pm

A major group representing Iraq and Afghanistan veterans announced on Friday morning that it supports repealing the military's ban on openly gay men and women service members. The announcement by the group, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, comes as the Senate is considering legislation to rescind the 17-year-old law, popularly known as "don't ask, don't tell."

In a statement, Paul Rieckhoff, executive director of the group, said: "IAVA shares Secretary Gates' and Admiral Mullen's opinion that upholding the integrity of the military as an institution is critical. All men and women who have committed their lives to service and sacrifice in our military should be treated equally."

The statement added that the group had conducted its own survey and found that "a clear majority of our members does not object to gay men and women openly serving in the military." The group claims to have 200,000 veteran members and civilian supporters.

"We also share the concern of military leaders that a prolonged court battle resulting from failure to repeal DADT legislatively would be damaging and disruptive to our armed forces," the statement continued.

"Allowing the courts to decide this issue could result in an overnight repeal that may not allow adequate preparation time for troops on the ground. Our military needs clear leadership and guidance on this policy to maintain the highest level of

cohesion, effectiveness and readiness. That clarity can only come with legislative action now.”

Supporters of the ban assert that concerns about federal courts overturning the law are overblown, saying they expect the United States Supreme Court will ultimately declare the law constitutional.

Veterans groups have not moved in lockstep on the issue. Veterans for Common Sense, formed in 2002, supports a repeal while Veterans of Foreign Wars opposes it. The American Legion has called on Congress to go slow.

“We don’t think that now is the time to change this policy, while our troops are fighting two major wars,” a spokesman for The American Legion, Marty Callaghan, said. “The American Legion would need to be assured that repealing DADT won’t have a negative effect on our military readiness. And we don’t believe that a lame-duck Congress should be making such an important decision based on political expediency.”

The announcement by Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America came hours before the chiefs of the armed services testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee on legislation to repeal the law. Although the commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen. James F. Amos, reiterated his steadfast opposition to changing the law, the chief of staff of the Army, the largest of the services, seemed to soften his earlier concerns about a repeal.

The chief, Gen. George W. Casey Jr., told the committee that he believed repeal would add stress to the force and be more difficult in combat arms units. But he added: “properly implemented, I do not envision that it would keep us from accomplishing our worldwide missions, including combat operations.”