

Statement of
Admiral Michael G. Mullen, USN
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
before the 111th Congress

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Sen. McCain and members of this committee.

My personal views on this issue remain unchanged. I am convinced that repeal of the law governing Don't Ask, Don't Tell is the right thing to do. Back in February, when I testified to this sentiment, I also said that I believed the men and women of the Armed Forces could accommodate such a change. But I did not know it for a fact. Now, I do.

And so what was my personal opinion is now my professional opinion. Repeal of the law will not prove an unacceptable risk to military readiness. Unit cohesion will not suffer if our units are well-led. And families will not encourage their loved ones to leave the service in droves.

I do not discount for a moment the findings in the Johnson-Ham survey which indicate resistance to repeal by those in the combat arms and irregular warfare communities. I do not find these concerns trivial or inconsequential. Nor do I believe we can afford to ignore them. Given that this reluctance arises from the ranks of the very troops upon which much of the burden of these wars has fallen, we would do well to pay heed and to move forward in a deliberate, measured manner.

Whatever risk there may be to repeal of this law, it is greatly mitigated by the thorough implementation plan included in the study, the time to carry out that plan, and effective, inspirational leadership.

These are the things I know for a fact. These are the things the study tells us. Now let me tell you what I believe.

I believe our troops and their families are ready for this. Most of them already believe they serve or have served alongside gays and lesbians. And knowing matters a lot. Those who said they knew they were serving with a gay or lesbian were consistently more positive in their assessment of the impact of repeal across all dimensions -- cohesion, effectiveness, retention, even privacy concerns.

Our families feel the same. Most of our spouses know at least one gay or lesbian and very few of them believe repeal of the law would have any effect on family readiness.

This tracks with my personal experience. I've been serving with gays and lesbians my whole career. I went to war with them aboard a destroyer off the coast of Vietnam. I knew they were there. They knew I knew it. And what's more, nearly everyone in the crew knew it. We never missed a mission, never failed to deliver ordnance on target. Readiness was not impaired. What mattered most, what made us a crew, was teamwork and focus on our combat mission.

Back then, of course, it was a different time. Society on the whole wasn't as accepting or as tolerant as it is now. So, we didn't speak of such things or of how little it really mattered that the Sailor next to you was gay. But America has moved on. And, if you look closely at this study, I think you'll find that America's military is, by and large, ready to move on as well.

Should repeal occur, some soldiers and Marines may want separate shower facilities. Some may ask for different berthing. Some may even quit the service. We'll deal with that. But I believe and history tells us that most of them will put aside personal proclivities for something larger than themselves and for each other.

There is a special warrior bond in combat, a bond formed not by common values, as some have claimed, but rather by the common threat of the enemy, hardship and peril.

"Numberless soldiers have died, more or less willingly," writes J. Glenn Gray in his book, *Reflections on Men in Battle*, "not for country or honor or religious faith or for any other abstract good, but because they realized that by fleeing their posts and rescuing themselves, they would expose their companions to greater danger."

It is those greater dangers that still motivate the heroism and comradeship our troops exemplify today.

That's why I believe the end of Don't Ask, Don't Tell will pass with less turbulence -- even in the combat arms world -- than some predict. In fact, it may be the combat arms community that proves the most effective at managing this change, disciplined as they are.

It's not only because our young ones are more tolerant; it's because they've got far more important things to worry about.

The experiences of other militaries would seem to bear this out. Our study looked at 35 other militaries that chose to permit open service, including those of our staunchest allies. In no instance, was there widespread panic or mass resignations or wholesale disregard for discipline and restraint.

Some will argue we are different, of course. None of these foreign armies face the unique global demands we do. And none are charged with the leadership roles we bear. True enough. But many of them fight alongside us in Afghanistan today, and they fought with us in Iraq. Gay or straight, their troops patrolled with ours and bled with ours. They have certainly shared with ours the fear and loneliness and the horror of combat.

I don't recall a single instance where the fact that one of them might be openly gay ever led to poor performance on the field of battle. My sense is that good order and discipline, far from being cast to the winds when one of these governments changed the policy, was actually reinforced and re-emphasized.

It's clear to me that our troops expect the same. They expect that whatever change we make to the current policy will be accompanied by rigorous training and high standards of conduct. In fact, the report indicates that one of the factors distressing to those who oppose repeal are fears that new policies will NOT be implemented fairly, evenly and dispassionately.

Let me be clear: nothing will change about our standards of conduct. Nothing will change about the dignity and the fairness and the equality with which we treat our people. And nothing will change about the manner in which we deal with those who cannot abide by these standards. The military is a meritocracy, where success is based on what you do, not who you are. There are no special classes, no favored groups. We may wear different uniforms, but we are one.

There are some for whom this debate is all about gray areas. There is no gray area here. We treat each other with respect, or we find another place to work. Period. That's why I also believe leadership will prove vital.

In fact, leadership matters most. The large majority of troops who believe they have served in a unit with gays and lesbians rate that

unit's performance high across virtually all dimensions, but highest in those units that are well-led. Indeed, the practical differences between units in which there were troops believed to be gay or lesbian and those in which no one was believed to be so, completely disappeared in effectively-led commands.

My belief is, if and when the law changes, our people will lead that change in a manner consistent with the oath they took. As one Marine officer put it, "If that's what the president orders, I can tell you by God we're going to excel above and beyond the other services to make it happen."

And frankly, that's why I believe that in the long run, repeal of this law makes us a stronger military and improves readiness. It will make us more representative of the country we serve. It will restore to the institution the energy it must now expend in pursuing those who violate the policy. And it will better align those organizational values we claim with those we practice.

As I said back in February, this is about integrity. Our people sacrifice a lot for their country, including their lives. None of them should have to sacrifice their integrity as well.

It is true there is no Constitutional right to serve in the armed forces. But the military serves all the people of this country, no matter who they are or what they believe. And every one of those people, should they be fit and able, ought to be given the opportunity to defend it.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I believe now is the time to act. I worry that unpredictable actions in the court could strike down the law at any time, precluding the orderly implementation plan we believe is necessary to mitigate risk. I also have no expectation that challenges to our national security are going to diminish in the near future, such that a more convenient time will appear. And I find the argument that war is not the time to change to be antithetical with our own experience since 2001.

War does not stifle change; it demands it. It does not make change harder; it facilitates it.

There is, to be sure, greater uncertainty today and our forces are under stress. I know the Chiefs are concerned about this. So am I. But I do not believe the stressors currently manifesting themselves in the lives of our troops and their families -- lengthy deployments, suicides and health care -- are rendered insurmountable or any

graver by this single policy change. Nor do I believe that simply acknowledging what most of our troops already know to be true about some of their colleagues threatens our ability to fight and win this nation's wars.

Quite the contrary. Today's young leaders are more attuned to combat effectiveness than in any of the last three decades. Tempered by war, bonded through hardship, the men and women of the U.S. Armed Forces are the finest and most capable they have ever been. If there is a better opportunity or a better generation to effect this sort of change, I don't know of it.

One final word. It is true that, as Chairman, I am not in charge of troops. But I have commanded three ships, a carrier battle group and two fleets. And I was most recently a Service Chief myself. For more than 40 years I have made decisions that affected and even risked the lives of young men and women.

You do not have to agree with me on this issue. But don't think for one moment that I haven't carefully considered the impact of the advice I give on those who will have to live with the decisions that advice informs. I would not recommend repeal of this law if I did not believe in my soul that it was the right thing to do for our military, for our nation and for our collective honor. Thank you.