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## Time to End 'Don't Ask'

A report on the ban on gays in the military adds to growing calls to repeal the prohibition.

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THE "DON'T ASK, don't tell" policy that continues the ban on gay men and lesbians serving openly in the U. S. military was wrong when President Clinton signed it into law in 1993, and it's wrong today. The only difference between then and now is that more people are now coming around to that conclusion.

The latest entrants -- four retired officers, each representing a branch of the military -- made their views known in the "Report of the General/Flag Officers' Study Group" released this week by the Michael D. Palm Center of the University of California at Santa Barbara. They interviewed people who had been drummed out of service because of "don't ask, don't tell," in addition to hearing testimony from military commanders and scholars in a range of disciplines including psychology and law. Their findings reveal the devastating impact of this wrongheaded policy.

Even though they found that "many" gay men, lesbians and bisexuals are serving openly in the military, they found that "don't ask, don't tell" has "compelled some gay, lesbian, and bisexual service members to lie about their identity." They don't seek medical attention or religious counsel for fear of being outed. Attitudes in the military are changing, as the study group pointed out, and allowing gay men and lesbians to serve openly "is unlikely to pose any significant risk to morale, good order, discipline, or cohesion." Currently, 24 countries allow gay men and lesbians to serve openly in the military. The study group highlighted the experience of Israel and Britain, which is actively recruiting gay men, lesbians and bisexuals to serve in the Royal Navy. The group's No. 1 recommendation is that Congress repeal the ban.

Calls for junking "don't ask, don't tell" or reexamining its usefulness have become more frequent and have been issued from lofty quarters. Retired Army Gen. John M. Shalikashvili was the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff when the law was implemented. He spoke against it last year. And just last month, former Senate Armed Services Committee chairman Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), who led hearings that resulted in the disastrous plan that continues to run gay men and lesbians out of the armed forces (at least 627 in 2007; about 12,500 since 1993), said that the law should be reexamined. That reexamination should be the beginning of the end of "don't ask, don't tell."

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