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OBAMA ADVISER ON GAY TROOPS ISSUE HAS PATTERN OF SEXISM General Concedes He Opposed Women Because of “Personal Prejudice”

SANTA BARBARA, CA, November 24, 2008 – Retired General Merrill McPeak, a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff when Clinton formulated the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy on gays in the military in 1993, has urged Barack Obama to maintain that policy when he becomes president. But researchers at the Palm Center at the University of California, Santa Barbara, say McPeak, a military adviser to Obama, has acknowledged that his views on gays and women in the military are rooted in personal, unsubstantiated beliefs, which he holds even when they conflict with the needs of the military.

McPeak said last month that he and the current service leaders did not share the values of tolerance that would be required to make the change work. To lift the ban on open gays, he said, “the service leadership will have to go to the gay and lesbian annual ball and lead the first dance,” something he is not willing to do. “I couldn't see how I could become an advocate for open homosexuality in Air Force combat units.”

In 1991 and 1992, McPeak used much the same explanation to oppose women in combat, saying in a string of talks with lawmakers that he had “personal prejudices” against expanding combat roles for women, “even though logic tells us” that women can conduct combat operations just as well as men. He told Congress then that he would choose an inferior male flight instructor over a superior female one even if it made for a “militarily less effective situation.” “I admit it doesn’t make much sense,” he said, “but that’s the way I feel about it.” Elsewhere he repeated that his position did not meet “strict evidence standards for logic,” but that that did not raise doubts in him about his position.

Aaron Belkin, professor of political science and director of the Palm Center at University of California, Santa Barbara, said the comments were a frank acknowledgement of how views on military personnel issues are often shaped by emotion rather than fact. “This kind of resistance to modernization is so often about prejudice, and not about military readiness,” Belkin said. “What’s notable about McPeak’s case, though, is how willingly he accepts degrading readiness as a tolerable price for indulging prejudice.”

Brigadier General Evelyn Foote, who sat on a military Advisory Council to the Obama campaign, attended one of the 1992 Congressional hearings in which McPeak said he

would choose a less qualified male over a more qualified female. Foote, who was also an adviser to the military's Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, said McPeak was not capable of dealing well with diversity issues in the military and that the president-elect deserves better advisers than someone who cannot transcend his own personal limitations. "I would have a very difficult time trusting someone like McPeak with any advice he gave to Obama," she said. "There are far better people to advise him than this man."

Other former members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff share McPeak's history of personal animosity to women and gays in combat, including General Carl Mundy, former Commandant of the Marine Corps. Mundy was one of the most outspoken opponents of gay service in 1993 and distributed a salacious anti-gay video to other military leaders. His position was largely rooted in religious opposition to homosexuality. In 1992, he said that women were not well-suited for combat and "I do not believe the American people want them suited" because combat is "debasing" and is "something that I would not want to see women involved in."

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The Palm Center is a research institute at the University of California, Santa Barbara. The Center uses rigorous social science to inform public discussions of controversial social issues, enabling policy outcomes to be informed more by evidence than by emotion. Its data-driven approach is premised on the notion that the public makes wise choices on social issues when high-quality information is available. For more information, visit www.palmcenter.ucsb.edu.