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Contact: Indra Lusero, Assistant Director, 303-902-9402, indralusero@palmcenter.ucsb.edu

GAY BAN HARMS MILITARY'S REPUTATION, NEW POLL FINDS Shortage in Medical Personnel Prompts Experts to Question Policy

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SANTA BARBARA, CA, September 15, 2005 - The Pentagon's practice of prohibiting homosexuals from serving openly in the armed forces makes more people embarrassed by the military than proud of it, according to a new University of California poll. According to the poll, 24.2 percent of respondents said that the policy makes them embarrassed by the military while 17.5 percent said that the policy makes them proud. Fifty-six percent said that the policy has no impact on their feelings about the military.

Conservatives were heavily over-represented in the pool of respondents because the sample was designed to match the characteristics of a cohort of new military recruits. Among respondents to the survey, 53.1 percent were Republicans, 29.8 percent were independent/other, and 17 percent were Democrats; 81.6 percent were male and 18.4 percent were female; and all were between the ages of 18 and 24. These characteristics closely match the profile of a cohort of new military recruits.

The survey was designed by the Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military, a research institute at the University of California, Santa Barbara, to test how the gay ban is perceived among individuals who the military seeks to recruit. According to Aaron Belkin, Director of the Center, "The fact that even conservatives are embarrassed by the gay ban suggests that the policy is harmful to the military's reputation."

During the past two years, at least six national polls administered by five different polling organizations have asked members of the public whether gays and lesbians should be allowed to serve openly in the military. All polls found that between 58 and 79 percent of the public believes that gays and lesbians should be allowed to serve openly. For example, Fox News found in August 2003 that 64 percent of the public, including 55 percent of republicans, believe that gays and lesbians should be allowed to serve openly.

When polls showed a majority of the public in favor of the ban, some experts argued that military policy should reflect public preferences. For example, Melissa Wells-Petry, formerly of the Family



Research Council, wrote in 1993 that "...the consequence of an incautious policy determination that breaks the bond between soldier and public will prove a disaster. Thus, even if recruitment, retention, and public acceptability of the military had not been expressed as rationales for the homosexual exclusion policy, the American people always are at issue when the Army formulates military personnel policies. It is the American people, ultimately, who must be persuaded of the wisdom of personnel decisions and have confidence in their efficacy."

The CSSMM survey was administered from August 5 to August 25, 2005, to a sample of 424 young adults by Knowledge Networks, a public opinion firm. Of those surveyed, 282 responses were extracted to create a pool that matched the profile of a cohort of new military recruits. The survey had a margin of error of plus or minus 5.8 percent. The precise wording of the question was as follows: "The military's current practice of prohibiting homosexuals from serving openly in the armed forces makes me feel the following way about the military: very proud; proud; neither proud nor embarrassed; somewhat embarrassed; very embarrassed."

The Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military is an official research unit of the University of California, Santa Barbara. The Center is governed by a distinguished board of advisors, including the Honorable Lawrence J. Korb of the Center for American Progress, Honorable Coit Blacker of Stanford University and Professor Janet Halley of Harvard Law School. Its mission is to promote the study of gays, lesbians, and other sexual minorities in the armed forces.