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### **CONSERVATIVES URGING OBAMA NOT TO LIFT GAY BAN Some Say Effort Could Backfire**

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SANTA BARBARA, CA, April 1, 2009 – A conservative group has compiled a list of officers in an effort to block President Obama’s plan to repeal “don’t ask, don’t tell.” Two retired, four-star Army generals, James Lindsay, 76, and Carl Stiner, 72, have signed a letter and circulated it along with a statement to their colleagues urging the president and Congress to preserve the gay ban “as a matter of national security.” The documents were leaked last week to the Palm Center, and are posted at [www.palmcenter.ucsb.edu](http://www.palmcenter.ucsb.edu).

The current effort by conservatives to block gay service is led by the Center for Military Readiness, which opposes women and gays in combat. The group’s president, Elaine Donnelly, came under national criticism last summer when she told congress that gays would “sexualize the atmosphere” and engage in “passive aggressive behavior.” In the fall, CMR was implicated in an effort to identify “gay horror stories.” But conservative activists acknowledged, in another leaked document, that such stories would be “very difficult to find.” Donnelly testified before Congress last year using one such story that turned out to have been 34 years old.

Some observers viewed the effort by CMR as part of an expected national dialogue on the issue of gays in the military. “There have always been different opinions in the military,” said Dr. Aaron Belkin, director of the Palm Center and a professor of political science at University of California, Santa Barbara. “That’s how we get the best strategic advice.”

But others said that the initiative does not seem to be based on research. Retired Marine Corps General Hugh Aitken said, “New voices should always be welcomed to the debate, but they should be based on something besides the fears and concerns of individual officers; they should be based on research and data.” Aitken served on a year-long commission in 2008 which, after reviewing all available evidence on “don’t ask, don’t tell,” called for the policy’s repeal.

Others added that the new campaign could backfire and actually create the disruptions that gays are blamed for causing. “The most important factor in lifting a gay ban is a clear signal from senior



leadership,” said Dr. Nathaniel Frank, senior research fellow at the Palm Center and author of “Unfriendly Fire: How the Gay Ban Undermines the Military and Weakens America.” “Everyone knows it’s just a matter of time before the gay ban falls, so for officers to come out and say ‘gays are a threat to the military’ could cause the very problems that they ostensibly fear.”

Frank’s analysis is confirmed by social science evidence. A large body of research corroborates the importance of clear signals from senior leaders in updating institutional personnel policies. In 1993, for instance, the Rand Corporation, a respected think tank with ties to the Pentagon, released a study that said openly gay service works, and that the clear support of senior leadership would critical to effective implementation.

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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 <http://www.palmcenter.ucsb.edu>