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GAO EXPLANATION OF ORIGINAL, DEFECTIVE STUDY INVOKES MORE ERRORS

Date: September 25, 2006

SANTA BARBARA, CA, September 25, 2006 - A July 13, 2006 memorandum by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) defending the plausibility of its 2005 study on gays in the military relies on misrepresentation, according to a new analysis by a University of California professor. In its 2005 study, GAO found that the cost of implementing "don't ask, don't tell," the federal law requiring the military to fire gay and lesbian service members who disclose their sexual orientation, was at least \$190.5 million between fiscal years 1994 and 2003. In its July, 2006 defense, GAO said that it continues to "stand behind" its original estimate.

According to Dr. Aaron Belkin, however, who chaired a Blue Ribbon Commission which discovered methodological errors in the 2005 GAO study, GAO's latest defense of its 2005 research rests on a number of additional flaws. Belkin is Director of the Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

First, says Belkin, GAO does not acknowledge the implications of its failure to obtain actual data about the length of time it took to train individuals who were subsequently fired for homosexuality. GAO's reliance on assumptions about length-of-training rather than actual data led to significant cost underestimations. Second, GAO misrepresents its own training cost data. Taken together, Belkin says, these errors undermine GAO's July, 2006 defense of its original report.

In February 2006, a Blue Ribbon Commission which included former Secretary of Defense William J. Perry and other distinguished military experts found that errors in GAO's 2005 study led to both over- and underestimates of the financial cost of implementing the policy. When GAO's errors were corrected, the Commission found that the total cost during the policy's first decade was at least \$363.8 million, or 91 percent more than originally reported by GAO.

After the Commission released its report, Senator Edward M. Kennedy wrote to GAO to ask why its figures differed from the Commission's. GAO responded to Senator Kennedy on July 13, 2006, delivering the defense that Belkin critiqued as flawed.