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GAY RIGHTS GROUPS UNIFY AROUND EXECUTIVE ORDER PLAN HRC Joins Emerging Consensus that Obama Should Sign Executive Order

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SANTA BARBARA, CA, June 5, 2009 – The Human Rights Campaign, the largest gay rights group in the country, has joined a growing number of other advocacy organizations calling on President Barack Obama to sign an executive order suspending “don’t ask, don’t tell.”

Asked by Chris Matthews on MSNBC’s Hardball last night whether he believes Obama has the authority to sign such an order and whether he should do so, HRC President Joe Solmonese said, “Yes he can and yes I do.” Matthews repeated the question, asking “Do you think he should?” Solmonese confirmed, “Yes I do.”

Solmonese added that Obama should sign the executive order immediately to halt further firings like that of Lt. Dan Choi, a West Point graduate who speaks Arabic. “The president has the opportunity to stop that from happening,” Solmonese said. “We’ve asked him to do that and pressed him to do that and hope that he will.” HRC is widely understood to be the most influential gay rights group in the nation, with high-level White House access and an expansive presence on Capitol Hill.

The idea of ending the ban by executive order gained momentum after the release last month of a Palm Center study showing that the president has the authority to suspend “don’t ask, don’t tell” using his “stop-loss” authority. Until then, many had argued that only Congress or the courts could lift the ban.

Dr. Nathaniel Frank said that the emerging consensus about an executive order reflects a significant change in the national conversation about “don’t ask, don’t tell,” including among gay groups. “There were reports that some of the larger gay groups were pushing Congress and the White House to delay lifting the ban in favor of other priorities,” said Frank, author of “Unfriendly Fire: How the Gay Ban Undermines the Military and Weakens America,” and senior research fellow at the Palm Center. “With the White House on the defensive about ongoing discharges, HRC has called for an immediate executive order, reflecting a changed landscape.”



Others calling for the President to sign an executive order include Knights Out, an organization of 400 straight and gay West Point graduates, former staff, faculty and allies, and the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center CEO Lorri Jean, who appeared on Hardball with Solmonese. Referring to the executive order proposal, Jean said, "Let's stop drumming people out now."

June 7 update: The Washington Blade reported today that HRC Vice President David Smith, "said HRC backs a stop-loss order because the organization supports 'anything that slows down or stops discharges.'"

"Well-qualified service members who are serving our country with distinction and pride and providing valuable assistance to our national security should not be discharged,' he said. 'Anything that stops those discharges or slows them down, we would support.'"

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