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PENTAGON'S RECRUITING SHORTFALLS SEEN AS SELF-INFLICTED Newly Released Gay Discharge Figures Underscore Civilian-Military Gap

SANTA BARBARA, CA -1 June 2001- Military analysts this week said that the Pentagon's practice of firing gay and lesbian soldiers may exacerbate the growing divisions between military and civilian life, and may contribute to difficulties the military faced recently in appealing to the American public. The remarks, made to researchers at the Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military at the University of California, Santa Barbara, came in response to the Pentagon's announcement today that 1,231 soldiers were fired in fiscal year 2000 for being gay, lesbian or bisexual. This is the highest number of gay discharges since 1987.

Elizabeth Kier, a professor of Political Science at the University of Washington, and author of an influential article on gays in the military in the journal *International Security*, says that "don't ask, don't tell" reflects certain gaps between the views of military brass and civilian opinion leaders. "The persistence of an anti-gay bias in the U.S. military," she says, "has the potential to erode the American public's confidence in the military." According to the latest Gallup polls, 70 percent of the public says that gays should be allowed to serve in the military.

Peter Feaver, a professor of Political Science at Duke University and Director of the Triangle Institute for Security Studies, which researches civilian-military relations, says that despite a grassroots respect for the military, the gay ban seems to be hurting the military's image in the eyes of essential gatekeepers of recruitment. "While a majority of officers oppose gays serving openly, a majority of the general public supports it," he says, "and there you have a wide opinion gap." It is one instance, he explains, of the growing divide between the military and American society.

Experts say that the gay ban may be hurting recruitment efforts because many high schools refuse to cooperate with the military as long as the Pentagon continues to fire gay and lesbian service members. According to Alan Dowd, former Associate Editor of *The American Legion Magazine*, high schools denied military recruiters access to their campuses on 19,228 separate occasions in 1999 (the last year for which figures were available), in part as an effort to "challenge the Pentagon's policy on homosexuals in the military." A professional staff member of the House Armed Services Committee, which recently conducted a nationwide review on school recruitment efforts, confirmed that each



service of the military maintains its own list of roughly two to three thousand schools that limit or prohibit access to recruiters on campus.

When high schools refuse to cooperate with the armed forces, the consequences for recruiting can be serious. The study by the House Armed Services Committee concluded that the refusal of schools and universities to give recruiters contact information and opportunities to meet with students was "the single biggest obstacle to carrying out their recruiting mission." This year, the Air Force is short by about 1,200 pilots, the Navy is short by about 12,000 sailors, and the Army has lowered traditional standards of admission to attract high school dropouts.

These self-imposed wounds are distressing, say critics, because they come at a time when the Pentagon has pumped ever-larger sums into attracting soldiers. In 1999, the Air Force increased its advertising spending from \$12 million to over \$56 million and will feature Air Force Thunderbirds this month on Frosted Flakes cereal boxes in a continuing effort to attract recruits. The Navy has doubled its recruitment staff and intensified its local television advertising, hiring Spike Lee to direct a glossy new campaign. The Navy met its recruitment goals in 1999 only after agreeing to double the number of high school dropouts it would accept. And the Army is spending \$150 million on its "Army-of-One" television and internet campaign.

Other observers have criticized the military for endorsing costly recruitment tactics while driving out well-trained and perfectly competent gay troops. "Even though the Pentagon was denied recruitment opportunities over 19,000 times, commanders continue to fire capable and experienced soldiers simply because they are gay," said Aaron Belkin, Director of the Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military, a research center at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Belkin said that after Britain lifted its gay ban in January, 2000, the British Ministry of Defense found that the more inclusive policy positively affected access to recruiting fairs. Indeed, a British Defense Ministry report said that "some areas that had previously closed to the Forces, such as Student Union 'Fresher's Fairs,' are now allowing access to the Services because of what is seen to be a more enlightened approach."

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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 Council on Foreign Relations, 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.