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SCHOLARS SEE GROWING POLITICAL COST IN DELAY ON GAY BAN

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SANTA BARBARA, CA, May 7, 2009 - In the wake of news that the military is about to discharge a gay Arabic language speaker, scholars at the Palm Center say the military costs of “don’t ask, don’t tell” are now being compounded by political costs. The discharge would be the first known case of a mission-critical specialist under the Obama administration. While President Obama has said he wants to see the current policy terminated, criticism is growing for what appear to be delays and walk-backs from the new administration, which recently changed its website to soften its commitment to ending the ban on open gays.

“It’s clear the White House has made a decision, for the moment, to put off action on this critical issue because of fear it could undercut other priorities,” said Dr. Nathaniel Frank, senior researcher at the Palm Center and author of “Unfriendly Fire: How the Gay Ban Undermines the Military and Weakens America.” Frank said Obama “apparently took the wrong lessons from the 1990s fallout with gays in the military, believing that Bill Clinton’s error was moving too quickly. “In fact, it was not Clinton’s speed, but his delay, and the appearance of a weakened resolve, that allowed his opponents to rally and defeat him,” said Frank. “With the firing of First Lieutenant Dan Choi, the costs of the gay ban delay are beginning to register with the public and the media.”

The Palm Center is about to release a study, co-authored by experts in military law, that argues that President Obama has stroke-of-the-pen authority to suspend the gay discharge process via executive order. Dr. Aaron Belkin, director of the Palm Center, wrote about the executive order and Choi’s discharge in the Huffington Post today.

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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 www.palmcenter.org.