

## **COMMENTARY: End the silent segregation in the U.S. military**

Tracy Emblem - SDGLN Guest Contributor  
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In 1948, President Harry Truman issued Executive Order 9981 proclaiming that “there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin.”

Following the president’s order, desegregation and integration of blacks in the armed service met with resistance despite being a major civil rights victory for African-Americans. For the next 20 years, our country went through similar desegregation, culminating in repealing the separate but equal laws and bans against interracial marriages that were enacted in several states.

Compare President Truman’s proclamation of equal opportunity and treatment in the military to today’s efforts to repeal the 1993 “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy imposed by Congress. This discriminatory practice is tantamount to silent segregation of gay and lesbian personnel and puts them at continued risk to lose their jobs and all of their benefits.

The Palm Center, a University of California Santa Barbara-based think tank that studies controversial public policy issues, reports that as of June 2009, 25 countries, including many NATO members, allow military service by openly gay personnel.

These countries are: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and Uruguay.

In February, Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Joint Chiefs Chairman Admiral Michael Mullen told Congress that they support repealing the ban. Later in May, the House of Representatives voted 234-194 to repeal “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” by the end of the year.

Instead of employing sound leadership, the Pentagon is dragging its feet. A subjective “survey,” costing the U.S. taxpayers \$4.4 million, was e-mailed to non-deployed active servicemembers.

The survey asked biased assumptions such as:

- If Don't Ask, Don't Tell is repealed, how, if at all, will it affect your willingness to recommend to a family member or close friend that he or she join the military?
- Have you been assigned to share bath facilities with an open bay shower that is also used by a servicemember you believed to be homosexual?
- If Don't Ask, Don't Tell is repealed and you are working with a Service member in your immediate unit who has said he or she is gay or lesbian, how, if at all, would your job performance be affected?

Never mind that an individual's sexual orientation has nothing to do with the quality of his or her job performance. Forget that gay and lesbian personnel have been serving side by side on a daily basis.

Unfortunately, the “survey” was intended to portray the gay and lesbian community as sexual predators.

Completely missing from the survey were important questions which would help establish that the gay and lesbian service members are treated in a discriminatory manner. Some LGBT advocates say the survey was intentionally designed and distributed in a manner to provide credence to and justification for continuing the discriminatory policy.

It does not take a “survey” to enforce civil rights.

The survey should not be used as justification to frame military policy where gay and lesbian personnel are already working side by side. In fact, desegregation should be much easier than it was almost 50 years ago because everyone is already working together, and on the battlefields, all blood is red, no matter whose blood is shed.

Since the “Don't Ask” policy was enacted, over 13,500 service members have been discharged losing countless hours of training and talent. It's time we demand an end to a policy that forces men and women to lie so they can continue to “honorably” serve our country.

We are all Americans.

On Nov. 11, My Patriots Pride organization is calling upon LGBT veterans and straight allies around the country to stand up and march against this discriminatory policy nationwide. You can sign up for an event in your community at [www.MyPatriotsPride.org](http://www.MyPatriotsPride.org).

*Tracy Emblem is an attorney in Escondido.*