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## United States Senate

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April 16, 2007

Mr. C. Dixon Osburn  
P. O. Box 65301  
Washington, DC 20035

Dear Mr. Osburn:

Thank you for contacting me regarding the controversial issue of homosexual rights in the military services.

I must state at the outset that I do not believe the government should unnecessarily interfere in the private lives of its citizens. That said, I do believe that any policy requiring the Armed Services to accommodate a particular lifestyle of whatever description is misguided.

I have grappled with the issue of homosexuals in the military as both a career Navy officer and a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. Although I do not expect the controversy surrounding gay and lesbian servicemembers to recede in the foreseeable future, I believe Congress ably debated the issue in 1993 and reached a consensus reconciling personal freedoms with the most critical of military requirements -- maintaining the high standards of morale, good order and discipline, and unit cohesion that form the core of military capability.

Following some of the most extensive hearings I have witnessed during all my years in Congress, the Senate Armed Services and House National Security Committees developed legislation in 1993 to effectively resolve the divisive debate over the role of homosexual servicemembers in our armed forces. This legislation, incorporated into the Fiscal Year 1994 National Defense Authorization Act, institutionalized the current policy that is colloquially referred to as "don't ask, don't tell."

The legislation, which I supported, does not require the military to ask recruits whether they are homosexual, but makes their behavior the basis for determining their sexual orientation. Thus, the Department of Defense does not ask questions exploring the sexual orientation of prospective servicemembers, and individuals are required to keep their homosexuality to themselves. However, the legislation

unambiguously maintains that open homosexuality within the military services presents an intolerable risk to morale, cohesion, and discipline.

This policy is supported by the Congress and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It has also been upheld by the Supreme Court, which has ruled that the military may constitutionally discharge a servicemember for overt homosexual behavior.

As General Colin Powell stated when he served as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "We have successfully mixed rich and poor, black and white, male and female, but open homosexuality in [military] units is not just the acceptance of benign characteristics such as color or gender or background.... The presence of open homosexuality would have an unacceptable, detrimental, and disruptive impact on the cohesion, morale, and esprit of the armed forces."

I believe polarization of personnel and breakdown of unit effectiveness is too high a price to pay for well-intentioned but misguided efforts to elevate the interests of a minority of homosexual servicemembers above those of their units. Most importantly, the national security of the United States, not to mention the lives of our men and women in uniform, are put at grave risk by policies detrimental to the good order and discipline which so distinguish America's Armed Services. For these reasons, which have nothing to do with my personal judgments about homosexual behavior, I remain opposed to the open expression of homosexuality in the U.S. military.

Thank you again for contacting me about the rules governing service of homosexuals in our Armed Forces. I value your input and will keep your views in mind should Congress choose to revisit this sensitive issue.

Sincerely,



John McCain  
United States Senator

JM/ab