



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Indra Lusero, Assistant Director, 303-902-9402, [indralusero@palmcenter.ucsb.edu](mailto:indralusero@palmcenter.ucsb.edu)

**TWENTY-EIGHT GENERALS AND ADMIRALS CALL FOR END TO MILITARY'S GAY BAN**  
Largest Such Group to Support Repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"

Date: November 29, 2007

"12,000 Flags for 12,000 Patriots" Washington, D.C., Nov. 30, 2007 [Photo Credit: CBSNews.com]"12,000 Flags for 12,000 Patriots" Washington, D.C., Nov. 30, 2007 [Photo Credit: CBS News]

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SANTA BARBARA, CA, November 29, 2007 – A group of twenty-eight retired U.S. generals and admirals will release a statement Friday urging Congress to repeal the current ban on openly gay troops, according to a report in the New York Times. The statement says that replacing the current policy with one of equal treatment "would not harm, and would indeed help, our armed forces," and it points to countries such as Britain and Israel which both ended their gay bans years ago. "Our service members are professionals who are able to work together effectively despite differences in race, gender, religion, and sexuality," says the statement. "Such collaboration reflects the strength and the best traditions of our democracy."

Dr. Aaron Belkin, director of the Palm Center at University of California, Santa Barbara, which studies gays in the military, said the support of such a large number of distinguished senior military officers for an end to the gay ban reflects a sea change in military opinion on the issue. "2007 has been a year-long earthquake," said Belkin, who is also a professor of political science at UC-Santa Barbara. He said a retired chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has joined the call for repeal, and that polls now show that a majority of younger enlisted personnel also favor letting open gays serve. Back in 1993, when the current policy was formulated, some surveys found that 97% of generals and admirals opposed lifting the ban. "Fourteen years looks like a lifetime when you consider how far our nation has come since then," said Belkin.

Many politicians, however—most recently the leading Republican presidential candidates at last night's debate in St. Petersburg, Florida—continue to claim that senior military leaders "almost unanimously" say the policy "ought to be continued because it's working," in the words of John McCain. Belkin said



the statement by 28 retired flag officers is “just the tip of the ice berg” because so many active duty officers feel they cannot criticize the policy publicly even though they oppose it privately.

The statement by the generals and admirals is to be read at a Friday morning news conference marking the 14th anniversary of the signing of “don’t ask, don’t tell” into law by President Bill Clinton. Gay veterans and aid organizations will lay twelve thousand flags on the Washington Mall as a tribute to the nearly twelve thousand gay, lesbian and bisexual service members who have been fired under the current policy. The project, “12,000 Flags for 12,000 Patriots,” was created and organized by Alexander Nicholson, who was ousted under the policy from the Army. Nicholson is now Executive Director of Servicemembers United, which is sponsoring the event along with the Human Rights Campaign, Log Cabin Republicans, the Liberty Education Forum, and Servicemembers Legal Defense Network.

Rhonda Davis, a former Navy journalist who was discharged under “don’t ask, don’t tell” in 2006, and who will speak at the “12,000 Flags” event, said the nation cannot afford to waste “one, let alone 12,000,” service members at a time of war. “We’re firing Arabic linguists, intelligence experts, medical specialists, all because of their sexual orientation, while we lower our standards for their replacements and fail to fill our ranks,” she said. “The policy is outdated and senseless, and this event aims to encourage America to take another look.”

Correction: January 2, 2008. A previous version of this statement incorrectly listed Rear Admiral William Retz as a signatory of this statement.

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The Palm Center, formerly the Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military, 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.ucsb.edu](http://www.palmcenter.ucsb.edu)