End to trans military ban celebrated at think-tank symposium

Army Capt. Sam Fair, who once faced being discharged under the new military ban, (below) joins by phone with Rep. Robin Vos of the Washington Blade. (Photo by Michael R. Holahan)

An event on Wednesday truly brought to light the U.S. military's leadership as to transgender service and led to a celebration over the recent defeat of the policy.

In a recent TED talk presentation — transgender experiences and support — rendered at UNC's Regent's Capitol for the symposium, which was hosted by the San Francisco-basedbrane, who was on hand for the military ban as the leader for the organization known as the Brave, told attendees that the military was for the first time "a place where you can be who you are.

The event followed Defense Secretary Ashton Carter's decision earlier this month to allow transgender people to serve in the military for the first time. While Carter's directive was "transgender people" and not "transgender service," the new policy will still mean an end to the ban on transgender personnel.

Although certain aspects of transgender service are planned for implementation at a later time, including access to transition-related care and access for openly transgender personnel to the military, the decision is seen as a major step forward in the battle against discrimination against transgender people across the board from the armed forces.

The top Obama administration officials most directly involved in the new policy, Acting Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter and Deputy Secretary of Defense Alice Havenith, who was the first transgender service member, were two of the major players signed on to this new approach to the policy.

"I think that when done the right thing not only for the transgender community, but for our military," Carter said.

Ivanhope made it clear that Carter's feet were in the right place and he was ready to make a change as well and was not convinced to come, but he then changed his mind.

The new policy was met with resistance and anger and varied in tone to the former policy. It was said that transgender people were not "special" but rather were just people and they should be treated as such.

"We're people just like you. We're both men and women, and we're just like you. We're just like you," Carter said. "We've been given the chance to continue our lives, our families, our children, and we're grateful for that opportunity."

In some portion of the event, Aaron Bellon, director of the Transgender Resource Center, a faith-based ultimate sports and fitness program for transgender individuals in the U.S. military, told attendees the comparison between the policy and the new policy as well.

"One of the things that really brings us both together is that both were proposed up by what probably was a real and difficult and important social issue," Bellon said. "These were battles that were fought with love and dignity and respect.

"The moral courage in the new policy is just as strong as the moral courage in the old policy."

Bellon also spoke about the event high profile, the U.S. House Democrats who support openly transgender military service, including House Majority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and Adam Smith, the top Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee.

House Majority Whip Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) was among those who delivered remarks in favor of transgender military service, saying "the world is changing."