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Contact: Indra Lusero, Assistant Director, 303-902-9402, indralusero@palmcenter.ucsb.edu

MILITARY ANALYSTS SEE PROGRESS IN GAY PENTAGON APPOINTEE Opposition to Gay Hire Seen as "Beyond the Bounds"

16 April 2001- SANTA BARBARA, CA. Military analysts and civil rights advocates today insisted that the hiring of an openly gay consultant to aid Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld at the Pentagon did not pose a threat to military readiness. Their remarks came in response to criticism of the Bush Administration's decision to hire Stephen E. Herbits, a civil rights activist, pioneer in gay and lesbian marketing, and a former assistant to both Vice President Cheney and Secretary Rumsfeld.

In communications yesterday with researchers at the Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military, a research center at the University of California, Santa Barbara that studies the experiences of foreign militaries, Herbits confirmed that he will be screening civilian applicants for top Pentagon positions as a consultant in the role of "special assistant" to Secretary Rumsfeld.

Robert H. Knight, director of the Culture and Family Institute told the Washington Times that "An administration that has pledged to uphold the moral order has no business advancing the homosexual agenda through appointments. People are policy." He said leaders of the administration "are trying to become the bisexual administration. They are trying to have it both ways." The Rev. Louis P. Sheldon, chairman of the Traditional Values coalition, called Herbits' hiring a "slap in the face to our servicemen and to Congress," saying the appointment "sends a message to Congress that the Defense Department openly supports homosexuals in the military... despite the intent of Congress and senior military officials to protect the armed forces from homosexual activism." And Robert Maginnis, Vice President of the Family Research Council, called the appointment "inappropriate," worrying that Herbits might reject applicants who find "homosexuality incompatible with military service."

But Charles Moskos, the Northwestern University military sociologist who is considered the architect of "don't ask, don't tell," told UC Santa Barbara researchers that he welcomed Herbits' appointment as "a very enlightened step," calling it a "good sign that this administration is showing itself not intolerant on sexual minorities." The gay ban, he explained, only applies to uniformed personnel, "so to get upset over [Herbits' appointment] seems beyond the bounds."

David Segal, a military sociologist at the University of Maryland, who studies foreign militaries, said



that both civilians and uniformed personnel can serve in the military without a problem. "There have been a number of gay civilians in the Pentagon who were out and it doesn't seem to have been an issue," he said. He went further, explaining that sexual orientation need not be an issue among combat troops either. According to his research, "the experience of other countries suggests there is no reason for concern." Segal suggested that opposition to Herbits' appointment might be motivated by politics rather than military considerations. "I presume that the people on the hill who are concerned with Rumsfeld having a gay advisor are the same ones as those who opposed Bush having an openly gay AIDS advisor. I suspect the real issue here is that they feel the president is abandoning them."

David Smith, a spokesperson for the Human Rights Campaign, the largest gay rights lobbying organization, told UC Santa Barbara researchers that Herbits' position has nothing to do with "don't ask, don't tell." "He's a qualified individual who is being tapped by the Defense Secretary," he said, adding that criticism of the position is "further evidence that conservative activist groups just don't like the fact that gay people have jobs." David Elliot, communications director for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, said that critics are "taking the tack that any gay or lesbian appointee is unacceptable simply because they are gay or lesbian."

Academic experts say that opposition to gays serving in the military is at odds with public opinion as well as lessons of foreign countries which have lifted their bans on gay troops. According to Aaron Belkin, Director of the Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military, "both our research of foreign militaries, and scores of academic studies of cohesion and performance in domestic institutions, suggest that the known presence of sexual minorities does not impair fighting effectiveness." According to the latest Gallup poll, 70 percent of the public says that gays should be allowed to serve in the military. The U.S. and Turkey are alone among the original members of NATO in continuing to ban openly gay soldiers from service.

The comments of conservative activists also seem contrary to the growing number of academic experts who previously claimed that lifting the gay ban would undermine the military but who now say that lifting the ban would not harm military performance. Laura Miller, an assistant professor of sociology at UCLA, had expressed concern that there might be significant disruptions if the ban were lifted. But after participating in a recent conference on the experiences of foreign militaries that ended their bans, she says that "I was persuaded that even for those who would come out in an unsupportive environment, there probably wouldn't be quite the level of open hostility I had thought." Even Charles Moskos, who continues to support "don't ask, don't tell," has recently distanced himself from its central justification, the alleged threat of gays and lesbians to unit cohesion, criticizing the effects of his own policy as "insidious."



Additional media contact: Nathaniel Frank, CSSMM Director of Communications, (805) 893-5664

The Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military is an official research unit of the University of California, Santa Barbara. The Center is governed by a distinguished board of advisors including the Honorable Lawrence J. Korb of the Council on Foreign Relations, Honorable Coit Blacker of Stanford University and Professor Janet Halley of Harvard Law School. Its mission is to promote the study of gays, lesbians, and other sexual minorities in the armed forces.