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### **WOMEN, GAYS, AFRICAN AMERICANS FACE NEW MILITARY CHALLENGES Analysts See Weakened Commitment to Diversity**

SANTA BARBARA, CA, April 1, 2002 - Scholars and military analysts raised concerns last week that the Pentagon, White House and federal courts are undermining efforts to ensure equal opportunity for minorities in the military. Experts described a strategy of neglect, attrition and non-enforcement with the cumulative effect of making military service less open to minorities. Particularly worrisome, they said, is the Pentagon's increasing reliance on a small group of civilian advisors intent on preserving the military as a bulwark of traditional values.

"What we're seeing is a jolt to the right by a Pentagon and an administration under the sway of extreme traditionalists," said Nathaniel Frank, Director of Communications at the Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military at the University of California, Santa Barbara (CSSMM). "They are using the language of national security and unit cohesion to justify politically-motivated attacks on equal opportunity."

### **WOMEN IN THE MILITARY**

In the most recent development, the Pentagon has dismissed 22 of the 34 members of the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) and has rewritten its charter to limit its ability to set its own agenda. The changes mark the first time the Pentagon did not automatically renew the charter of the fifty-one-year-old group, which advises the Secretary of Defense on issues relating to women in the armed forces.

Among the most dramatic revisions in the charter was a restriction of the committee's duties to an agenda dictated by top Pentagon officials. DACOWITS also lost its power to choose which military facilities to visit and its annual budget was cut by more than twenty percent.

In scaling back the size, budget and duties of the committee, Pentagon officials were responding to heavy pressure from conservative groups that oppose women in combat and that have lobbied to put an end to DACOWITS and what they see as its "feminist ideology." According to Brig. General Evelyn P. Foote, President of the Alliance for National Defense and a former DACOWITS advisor, this well-



coordinated network of conservative women's groups, including the Center for Military Readiness (CMR), Concerned Women for America (CWA), the Independent Women's Forum (IWF) and the Eagle Forum, has the ear of top Pentagon officials. "The Department of Defense has been under incredible pressure for a long time," she said, "from a very strong coalition of organizations, primarily those affiliated with the opposition to women's roles in the military," to abolish the committee. Gen. Foote referred to "repeated efforts" made by then chair of DACOWITS, Vickie McCall, a Republican now running for Congress, to meet with Pentagon officials to discuss the future of the committee. But McCall was not granted a meeting.

Five former chairs of the committee also wrote a letter to Secretary Rumsfeld asking to have input into recommending appropriate changes to the charter, but they are still awaiting a response. Judith Youngman, chair of DACOWITS in 1997, was surprised that the Secretary of Defense did not meet with representatives of the group. "We had access to the Secretary when I was chair," she said. "But to my knowledge, no one who was a supporter of the committee was consulted before its charter was amended." Though periodic changes among political appointees to advisory committees occur routinely, experts suggested that the latest alterations were unprecedented. "This is a new phenomenon," said an Army Colonel who requested anonymity. "I have to say that this is different from anything that has occurred before." The Colonel said that the changes were motivated more by political considerations than military necessity. "What we have here," she said, "is a group of people who saw an opportunity to bring things in line with what they believe and they now have access to the Pentagon like they've never had before."

Indeed, critics of women in the military, including Rep. Roscoe G. Bartlett, Republican of Maryland, and Elaine Donnelly, president of the CMR, were allowed to meet with top Pentagon officials to press them to abolish DACOWITS and limit the role of women in the services. Donnelly, one of the most vocal opponents of women in combat and a former DACOWITS member, told the Washington Times she was "very disappointed" that the charter was renewed at all, adding that "there is no need for a committee focusing on women alone." A statement released by CMR from Donnelly linked the changes to the war against terrorism: "With a serious war going on, Secretary Rumsfeld should not retain a discredited, insubordinate feminist committee pushing a radical agenda that has nowhere to go but over the edge."

Other women connected to CMR and IWF have also pushed to exclude women and gays from combat in the name of national security. Nancy M. Pfothauer, president of the IWF, where Donnelly sits on the board of advisors, released a statement praising the downsizing of DACOWITS, saying, "it is important to put military readiness before social engineering." Charmaine Yoest, who also sits on the



IWF board of advisors, wrote in the Houston Chronicle this month that "DACOWITS should be dishonorably discharged because of military necessity." She said that male doubts about the fitness of women to carry them to safety "impair unit cohesion."

According to Mady Segal, Professor of Sociology at the University of Maryland, policy debates are frequently based on personal and political biases instead of on sound data. "Opponents of women in the military selectively cite whatever statistics or quotes will help their case," she said, "often omitting the latest studies if they don't corroborate their conclusions." With the issue of women on submarines, for instance, Segal said "there is no evidence that there would be a readiness problem." As for training issues, she said the findings of the Congressional Commission on Military Training "clearly support gender-integrated training as used in the Army (for non-combat specialties), the Navy and the Air Force."

Segal doubts that combat readiness is the real concern of these critics, suggesting they are committed instead to removing women from military service. "They are such hypocrites in saying that their concern is military readiness," Segal said, "because after the terrorist attacks, the last thing the military should be concerned about is re-evaluating integrated training and women in combat; yet I was appalled to see that Donnelly and others met with the Department of Defense after 9/11 to oppose gender-integrated basic training and to pressure the services to change or abolish DACOWITS. I think it shows their true colors."

#### ANTI-GAY CLIMATE

In addition to declining support for women in the military, the armed forces have seen a surge in expulsions and harassment of gay soldiers. Last month, the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN), a legal aid and watchdog group that monitors the policy on gay troops, released its eighth annual report on "don't ask, don't tell." According to SLDN, the Pentagon fired more than 1250 soldiers in 2001 for being lesbian, gay or bisexual. The report also documents 1075 cases of anti-gay harassment last year, up from 871 in 2000. Reflecting a "worsening epidemic of anti-gay hostility," this figure includes a record 513 instances in the Army alone, up 145% from the previous year.

Responding to these figures, Lt. Col. James Cassella said the Pentagon seeks to "balance readiness and unit cohesion with an individual's right to privacy and the expectation of a safe and harassment-free work environment." Yet researchers said that the restrictions on openly gay soldiers do not help to ensure combat readiness and may, in fact, hurt it. "The Bush administration's willingness to tolerate the continued expulsion and increased harassment of its gay soldiers is bad policy," said Nathaniel Frank,



of CSSMM, "and seems to be motivated by a fear that treating gays with respect would alienate its conservative base." He added that "the social science data clearly show that combat readiness is not compromised by the lifting of a gay ban and is not helped by policies that tolerate harassment and drive gay soldiers out of the services."

SLDN's report contends that military leaders have failed to implement anti-harassment plans that were adopted by the Pentagon over the past few years. "The White House and the Pentagon have allowed a climate of pervasive anti-gay sentiment to fester and grow within the services," the document concludes. The report also raises concerns that a policy which requires soldiers to lie to one another and which condones anti-gay sentiment is itself detrimental to unit cohesion and military readiness.

C. Dixon Osburn, executive director of SLDN, said the discharge and harassment figures reveal a failed policy. "'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' is a policy of rank discrimination that, at its core, is wrong, inhumane and anti-family," he said. "The blatant harassment violations documented in this year's report and the record number of gay discharges should compel the White House and Congress to repeal this un-American policy."

#### COURT RULING ON AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

These assaults on sexual minorities in the military come as an important federal court decision also has threatened the status of women and blacks in the armed forces. Earlier this month, a federal judge struck down the Army's equal-opportunity promotion process, saying that "the Army's desire to create the perception of equal treatment is not an important government objective." The decision found it unconstitutional to consider "personal or institutional discrimination" since it favors one race or gender over another.

The Judge reviewed promotion data supplied by the Army from between 1970 and 1992, and determined that there was insufficient evidence to document a pattern of past discrimination against black or female candidates. However, a study conducted by the RAND Corporation and the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School found that women and minority officers are still not promoted at the same rates as white males.

Nathaniel Frank said the pattern at the federal level constitutes a threat to diversity in the services. "Through their silence and inaction on anti-gay harassment, their efforts to weaken the role of advisory groups and their denial of past or present discrimination in the military, the federal government is eroding diversity in the armed forces" he said. "If these Americans weren't putting their lives on the



line for us, there would be no military."

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.