



Special Report

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Pentagon Report: Repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” Can Be Accomplished Successfully, Initiated Immediately

The Pentagon released its *Report of the Comprehensive Review of the Issues Associated with a Repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,”* an in-depth, nine-month study on how to implement repeal of the 17-year-old “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT) policy banning gays and lesbians from openly serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. The Pentagon report concludes that repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell can be accomplished without undermining military readiness and can be initiated immediately. Below are highlights from the report.

Low risk to unit cohesion and military readiness

The report concludes that, “while a repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell will likely, in the short term, bring about some limited and isolated disruption to unit cohesion and retention, we do not believe this disruption will be widespread or long-lasting, and can be adequately addressed by the recommendations we offer below. Longer term, with a continued and sustained commitment to core values of leadership, professionalism, and respect for all, we are convinced that the U.S. military can adjust and accommodate this change, just as it has others in history.”¹

The report goes on to state that, “in the key areas of military readiness, unit effectiveness, and unit cohesion the risks were all deemed to be LOW. Having considered the panel’s assessments, as well as other information gathered by the Working Group and implementation of our recommendations that follow, we assess the risk of repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell to overall military effectiveness is LOW.”²

Limited effect on service members’ ability to conduct mission

The study found “a widespread attitude among a solid majority of Service members that repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell will not have a negative impact on their ability to conduct their military mission.”³

According to survey results, “when asked about how having a Service member in their immediate unit who said he or she is gay would affect the unit’s ability to ‘work together to get the job done,’ 70% of Service members predicted it would have a positive, mixed, or no effect.”⁴

Repeal of DADT will have a limited impact on:

- **Cohesion.** “Overall, 70–76% of Service members said repeal would have a positive, a mixed, or no effect on aspects of task cohesion. Similarly, 67–78% of Service members said repeal would have a positive, mixed, or no effect on aspects of social cohesion.”⁵
- **Effectiveness.** “Service members without combat deployment experience since September 11, 2001, were asked how, if at all, repeal would affect their unit’s effectiveness at completing its mission ‘on a day-to-day’ basis. Almost 80% said repeal would have a positive, a mixed, or no effect.”⁶
- **Unit Readiness.** “With regard to personal readiness, 67% of Service members said that repeal would have a positive or no effect; 22% said the effect would be equally positive as negative, and 12% said repeal would have a negative effect. In addition, 58% said repeal would have a positive or no effect on their ability to train well; 21% said the effect would be equally positive as negative; and 21% said repeal would have a negative effect.”⁷
- **Morale.** “62% of Service members responded that repeal would have a positive, mixed, or no effect on their morale, while 28% said it would have a negative impact on their morale.”⁸

Misperceptions fuel resistance to repeal

According to the study authors, “[It] became apparent to us that, aside from the moral and religious objections to homosexuality, much of the concern about ‘open’ service is driven by misperceptions and stereotypes about what it would mean if gay Service members were allowed to be ‘open’ about their sexual orientation... Based on our review, however, we conclude that these concerns about gay and lesbian Service members who are permitted to be ‘open’ about their sexual orientation are exaggerated, and not consistent with the reported experiences of many Service members (5).”⁹

Further, “while a higher percentage of Service members in warfighting units *predict* negative effects of repeal, the percentage distinctions between warfighting units and the entire military are almost non-existent when asked about the *actual* experience of serving in a unit with someone believed to be gay.”¹⁰

Of the 69% of respondents in the overall military who reported having worked in a unit at some point in their career with a co-worker they believed was homosexual, 92% stated that the unit’s “ability to work together” was “very good,” “good,” or “neither good nor poor.” Despite apprehension in Army and Marine Corps combat units about repealing Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, when members of those units were asked the same question about their “ability to work together” with a homosexual co-worker, 89% of those in Army combat arms units and 84% of those in Marine combat arms units reported that their “ability to work together” was “very good,” “good,” or “neither good nor poor.”¹¹

Department of Defense (DoD) recommends immediate implementation

The report concluded, “Repeal can be implemented now, provided it is done in a manner that minimizes the burden on leaders in deployed areas. Our recommended implementation plan does just that.”¹²

The study’s authors concluded, “we are convinced the U.S. military can make this change, even during this time of war.”¹³

Report recommends key actions to limit risks of repeal

After concluding repeal can be accomplished with low risk to military readiness, the study recommends a series of steps to ensure that risk is mitigated. The recommendations include:

- Ensure success of repeal through strong leadership, a clear message, and proactive education.
- Clearly and forcefully deliver leadership expectations.
- Emphasize military standards of conduct and professionalism and apply them uniformly, with no special treatment on the basis of sexual orientation.
- Review current standards to ensure they are sexual orientation-neutral.
- Be mindful of moral and religious concerns, particularly within the chaplain corps, and adhere to existing guidance.
- Maintain current accommodations for bathroom facilities and sleeping quarters. Do not establish separate facilities based on sexual orientation; however, commanders should make use of existing guidance, where appropriate, to separate service members to protect privacy or address conflicts.
- Treat all service members under the same general principles of military equal opportunity policy.
- Do not treat sexual orientation on par with race, color, religion, sex and national origin as a class eligible for various diversity programs, tracking initiatives and complaint resolution processes under the Military Equal Opportunity Program.
- Educate service members on some of the “member-designated” benefits that will become available to same-sex partners. A number of benefits cannot legally be extended to gay and lesbian service members’ partners, due to existing law.
- Examine “qualifying relationship” status for couples in a follow-on review of implementing the repeal.

- Allow service members who were previously separated under Don't Ask, Don't Tell to reapply for reentry into the military.
- Remove private consensual sodomy between adults as a criminal offense from the Uniform Code of Military Justice.
- Conduct a follow-on review one year after Don't Ask, Don't Tell is repealed to monitor implementation and determine how adequately the recommended actions were adopted.

DoD report is unprecedented in breadth and depth of service member outreach

This undertaking is considered one of the largest and most comprehensive surveys conducted in U.S. military history. The survey was sent to nearly 400,000 active duty and reserve component service members; 115,000 responses were received. In addition, the study solicited input from more than 150,000 military spouses. More than 72,000 service members and their families submitted responses via online inboxes. More than 24,000 service members participated in 95 face-to-face "information exchange forums," which took place at 51 bases and installations located throughout the world, and several thousand more participated in one of more than 140 focus group sessions. The Task Force also sought input from military commanders, service academy superintendents and faculty, service chiefs of chaplains, service surgeons general, and members of Congress. Allied foreign militaries, veterans organizations and groups both opposed to and in favor of repeal were consulted. Finally, the survey was administered to current and former gay and lesbian service members.

DoD report strongly supported by military and government leaders

President Obama. "As Commander in Chief, I have pledged to repeal the 'don't ask, don't tell' law because it weakens our national security, diminishes our military readiness, and violates fundamental American principles of fairness and equality by preventing patriotic Americans who are gay from serving openly in our armed forces... Today's report confirms that a strong majority of our military men and women and their families—more than two-thirds—are prepared to serve alongside Americans who are openly gay and lesbian. This report also confirms that, by every measure—from unit cohesion to recruitment and retention to family readiness—we can transition to a new policy in a responsible manner that ensures our military strength and national security. And for the first time since this law was enacted 17 years ago today, both the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff have publicly endorsed ending this policy."¹⁴

Defense Secretary Robert Gates. On repealing Don't Ask, Don't Tell: "This can be done, and should be done, without posing a serious risk to military readiness... Now that we have completed this review, I strongly urge the Senate to pass this legislation and send it to the president for signature before the end of this year."¹⁵

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen. The Chairman's assessment of the working group's recommendations: "solid, defensible conclusions... For the first time, the [service] chiefs and I have more than just anecdotal evidence and hearsay to inform the advice we give our civilian leaders."¹⁶

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV). “The study released by the Pentagon confirms that repeal of the ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ policy can be accomplished without undermining the strength, cohesion, or readiness of our military. The comprehensive study included wide-ranging feedback from troops, spouses, military experts and others, and showed that overwhelming majorities believe repeal would not negatively affect morale and combat readiness. Democrats and Republicans should now come together to strengthen our military by ensuring that any American who wants to volunteer to defend our country can do so.”¹⁷

Senator Carl Levin (D-MI), Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. “It is clear that we can end ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ in a way that maintains our military strength, respects our troops and their families, allows patriotic Americans to serve the country they love without regard to sexual orientation, and upholds the principle that service and advancement in our military are based on merit alone.”¹⁸

Senators Joe Lieberman (I-CT), Mark Udall (D-CO), and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY). “The Pentagon report makes it unambiguously clear that the risk of repeal on military effectiveness is minimal, that any risks can be addressed by implementing the report’s recommendations, and that a clear majority of active duty servicemen and women have no problem with repeal. The military has spoken and now is the time to repeal this policy that is damaging to our national security.”¹⁹

General Carter Ham and DoD General Counsel Jeh Johnson. “We do not underestimate the challenges in implementing a change in the law, but neither should we underestimate the ability of our extraordinarily dedicated service men and women to adapt to such change and continue to provide our nation with the military capability to accomplish any mission.”²⁰

¹ *Report of the Comprehensive Review of the Issues Associated with a Repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,”* [Page 3](#).

² Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent page references refer to Pentagon report.

³ [Page 129](#).

⁴ [Page 3](#).

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⁶ [Page 64](#).

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¹⁴ [Page 10](#).

¹⁵ White House Press Release, [11/30/10](#).

¹⁶ *Washington Post*, [11/30/10](#).

¹⁷ Chairman of the Joint Chief’s Press Release, [11/30/10](#).

¹⁸ Senator Reid’s Press Release, [11/30/10](#).

¹⁹ Senator Levin’s Press Release, [11/30/10](#).

²⁰ Senators’ Lieberman, Udall and Gillibrand Joint Press Release, [11/30/10](#).

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