

EXPLODING FIVE MYTHS ABOUT THE MILITARY'S GAY BAN

During the presidential campaign, Bill Clinton pledged to end the Pentagon's ban on homosexuals in the military. By doing this, Clinton will neglect his constitutional responsibility to ensure that U.S. armed forces, the finest in the world, are prepared to fight. Clearly the new President, never having served in the military himself, has accepted several myths about the military's policy on homosexuals. Before he makes a serious mistake that could undermine national security, Clinton should re-examine these myths, and break a promise he never should have made.

Myth #1: The military's main objective should be to have the best person in the job, regardless of sexual orientation.

If battles were fought and won by individuals, this might be true. But combat is a team endeavor. A military organization functions best when the differences among individuals in a unit are minimized. That is why soldiers look, act, dress, and train alike. Why break down all of these differences only to inject the greatest difference of all—individual sexual identity—into a unit? Civilians can easily avoid unwanted sexual attraction from people of the same sex. But in the military lifestyle of forced association, such options seldom exist. Of course, the military wants the best person it can get in a job—but only if that individual's abilities contribute to the overall good of the team more than his personal differences detract from it.

Myth #2: Heterosexuals are unreasonably afraid of overt homosexual advances toward them.

Most heterosexual men who are likely to join the military are troubled by the notion of homosexuality. It is this profound discomfort, not the fear of actual homosexual advances, which would destroy the personal bonds that bring a military unit together. Men are able to show mutual affection only when there are no sexual implications. "Straight" men will not bond with men they know to be homosexual nearly as well as with other straight men. Without such bonds and the trust they create, men will not risk their lives for each other or put their lives in each other's hands. This type of fissure will wreck a combat unit.

Myth #3: The politics of "gay rights" will not affect military efficiency.

Sanctioning the presence of homosexuals in the military would threaten the merit-based system of the military, in which promotions and assignments are made based on performance, not political or personal relationships. The political power of the gay rights movement, which Clinton courted during the campaign, would threaten the merit-based system for which the military is highly regarded. Lifting the ban would be followed by promotion quotas, and the risk of lawsuits if gays were not promoted in representative numbers. Fearing such a political and legal backlash, military leaders might favor homosexuals, causing resentment among their heterosexual troops. Commanders making a decision unfavorable to a gay subordinate would be ac-

cused of "gay-bashing." This kind of sexual politics would politicize promotions and assignments, undermining military discipline and eroding morale.

Myth #4: The current policy violates the rights of homosexuals to serve their country.

Military service is a privilege, not a right. Access to the military has never been fair. Because victories in combat are achieved by cohesive units, the armed forces routinely sacrifice individual interests to ensure unit cohesion. Military service is legally restricted or denied entirely to patriotic Americans who are too tall, too short, too fat, color blind, flat-footed, and mentally or physically handicapped in any way. There are other restrictions; single parents, for example, are not allowed to enlist. This is no reflection on the inherent worth of these people as human beings; they are simply not suited for military service. Professional military judgment and experience indicate that mixing known homosexuals with heterosexuals degrades cohesion and combat effectiveness. It is not the individual qualities of the homosexual, but rather homosexuality itself, which is incompatible with military service.

Myth #5: Military personnel will accept known homosexuals among their ranks if ordered to do so.

Military effectiveness rests on more than commands from above. Men risk their lives under orders, but only because they trust their commanders and their comrades — and their Commander-in-Chief. Most Americans are uncomfortable with homosexuality in the military; in a September 4, 1992, *USA Weekend* survey, 67 percent of the respondents wanted the ban to continue. No change in Pentagon policy can change these feelings. It might drive them beneath the surface where, as any experienced leader knows, problems are usually far worse than when they are out in the open. A commanding officer who is known to be gay will encounter so much mistrust, if not hostility, that his ability to lead his unit will be severely compromised. All kinds of orders and punishments will not make men willingly put their lives in his hands.

What About AIDS?

The risk of AIDS is itself sufficient reason to deny gays the privilege of serving in the U.S. military. In battle, men must be sure that the blood they may encounter is free of the deadly HIV virus. This is not a frivolous concern, like being afraid to bump into "Magic" Johnson on a basketball court; people bleed on each other in battle, and the wounded frequently require battlefield transfusions from their fellow soldiers to stay alive. Nor is this fear of HIV unfounded; according to the federal Centers for Disease Control, two-thirds of U.S. AIDS cases are found among gay men. Testing may not reveal the presence of HIV for months. Surely not all homosexuals have HIV, but their behavior places them at high risk. This is a medical fact, and it begs the question: Should American soldiers be exposed—or think they are being exposed—to a deadly disease with no known cure just for the sake of gay rights? And what about the wounded gay soldier; will his comrades be afraid to help him because he may have contracted HIV since his last test? That is not fair to anyone involved.

Because he willfully evaded military service himself, Bill Clinton must overcome the initial mistrust of most military professionals. Promising a change in policy with such tremendous implications for the military would not be a good beginning. To be sure, the President is the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, regardless of his ideology. But the sole purpose of the military is to win in combat, not to advance the rights and equality of individuals. The Commander-in-Chief who puts ideology ahead of this principle will endanger the nation and every person in the military who puts his life in the President's hands.

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