

VFW Urges Caution in Ending 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell'

The VFW national commander said his greatest concern is how repeal will impact those closest to the fight.

Dec 20, 2010

The end of the Defense Department policy known as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" is imminent, but the national commander of the nation's largest combat veterans organization is still urging the administration to move cautiously with implementation.

"The acceptance of open homosexuality and the creation and enforcement of new policies could be far more difficult to implement than repeal advocates ever envisioned," said Richard L. Eubank, a retired Marine and Vietnam combat veteran from Eugene, Ore., who leads the 2.1 million-member Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. and its Auxiliaries.

Yesterday's 65-31 Senate vote ends congressional resistance to repealing "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." What remains is for the legislation to be signed into law, and for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of Defense, and the President to certify that repeal will not be detrimental to military readiness.

"Homosexuals have and will continue to serve in uniform with great honor and dignity because they understand the military is all about the team," said Eubank, "whereas repeal advocates are focused primarily on pushing a social agenda about individual rights. National security, unit cohesion and morale are the furthest things from their minds."

The VFW national commander said his greatest concern is how repeal will impact those closest to the fight. Results from a 10-month DOD survey indicate that 70 percent of the total force believes repeal would have little or no impact on unit performance, but almost 60 percent of those surveyed from the combat arms profession said repeal would have a negative or very negative impact on unit cohesion and performance.

"The majority of the fighting and dying in our nation's wars has always been done by the

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infantry, and if those at the tip of the spear have a problem with repeal, then it would behoove everyone to pay more attention to their concerns than those who have no vested interest in repeal's success or failure," he said.

"If implementation is to occur, it must be done cautiously and with the interests of the military and nation first and foremost, otherwise this social experiment could spell the end of America's all volunteer military, which is not a price this nation appears to be willing to pay."