

Repealing 'don't tell' won't hurt readiness

As a retired Army chaplain and a Vietnam veteran who served with combat units, I emphatically say that failing to lift "don't ask, don't tell," the policy that forbids gays from serving openly in the military, shows a bias and a misunderstanding of facts about gay people. It is based on fear, on warped and closed-minded thinking and on irrelevant religiosity.

Sen. John McCain is wrong to want to uphold the ban and seems little interested in negotiating with his opponents.



FLETCH WIDEMAN
MY TURN

My chaplaincy care and support was to all military personnel and their families, which, of course, included gays.

The gay military was just as committed to the mission as any group. Never did I see anyone question the orientation of a person. They were buddies in combat fighting for their country and fighting to protect each other without concern for any of that. In combat I never saw a gay person interfere with the mission. They were just ordinary people with integrity and with a love for America.

For the 20 years I served in the military, the greater problem was race relations. At the time, there was a significant effort to reform the armed services on this front. But in combat, there was never a question about race, because it was, again, just buddies doing their job. At that time, not accepting all races was unacceptable. If we had the same leadership today we had then, leadership based on integrity, building relationships and the affirmation of all persons, we would dis-



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Getting rid of the "don't ask, don't tell" policy will not affect troop readiness or morale, and it won't interfere with missions.

miss this fantasy that gays pose a serious risk to military readiness.

There are so many issues we face today — poverty and homelessness, the widening gap between the haves and have-nots, the significant cuts to public education, a failed economy, etc.

These trivial problems are created by those whose politics are more important than the best interest of Americans.

We must bring all people together because of the critical issues we face.

But this becomes difficult when leaders such as Sen. McCain focus on the trivial merely to call attention to themselves.

The "don't ask, don't tell" issue is not trivial, but having to continue to address it when there is no doubt of its eventual outcome is a waste of time, energy and money.

Without reading the Pentagon's report showing a growing acceptance of gays in the military, I know from combat experience that repealing "don't ask, don't tell" will not affect combat readiness or troop morale.

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