



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on November 8, 2010

Top Marine Urges Military to Keep “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”

President Obama and Defense Secretary Robert Gates are both encouraging Congress to repeal the military’s “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy before the end of the year. While Judge Virginia Phillips virtually eliminated the military policy when she ruled it to be unconstitutional, a three-judge panel on the 9th Circuit Appeals Court ruled on November 1 for the military to maintain the policy while the federal government pursues all appeals. In the meantime, however, a new commandant of the U.S. Marines Corps, General James Amos, declared on November 6 that now is the wrong time to overturn “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” — while American troops are still at war in Afghanistan.



Amos spoke with reporters during an interview in Southern California where the Marines marked the 235th birthday of the Marine Corps. According to Amos, who will make recommendations to Defense Secretary Gates this month, “There’s risk involved; I’m trying to determine how to measure that risk. This is not a social thing. This is combat effectiveness. That’s what the country pays its Marines to do.”

Amos’s argument is virtually the same one conservatives have used to urge politicians to hold off on any decision regarding the policy until after combat missions have concluded. Likewise, it is the same mentality that helped the three-judge panel grant a temporary stay of the injunction, observing:

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We conclude that the government’s colorable allegations that the lack of an orderly transition in policy will produce immediate harm and precipitous injury are convincing. We also conclude that public interest in ensuring orderly change of this magnitude in the military — if that is what is to happen — strongly militates in favor of a stay.

The [Associated Press](#) reports, “Amos said the policy’s repeal may have unique consequences for the Marines, which is exempt from a Defense Department rule for troops to have private living quarters except at basic training or officer candidate schools. The Marines put two people in each room to promote a sense of unity.”

“There is nothing more intimate than young men and young women — and when you talk of infantry, we’re talking our young men — laying out, sleeping alongside of one another and sharing death, fear, and loss of brothers,” Amos explains. “I don’t know what the effect of that will be on cohesion. I mean, that’s what we’re looking at. It’s unit cohesion. It’s combat effectiveness.”

Amos’s assertions have largely been founded on preliminary results of an internal Pentagon study of the policy based upon survey sent out to nearly 400,000 troops and an additional 150,000 family members.

The Associated Press indicates that while the results of the survey are not yet available to the public,



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portions have already been leaked, revealing that most troops, as well as their families, believe a repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” should be considered. These findings have been reported by anonymous military officials.

Amos contends, however, that his own top priority was success in Afghanistan, particularly since he does not envision a pullback of Marine forces in that country in the foreseeable future, even while President Obama maintains that he wants to reduce the number of ground troops in July, if conditions allow.

Based on the amount of necessary work remaining to train the Afghan army and police to take control of the country, Amos states, “The Marine Corps will stay the way it is [in Afghanistan] right now for probably at least the next year,” but that the number of Marines in Afghanistan will eventually shrink.

Despite Amos’ recommendations, however, Secretary Gates continues to maintain, “I would like to see the repeal of ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.’” However, noting the results of the midterm elections, he adds, “I’m not sure what the prospects for that are and we’ll just have to see.”

Additionally, Gates has urged Congress not to move forward on the repeal until the Pentagon releases its study — due December 1 — of how it should be implemented.

The [Associated Press](#) writes, “The House has passed legislation repealing ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,’ but it has not yet seen a vote in the full Senate, where Democrats don’t have the votes to overcome a Republican filibuster. Democratic leaders say they are trying to reach a deal across the aisle now that Election Day has passed.”

Likewise, the Senate is likely to consider the repeal during the lame-duck session in the form of the military defense authorization bill, which failed to pass because of Nevada Senator Harry Reid’s inclusion of such controversial provisions as the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” and the DREAM Act, an amendment which would have provided a pathway to citizenship for illegal aliens who enlist in the military.

While the White House and the military continue to debate the effects of repealing “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” the national gay and lesbian organization Log Cabin Republicans intend to appeal the decision of the three-judge panel to the full Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals or make an emergency application directly to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Photo: U.S. Marine Corps Gen. James F. Amos testifies on Capitol Hill in Washington, Sept. 21, 2010, before the Senate Armed Services Committee: AP Images



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