

OPINION

Time for the Corps to accept gay Marines

BY DARREL CHOAT

If President Barack Obama could have ended “don’t ask, don’t tell” by announcing a policy change rather than his intent to work with Congress to repeal the law in his 2010 State of the Union address, I might have served in the Marines openly but quietly. But the repeal debate turned ugly, and as gay veterans and gay soldiers and Marines serving in Iraq and Afghanistan were disrespected by military and civilian leaders, I realized that a quiet transition was not an honorable course of action.

Remarks by senior Marine leaders made clear that their conception of “Marine” did not include those who were gay. During and following his confirmation hearings in fall 2010, Commandant Gen. James F. Amos said he did not want his Marines dying because of a “distraction.” He probably meant that managing the repeal would be a distraction, but many gay Marines, myself included, felt that Amos was saying we were the distraction that would get our fellow Marines killed. Given the number of gay Marines in combat, that comment was deeply hurtful.

I am a patriotic American. I am an officer who loves country and Corps. I am doing my best to serve honorably and proudly. And I happen to be gay.

My challenge is not to simply acknowledge my sexuality as a Marine officer but for my actions to reflect the legacy of the Declaration of Independence — that all Americans are created equal and deserve equal consideration from their government. My task is to demand no less from my country and Corps.

I understand that my statements will prompt anger and disgust among some active-duty and retired Marines. History demonstrates, however, that deliberate steps are necessary to overcome the legacy of dishonor and prejudice such as that inspired by “don’t ask, don’t tell.” I have

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confidence that my Corps will take those steps.

While working in the Senate in the 1990s, I remember Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., taking to the floor and disparaging the “agenda” of gays and their “sinful” and “deviant” behavior. I felt helpless. One day Helms stepped into an elevator in which I alone was riding. Slowly, I realized no words could be adequate to confront him. His hate and ignorance could not be rationally discussed. The only effective course, it seemed to me, would be to disprove him by example, by personifying a proud, honorable and gay American who — simply by existing — refuted Helms’ demagoguery.

I came out to my family years earlier, and I had long been in the habit of letting co-workers become aware of my sexual orientation. Often I made no pronouncements. Engaging in honest discussions about weekend activities or personal relationships was all that was necessary. My guiding principle was simple: If I felt I had to say something or compromise out of fear or shame because I was gay, I had to stop and take the honest course. If I got fired, I got fired. No job was worth the sacrifice of my honor and courage.

In 1981, I had been awarded a four-year Marine Corps Reserve Officer Training Corps scholarship. I was aware that I was different — I hated being different — and I was self-conscious. I found it difficult to interact with other midshipmen and Marines, so I left the program. In 1997, however, I knew that “don’t ask, don’t tell”



JEFF CHIU/AP

From left, Julian Chang, of the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, cheers with Sen. Mark Leno, retired Navy Cmdr. Zoe Dunning, veteran Keith Kerr and retired U.S. Navy Petty Officer Joseph Rocha at a news conference in San Francisco on Tuesday.

did not preclude my service; it simply required that I shut up about being gay. So I applied and was accepted to attend Officer Candidate School in Quantico, Va., in October 1997. I greatly underestimated the personal cost of this compromise.

After the Battle of Saipan in 1944, Marine Commandant Gen. Alexander Vandegrift said: “The Negro Marines are no longer on trial. They are Marines, period.” His predecessor, Gen. Thomas Holcomb, had said that “Negroes did not have the right to demand a place in the Corps” and that “If it were a question of having a Marine Corps of 5,000 whites or 250,000 Negroes, I would rather have the whites.” It took leadership for Vandegrift to recognize the heroic service of [black] Marines and end officially sanctioned segregation in the Corps.

While Sgt. Maj. Micheal Barrett, the service’s senior enlisted official, clearly stated in June that a Marine is a Marine, regardless of sexual orientation, I am

aware of no senior Marine officer who has followed Vandegrift’s lead and set a leadership tone that will turn the page on the prejudice of the past. A January video by Amos and Barrett’s predecessor, Sgt. Maj. Carlton Kent, sent the message simply that the “don’t ask” law has changed and that Marines follow the law. Action to overcome the legacy of “don’t ask, don’t tell” is still necessary.

Vandegrift is an example of the possible. With the formal repeal of “don’t ask, don’t tell,” it is time for the Marine Corps to end the bigotry and prejudice regarding sexual orientation and to give Marines, combat veterans and Purple Heart recipients the respect and consideration they have earned.

Marine Maj. Darrel Choat, a student at the Marine Corps University in Quantico, Va., is the author of a report and personal essay in “The End of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” a forthcoming book from Marine Corps University Press. The views expressed in this column, which first appeared in The Washington Post, are his own.

End of DADT paves way for new discrimination

BY ALEXANDER F.C. WEBSTER

On Sept. 20, 2011, a date that will live in infamy, the U.S. armed forces were deliberately and successfully attacked by advocates of the scourge of homosexuality. The elimination of the last vestige of moral restraint on sexual perversion in the U.S. military, commonly known as the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy, ushers in a new Orwellian era in which the military leadership of our nation will proclaim the unnatural as natural, the unhealthy as healthy and the immoral as moral.

On Aug. 25, 2010, before the DADT policy was rescinded by Congress and the current president of the United States, I wrote the following in a guest column in Stars and Stripes (“Chaplains in no-win situation on ‘don’t ask’”): “A ‘nondiscrimination’ policy would surely mutate into approval and celebration of the ‘gay’ lifestyle, followed by ‘affirmative action’ recruitment of homosexuals, politically correct ideological indoctrination throughout the armed forces including family members, and, finally, active discrimination against — and persecution of — those who dare to express a dissenting opinion.”

Perhaps in another year or so we shall know with certainty whether that prediction was exaggerated or prescient. However, several portents of the latter prospect are already evident.

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Wasting no time, U.S. Marine Corps recruiters accepted an invitation from the executive director of a “gay rights” center in Tulsa, Okla., to “celebrate” the end of DADT on Sept. 20 by setting up a recruitment booth near the center’s AIDS quilt. The New York Times reported that the USMC was “the only one of five invited branches of the military to turn up with their recruiting table and chin-up bar”. That gives new meaning to the Corps leading the way.

Last April, still five months shy of the mandated expiration of DADT, the U.S. Navy chief of chaplains, Rear Adm. Mark Tidd, publicly embarrassed himself and his Chaplains Corps when he proactively paved the way for homosexual weddings by U.S. Navy chaplains in certain U.S. Navy chapels. In a memo dated April 13, Chaplain Tidd announced: “Consistent with the tenets of his or her religious organization, a chaplain may officiate a same-sex, civil marriage: if it is conducted in accordance with a state that permits same-sex marriage or union; and if that chaplain is, ac-

ording to the applicable state and local laws, otherwise fully certified to officiate that state’s marriages.”

He also gave the green light for Navy chapels to be the venue “if the base is located in a state where same-sex marriage is legal”.

What the admiral and his legal advisers somehow overlooked was the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act, which does not countenance such faux “weddings” in lieu of marriage between one man and one woman. Since Navy bases fall under Title 10 of the U.S. Code and are federal territory, the admiral, in his eagerness to accommodate a sexual minority, was effectively authorizing a violation of federal law. Four weeks later, after a storm of protest across the nation, particularly some 63 outraged members of the U.S. House of Representatives, the admiral ordered a right full rudder reverse starboard, changed course, and suspended his directive “pending additional legal and policy review.”

Most ominous, however, was the punishment that a military chaplain had to

endure as long ago as March, fully six months before the official commencement of the new post-DADT era. That chaplain’s endorser — that is, the religious authority who approves clergy of a particular faith group or denomination for military service — informed me on background that the eager minister’s orders for an assignment in Germany were suspended by the service component’s Chief of Chaplains office, and that the minister would have to be “supervised closely.” Why? The young chaplain had forwarded an email opposed to repeal of DADT and to homosexuality on moral grounds.

There we have the first punitive action, to my knowledge, against conscientious chaplains who dare to dissent from the new ideological groupthink that has captured the minds of the American military leadership. If my prediction last year proves correct, I fear that chaplain’s fate will be suffered by many.

As an Orthodox priest who still loves all of the troops I served as a chaplain for a quarter of a century, I pray that God the Holy Trinity will preserve and protect the U.S. armed forces — especially in this new Dark Age.

Father Alexander F.C. Webster, an archpriest in the Orthodox Church in America, retired in June 2010 as an Army Reserve chaplain at the rank of colonel after more than 24 years of military service. He is the author or co-author of four books on topics of social ethics, including “The Virtue of War: Reclaiming the Classic Christian Traditions East and West.”