

Wyden blasts DOD response on Don't Ask, Don't Tell

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden (OR), a senior member of the Intelligence Committee, on Thursday said he was extremely troubled by the response he received Wednesday night in a letter from the Pentagon concerning its "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. This is the second time the Pentagon has avoided answering the question of whether there is any military reason for maintaining the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy.

"As we send men and women to fight overseas, it is more important than ever that we address this critical issue," Wyden said. "Don't Ask, Don't Tell harms our national security. The policy impedes our military readiness by disqualifying thousands of talented and patriotic Americans from military service. It's also costing the nation hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars, which is completely unacceptable in this era of record budget deficits."

Wyden wrote to then-Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in August of 2006 asking him to respond to several criticisms of the policy and to inform Wyden of any positive effect the policy has had on the military and our nation's defense. When the Pentagon's response did not adequately answer the questions, Senator Wyden sent a follow-up letter to newly confirmed Secretary Robert Gates revisiting the issue and asking what, if any, negative effect the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell might have on the military.

"The Pentagon's refusal to directly answer my questions appears to confirm that there is no military reason for the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy," Wyden said. "The contention that this issue should not be addressed in a time of war is wrong-headed and counter-productive. Now is the time that we need to address any problems that harm military readiness or waste hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars."

In the past decade, nearly 10,000 service members have been discharged for being gay, the equivalent of two Army brigades. In addition, a 2005 report from the Government Accountability Office showed that nearly 800 specialists with critical skills have been discharged under Don't Ask, Don't Tell, including 322 Linguists, 54 of whom specialized in Arabic. That same GAO (General Accounting Office) report found that Don't Ask, Don't Tell cost the government \$190.5 million to implement between fiscal years 1994 through 2003. A 2006 University of California Blue Ribbon Commission Report found the cost to be \$363.8 million, almost double the GAO estimate.

"At a time when our military is scrambling to find qualified recruits, the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy makes absolutely no sense and undermines the fight against terrorism," Wyden said. "These patriotic and courageous men and women who want to serve our country ought to be allowed to do so."

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