

## **Gay General Queries Republican Candidates on “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”**

### ***GOP Presidential Candidates Defend 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell'***

ST. PETERSBURG, FL – Republican candidates for the 2008 presidential nomination expressed support this evening for the federal “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” law, which bans openly lesbian, gay and bisexual personnel from the armed forces. The candidates were queried on the topic by retired Brigadier General Keith Kerr, CSMR (Ret.), a member of Servicemembers Legal Defense Network’s (SLDN) military advisory council who ‘came out’ in 2003 and identified as a Republican voter. General Kerr served for 43 years in the military, including as Commanding General of the Northern Area Command of the California State Military Reserve. His question was part of this evening’s CNN/YouTube debate of Republican presidential contenders.

“I want to know why you think that "Despite the statements by candidates this evening, a growing majority of Americans in both parties want ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ repealed."

American men and women in uniform are not professional enough to serve with gays and lesbians,” General Kerr asked the candidates.

“Most Americans (who enter the military) are conservative and have conservative values . . . and to force those people to work in a small, tight unit with someone openly homosexual and goes against their principles is a disservice,” Congressman Duncan Hunter (D-CA) said in response. Senator John McCain (R-AZ) also endorsed maintaining the law, saying that “. . . leaders almost unanimously tell me that the present policy is working.”

Former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee told Kerr that, “People have a right to whatever feelings and attitudes they wish, but when conduct puts cohesion at risk, I think that is what is at issue. That is why we have the policy we have right now.” Former Governor Mitt Romney, who acknowledged supporting open service early in his career, told the General he now opposes that idea, saying that the law “has been there for 15 years and it seems to be working.”

Romney added that he would listen to the counsel of military leaders in the future and “listen to what they have to say.”

In response to the candidates, General Kerr noted that he did not believe they addressed his initial question, saying that, “Every day the Department of Defense discharges two people, not for misconduct or issues of cohesion, but simply because they happen to be gay.”

Source: Servicemembers’ Legal Defense Network,

<http://www.sldn.org/templates/press/record.html?section=2&record=4531>

On tridd at <http://www.tridd.com/docs/answers/GayGeneralOnDontAskPolicy.pdf>

Aubrey Sarvis, executive director of SLDN, pointed to growing support among Republican voters, and some GOP lawmakers, for repealing the law. "Republicans and Democrats alike should be able to agree that our national security and military readiness are not partisan political matters," Sarvis said. "Republican voters increasingly understand that 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' deprives our armed forces of the talent and skills of patriotic Americans who have important contributions to make to our national defense. Those voters want leaders who will reach across party lines and build consensus to repeal this law."

A March 2006 Pew Research Poll found that 62% of self-identified moderate Republicans support open service. A May 2005 Boston Globe poll also found that "Large majorities of Republicans, regular church-goers and even those with negative attitudes toward gays think gays and lesbian should be able to serve openly in the military."

Republican Senator Susan Collins (R-ME), a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, has also questioned the law, telling Joint Chiefs Chairman Michael Mullen that she "recently met with a retired admiral in Maine who urged me to urge you to reexamine the 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' policy." Former Republican Senator Alan Simpson of Wyoming has also endorsed repealing the law.

"Despite the statements by candidates this evening, a growing majority of Americans in both parties want 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' repealed," said Sarvis. "Lawmakers should follow the public's lead and lift this ban."

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