

Military analysts see great strides in gay Pentagon appointee

SANTA BARBARA, CA — Military analysts and civil rights advocates insist that the hiring of an openly gay consultant to aid Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld at the Pentagon does not pose a threat to military readiness.

Their remarks are in response to criticism of the Bush Administration's decision to hire Stephen E. Herbits, a civil rights activist, pioneer in gay and lesbian marketing, and a former assistant to both Vice President Cheney and Secretary Rumsfeld.

In communications with researchers at the Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military, a research center at the University of California-Santa Barbara that studies the experiences of foreign militaries, Herbits confirmed that he will be screening civilian applicants for top Pentagon positions as a consultant in the role of "special assistant" to Secretary Rumsfeld.

Robert H. Knight, director of the Culture and Family Institute, told the *Washington Times*, "An administration that has pledged to uphold the moral order has no business advancing the homosexual agenda through appointments. People are policy."

He said leaders of the administration "are trying to become the bisexual administration. They are trying to have it both ways."

The Rev. Lou Sheldon, chairman of the

Traditional Values Coalition, called Herbits' hiring a "slap in the face to our servicemen and to Congress," saying the appointment "sends a message to Congress that the Defense Department openly supports homosexuals in the military... despite the intent of Congress and senior military officials to protect the armed forces from homosexual activism."

Robert Maginnis, Vice President of the Family Research Council, called the appointment "inappropriate," worrying that Herbits might reject applicants who find "homosexuality incompatible with military service."

But Charles Moskos, the Northwestern University military sociologist who is considered the architect of the Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT) policy, told UC-Santa Barbara researchers that he welcomed Herbits' appointment as "a very enlightened step," calling it a "good sign that this administration is showing itself not intolerant on sexual minorities." The gay ban, he explained, only applies to uniformed personnel, "so to get upset over [Herbits' appointment] seems beyond the bounds."

David Segal, a military sociologist at the University of Maryland, who studies foreign militaries, said that both civilians and uniformed personnel can serve in the military without a problem. "There have been a number of

gay civilians in the Pentagon who were out and it doesn't seem to have been an issue," he said. He went further, explaining that sexual orientation need not be an issue among combat troops either. According to his research, "the experience of other countries suggests there is no reason for concern." Segal suggested that opposition to Herbits' appointment might be motivated by politics rather than military considerations. "I presume that the people on the hill who are concerned with Rumsfeld having a gay advisor are the same ones as those who opposed Bush having an openly gay AIDS advisor. I suspect the real issue here is that they feel the president is abandoning them."

David Smith, a spokesperson for the Human Rights Campaign, the nation's largest gay rights lobbying organization, told UC Santa Barbara researchers that Herbits' position has nothing to do with DADT. "He's a qualified individual who is being tapped by the Defense Secretary," he said, adding that criticism of the position is "further evidence that conservative activist groups just don't like the fact that gay people have jobs."

David Elliot, communications director for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, said that critics are "taking the tack that any gay or lesbian appointee is unacceptable simply because they are gay or lesbian."

Academic experts say that opposition to gays serving in the military is at odds with public opinion as well as lessons of foreign countries that have lifted their bans on gay troops.

According to Aaron Belkin, Director of the Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military, "both our research of foreign militaries, and scores of academic studies of cohesion and performance in domestic institutions, suggest that the known presence of sexual minorities does not impair fighting effectiveness."

According to the latest Gallup poll, 70 percent of the public says that gays should be allowed to serve in the military. The US and Turkey are alone among the original members of NATO in continuing to ban openly gay soldiers from service.

The comments of conservative activists also seem contrary to the growing number of academic experts who previously claimed that lifting the gay ban would undermine the military, but who now say that lifting the ban would not harm military performance. Laura Miller, an assistant professor of sociology at UCLA, had expressed concern that there might be significant disruptions if the ban were lifted. But after participating in a recent conference on the experiences of foreign militaries that ended their bans, she says, "I was persuaded that even for those who would come out in an unsupportive environment, there probably wouldn't be quite the level of open hostility I had thought."

Even Moskos, who continues to support DADT, has recently distanced himself from its central justification, the alleged threat of gays and lesbians to unit cohesion, criticizing the effects of his own policy as "insidious." ▼

Fund launches online chats

by Sloan Wiesen
Special to Q-Notes

The Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund, in partnership with Gay.com, is launching periodic online chats with prominent openly gay and lesbian elected officials and candidates. The first such chat is set for Tuesday, May 1, from 7:00-7:45 pm and will feature Atlanta City Council member Cathy Woolard, who is currently in a landmark race to become City Council president.

"We are very excited about bringing members of our community 'up close and personal' with the exemplary openly gay and lesbian candidates they can help elect," said Victory Fund Executive Director Brian K. Bond. "From the smallest towns to the biggest cities, gay and lesbian people across America will be able to join these informative question-and-answer sessions with our community's most exciting candidates and office holders. Participants will be able to learn about the enormous difference civic leaders like Cathy Woolard are making — and they will also be able to learn what they can do to help."

By prevailing this fall, Woolard, a past and current Fund endorsee, would become the first openly lesbian city council president of a major US city — and fill Atlanta's number two leadership post. She became Georgia's first openly gay or lesbian elected official in 1997, and she recently secured passage of a comprehensive equal rights law for the city.

"In addition to her work for equal rights, Cathy Woolard has been a leader in advancing technology initiatives in Atlanta and making the city government accessible on the Internet," noted Bond. "It seems only fitting that she will be the featured public servant at our first online forum."

People interested in participating in the first such online forum should visit the Victory Fund's web site at www.victoryfund.org at 7:00 pm on Tuesday, May 1, click on the link to the chat and then enter the "Victory Fund Chat" room. Information about future chats will be posted on the Victory Fund's web site as it becomes available. ▼

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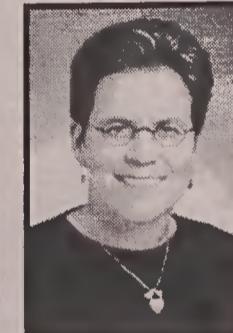
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