

Newspapers call for repeal

by Steve Rawls

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Newspaper editorial boards across the country are calling for the repeal of the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" law banning lesbian, gay and bisexual personnel. *USA Today* calls the ban "archaic and hurtful" and calls on Congress to "do what it ought to do and repeal the ban." Editorials calling for repeal have also appeared in *The Washington Post*, *The Baltimore Sun*, *The Oregonian* and smaller publications such as *The Republican* and *The Berkshire Eagle* in Massachusetts.

"Newspaper editorial boards are echoing the sentiment of the American people and calling for an end to the unjust ban on lesbian, gay and bisexual service members," said Sharra E. Greer, director of law and policy for Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN). "'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' flies in the face of our country's commitment to equal opportunity and robs our armed forces of talented men and women who want to serve. Seventy-nine percent of Americans support allowing gays to serve openly. Communities across

our nation are calling for repeal and Congress should heed their constituents' advice."

On March 7, *The Washington Post* wrote, "A combination of bigotry and inertia keeps the gay ban in place." *The Baltimore Sun* stated, "It's high time for the military to recognize fully the service and sacrifice of gays and lesbians and allow them to serve openly and proudly." And *The Oregonian* said, "It's time for Congress and President Bush to lift the ban."

In March 2005, Congressman Marty Meehan (D-MA) introduced *The Military Readiness Enhancement Act* (H.R. 1059), a Congressional bill to repeal the law. A bipartisan coalition of 110 members of Congress now support the bill.

"When this issue comes up, members who believe that gays shouldn't be in the military are now more hesitant to voice their opinion. Many of us who feel the other way have come out of the closet, so to speak," Congressman Wayne Gilchrest (R-MD), a supporter of the bill, told *The Washington Post*.

Soldier's story

from page 1

from where I live and work.

I don't think this has been reported in the States as of yet, at least I haven't heard. An unnamed company was on site to do testing and results were found on two of the three articles in question. The third object raised serious concern for the team — who requested to leave immediately.

Later another group came in and identified the third chemical as a blister agent.

Since then the soldiers have been carrying their protective masks. This is a concern for Iraqi soldiers and civilians around where we are. I think it scares them and reminds them of past tragedies.

We have to be careful how we conduct ourselves in these circumstances — there is little room for error — and the feeling against America and the coalition is always a source of much debate. The thought that America or the coalition might use these weapons is something the resistance often tries to use as scare tactics and ploys to recruit.

Blister agents are exactly what you think they are, they cause caustic reactions to the skin

and respiratory system. Having knowledge of these findings is a cause of slight alarm, but not panic. There are new filters on our masks — we have new chemical suits, gloves and boots. All soldiers are trained and equipped to protect themselves against a potential leak if this material exploded from an attack.

As of now — the material is contained and fairly safe. There is some concern around the number of mortar attacks we receive. If there was one good concentrated attack on that area — which is being kept secret — there could be devastating results.

We've been told we'll have the opportunity for advance warning. Even though the agent will be airborne if hit by a mortar and will travel quickly — there should be ample time for us to protect ourselves. Exposure can be treated, but it's not a pretty picture.

What does all of this make me realize?

Life is precious. You should appreciate it and live today like it may be your last.

See you soon my friends.

— Reporting from Iraq,
your friend and soldier from Charlotte.

It may take time to recognize the name, but you'll always recognize the face.

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