

NOT PUBLIC
UNTIL RELEASED BY THE
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT OF
GENERAL JAMES F. AMOS
COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS
BEFORE
THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
ON
THE POLICY CONCERNING HOMOSEXUALITY IN THE ARMED FORCES
DECEMBER 3, 2010

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Chairman Levin, Senator McCain, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to address the report of the Department of Defense Working Group that conducted a comprehensive review of the issues associated with a repeal of section 654, title 10, United States Code, "Policy Concerning Homosexuality in the Armed Forces."

I would like to begin by stating for the record that the study conducted by the Department's Comprehensive Review Working Group (CRWG) is a valuable examination of the issues associated with repealing the policy concerning homosexuality in the Armed Forces and serves to usefully frame the perspectives of our service members and their families. I am grateful for the efforts of the Honorable Jeh Johnson and General Carter Ham; as team leaders, I believe they led their working group faithfully to uncover the attitudes and opinions of our service members.

The survey provides useful information about service member attitudes and issues regarding potential implementation of repeal across the Marine Corps. I would like to briefly share with you what this report says about our Marines' opinions concerning implementation.

Viewed holistically across the Corps, including all military occupational specialties, approximately 45% of Marines surveyed viewed repeal negatively regarding unit effectiveness, unit readiness, and cohesion; 5-13% viewed repeal positively in those same categories. Of particular concern to me is that roughly 56% of combat arms Marines voiced negative concerns. Negative benchmark measurements for combat arms Marines ranged between 66% for unit effectiveness, and 58% for cohesion. These negative perceptions are held almost equally by all ranks within the combat arms communities. What the survey did not identify is the risk to the force should repeal be undertaken while the Corps is engaged in the ninth year of combat operations. With half of the Marine Corps' operating forces either engaged in fighting in Afghanistan, returning from theater, or preparing to deploy to combat, their readiness and associated focus are foremost in shaping my implementation assessment.

My experiences throughout nearly forty years in uniform tell me that young men and women who volunteer to be Marines do so with honorable and patriotic intentions, and that even vast differences in background, beliefs or personalities can be bridged. That said, if the law is changed, successfully implementing repeal and assimilating openly homosexual Marines into the tightly woven fabric of our combat units has strong potential for disruption at the small unit level, as it will no doubt divert leadership attention away from an almost singular focus of preparing units for combat. I do not know how distracting that effort would be, nor how much risk it portends. While the study concludes that "...repeal can be implemented now, provided it is done in [a] manner that minimizes the burden on leaders in deployed areas," the survey data as it relates to the Marine Corps' combat arms forces does not support that assertion. I cannot reconcile, nor turn my back, on the negative perceptions held by our Marines who are most engaged in the hard work of day-to-day operations in Afghanistan. We asked for their opinions and they gave them to us. Their message to me is that the potential exists for disruption to the successful execution of our current combat mission should repeal be implemented at this time.

I am faced with two questions. The first is “could we” implement repeal at this time? The answer is yes. Despite the challenges I have briefly outlined above, at the end of the day, we are Marines – should Congress change the law then our Nation’s Marine Corps will faithfully support the law. Marine Corps authorities, and even its very existence in law, flow directly from Congress; I promise you that we will follow the law. Chapter XIII of the study does a good job of articulating most of the elements of a successful implementation strategy. It will require and receive highly focused leadership at every level, beginning with me and the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps.

The second question is “should we at this time?” Based on what I know about the very tough fight on the ground in Afghanistan, the almost singular focus of our combat forces as they train up and deploy into theater, the necessary tightly woven culture of those combat forces that we are asking so much of at this time, and finally the direct feedback from the survey, my recommendation is that we *should not* implement repeal at this time.

Finally, on behalf of all Marines, their families, and civilian Marines, I want to thank you for your concern and continued support. I know that the repeal issue has been difficult for all concerned. I am grateful for the opportunity to represent our Marine Corps on this important matter to you.

I look forward to continuing to work with you to meet the challenges that lie ahead as our Marines and sailors remain engaged in combat operations. I pledge you will always have my honest assessment of what is required to maintain the health of your Marine Corps and the security of our great nation.