



**TESTIMONY OF ADMIRAL ROBERT PAPP
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BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

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Thank you Mr. Chairman, Senator McCain and distinguished members of the Committee for inviting the Coast Guard to participate in today's Hearing. I am grateful for the opportunity to provide you with our views regarding the the Report's (*Report of the Comprehensive Review of the Issues Associated with a Repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"*) findings on the potential impacts of repealing Don't Ask Don't Tell and its recommendations for implementation.

The Coast Guard is at all times an armed force, and its 50,000 uniformed men and women in the active and reserve force serve the American people by protecting our coasts, waterways, and maritime interests around the world. Our rescues in perilous conditions are legendary. Our law enforcement detachments board hostile vessels that carry drugs, traffic in human beings, or engage in piracy. Our maritime forces safeguard our national interests in places as diverse as the Bering Sea and the Northern Arabian Gulf.

I am extremely proud of our Coast Guard men and women. They are individuals of extraordinary caliber, who readily engage in the communities in which they serve. I am particularly proud of the strong response of Coast Guardsmen and family members who responded to the Report's survey—our active duty response rate was 54%; our Reserve response rate was 39%; and our spouse response rate was also 39%—which demonstrates their understanding of the importance of this issue.

I concur with the Report's recommendations on how to implement repeal of the current law. Allowing gays and lesbians to serve in the Coast Guard openly will remove a significant barrier to those Coast Guardsmen who are capably serving, but who have been forced to hide or even lie about their sexual orientation. Forcing these Coast Guardsmen to compromise our core values of Honor, Respect and Devotion to Duty to continue to serve is a choice they should not have to make.

While I concur with the Report's recommendations, prudence dictates that implementation must proceed with caution. I infer from data relating to the Coast Guard that many Coast Guardsmen and their family members may find gays and lesbians in our Service acceptable, however, minority views cannot be ignored. Moreover, there is no "total-force" view. Views within our Service communities vary to some degree. We must therefore fashion an implementation strategy that takes into account the attitudes that vary among our commands, based on where our people live and serve together.

Effective implementation of any repeal will surely require leadership and a conscientious dialogue with our workforce to achieve success. The Coast Guard's unique identity among the five armed services offers us potential advantages and challenges. We operate as both an armed force and a law enforcement agency. As a law enforcement agency, Coast Guardsmen partner daily with federal, state and local law enforcement agencies in which gays and lesbians serve with heroism and distinction. We also have many small units in remote localities throughout our Nation. Our personnel live in and are part of these communities. Indeed, ninety percent of Coast Guard personnel live on the economy rather than on base in military housing. This may facilitate the acceptance of gays and lesbians who serve among us.

At the same time, living in many remote communities around the Nation may pose challenges to assimilating gays and lesbians. As a field commander, I have seen Coast Guard members who have been victims of insensitivity, intolerance and even discrimination. While such experiences have been the exception and not the rule, our experiences in the past may be predictors of the challenges we will face in the future if the law is repealed. Openly gay or lesbian Coast Guardsmen may find themselves targets, and the Service must confront this issue and craft an implementation strategy that will protect the well being of all of our people, while ensuring mission execution.

By analogy, today the integration of women into the military is portrayed as a success story. However, we must not forget the rather significant challenges that accompanied our efforts to fully integrate women into the armed Services—as well as the hurdles these first women encountered. The Coast Guard pioneered the integration of women—our Academy was the first Federal Service Academy to accept women, and the first to assign women to the fleet. We do not tolerate conduct that constitutes discrimination or harassment and we take proactive measures to prevent it. However, though we have a highly trained and educated workforce, now with three decades of experience serving in a gender integrated service, incidents of such conduct continue to be reported.

Thus, I ask the committee to avoid inferring from the Report that implementation of this rather significant decision will be easy. I am a “pragmatist,” which I define as an “optimist with experience”. My experience leads me to conclude that we must inform you, our civilian leaders, that implementation will not be achieved without encountering significant challenges along the course ahead, some of which, despite our best efforts, we cannot foresee, and which will likely take considerable time and resources to overcome.

With that said, I am absolutely confident that Coast Guard leaders are prepared to implement any change you direct. Moreover, I do not harbor the slightest doubt that Coast Guard men and women will be up to the task, and will sustain the highest level of professionalism and effectiveness, should the law change. They prove every day that they are among America's best and I have unshakable confidence in their ability to weather change of this magnitude and to prevail.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to your questions.