

12,000 American Flags Mark DADT Anniversary
by Bob Roehr of the Windy City Times
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They fluttered in the crisp morning breeze, 12,000 American flags aligned on the Mall between the Capitol and the White House, looking a bit like a cemetery. Each one stood for a gay man or woman who has been discharged in the fourteen years that the antigay policy known as “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT) has been in place. They were small and on a stick, the kind of flag that a kid might wave from the sidewalk in the summer heat as a Fourth of July parade passed by; the kind left standing in the ground by a tombstone on Memorial Day. This was fitting because each flag marked the end of a proud career of service to their country. Each was a blot on the national ideals of liberty and justice for all.

“As we look across the field this morning at the flags honoring men and women who were willing to sacrifice their lives for this great country, one thing is clear, it is time to repeal the failed policy of ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’” It is time to allow all qualified men and women to serve openly and proudly,” said Joe Solmonese, president of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) .

“Yes, we are here to call attention to this discriminatory policy, but more importantly, we are here to thank those 12,000 gays and lesbians and their families for the great sacrifices they have made for our country,” he said on November 30, at the start of three days of events focusing on the policy.

Marine sergeant Eric Alva was the first person wounded in the Iraq War, in 2003. He lost his right leg. “I served my country proudly for 13 years, and I shed blood for my country on the sands of Iraq. I have sacrificed for the rights and freedoms of people in this country. Not just some of them, all of them—no matter who they are.”

“‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ is the only law in this country that forces people to be dishonest about who they are.” Alva said, “It is time for us to allow people to be who they are.”

Aubrey Sarvis, executive director of the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, said the policy “stands against every principle of equity and fairness that this country claims to stand for. It is time for ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ to go.”

He said, it is about more than the gays and lesbians who have served and continue to serve in the military, “it is also, in a very real and fundamental way, about citizenship, civil rights, military readiness, and simple fairness for each and every one of us.”

Retired Major General Dennis Laich released a letter signed by 27 other generals and admirals. It urged Congress to repeal DADT “in the name of truth, justice, and espoused military values.”

All of the Democratic presidential candidates have said the policy should be changed, but when HRC has pressed them as to what actions they would take as President to make that change, they have not been forthcoming with details. All of the major Republican candidates support the ban.

A poll in May by CNN found that 79 percent of Americans thought that gays should be allowed to serve openly, while a survey of returning Iraqi vets, who presumably are more conservative, found only slightly lower support.