

Gay advocates demand apology from Pace

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March 13, 2007

A gay advocacy group Tuesday demanded an apology from the Pentagon's top general for calling homosexuality immoral.

In a newspaper interview Monday, Marine Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had likened homosexuality to adultery and said the military should not condone it by allowing gays to serve openly in the armed forces.

"General Pace's comments are outrageous, insensitive and disrespectful to the 65,000 lesbian and gay troops now serving in our armed forces," the advocacy group Servicemembers Legal Defense Network said in a statement on its Web site.

The group has represented some of the thousands dismissed from the military for their sexual orientation.

Pace made his remarks in an interview Monday with the Chicago Tribune. He was responding to a question about the "don't ask, don't tell" policy that allows gays and lesbians to serve if they keep their sexual orientation private and don't engage in homosexual acts.

Pace said he supports the policy, which became law in 1994 and prohibits commanders from asking about a person's sexual orientation.

"I believe homosexual acts between two individuals are immoral and that we should not condone immoral acts," Pace was quoted as saying in the newspaper interview. "I do not believe the United States is well served by a policy that says it is OK to be immoral in any way."

Pace, a native of Brooklyn, N.Y., and a 1967 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, said he based his views on his upbringing.

"As an individual, I would not want (acceptance of gay behavior) to be our policy, just like I would not want it to be our policy that if we were to find out that so-and-so was sleeping with somebody else's wife, that we would just look the other way, which we do not. We prosecute that kind of immoral behavior," he said.

The newspaper said Pace did not address concerns raised by a 2005 government audit that showed some 10,000 troops, including more than 50 specialists in Arabic, have been discharged because of the policy.

"Don't ask, don't tell" was passed by Congress in 1993 after a firestorm of debate in which advocates argued that allowing homosexuals to serve openly would hurt troop morale and recruitment and undermine the cohesion of combat units.

Rep. Martin Meehan, D-Mass., has introduced legislation to change the ban. Meehan introduced a similar bill in 2005 that eventually attracted 122 co-sponsors, including Republican Chris Shays of Connecticut and Independent Bernard Sanders (news, bio, voting record) of Vermont.

John Shalikashvili, the retired Army general who was Joint Chiefs chairman when the policy was adopted, said in January that he has changed his mind on the issue since meeting with gay servicemen.

"These conversations showed me just how much the military has changed, and that gays and lesbians can be accepted by their peers," Shalikashvili wrote in a newspaper opinion piece.

He also cited a new Zogby poll, commissioned by the Michael D. Palm Center at the University of California at Santa Barbara, of 545 U.S. troops who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Three quarters said they were comfortable around gay men and lesbians; 37 percent opposed allowing gays to serve openly; 26 percent said they should be allowed, and 37 percent were unsure or neutral.

Of those who said they were certain that a member of their unit was gay or lesbian, two-thirds did not believe it hurt morale, according to the poll published in December.

Shalikashvili said he expected fierce debate over gays in the military this year as Congress considers President Bush's call for expanding the size of the Army, which is stretched thin by wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.