

Survey will permit informed decisions on 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell'

BY JIM GARAMONE

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON — Survey responses on the possible repeal of the law that bans gays and lesbians from serving openly in the military will allow leaders to make informed decisions, Pentagon Press Secretary Geoff Morrell said Friday.

Morrell said many stories that have resulted from advocacy groups leaking a 103-question survey e-mailed this week to 400,000 servicemembers "have been inflammatory in the worst case, and misleading in the best case."

Defense Department officials wanted the survey to remain confidential, Morrell said, but the distribution of the survey to 200,000 active-duty servicemembers and 200,000 reserve-component personnel worked against that aim.

The survey was designed to be a confidential conversation between the Defense Department working

group studying the matter, in particular, and a large representative sample of the force, Morrell said.

"We thought it would be breaking faith with them for us to be proactively sharing the survey," he said, "because what we are trying to do is preserve the credibility and integrity of the answers that it elicits from the force."

Outside influence is not helpful to the process, Morrell said.

The survey is designed to get the attitudes of the force on how to proceed if Congress repeals the so-called "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" law, and is not a referendum on whether or not the law should be repealed, Morrell said. The answers, he added, will inform the working group's deliberations.

Pentagon officials worked with a professional and reputable polling firm to produce the survey, Morrell noted. Roughly the first third of the 103 questions seeks demographic information. The second

third asks about professional and military experience. The final third asks how the law's repeal might affect the individual being surveyed, he explained.

The working group led by Gen. Carter F. Ham, commander of U.S. Army Europe, and Jeh Johnson, the Defense Department's general counsel, already has spoken with 14,000 servicemembers, Morrell said. Another 33,000 servicemembers have interacted with the department electronically, he added.

Of the responses to date, Morrell said, many included concerns about privacy issues. "Clearly," he said, "a component of this scientific survey had to deal with privacy questions." Ten survey questions address privacy issues surrounding bathing facilities, living facilities and social settings.

"We think it would be irresponsible to conduct a survey that didn't address these questions," Morrell said, "because when 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' is repealed, we will

have to determine if there are any challenges in those particular areas, any adjustments that need to be made in terms of how we educate the force, or perhaps even facility adjustments that need to be made to deal with those scenarios.

"But we won't know any of that until we get a sense from the force of their attitudes," he continued. "It could turn out, based on this survey, that there are far fewer concerns than we are led to believe. There could more or different concerns than we had anticipated."

But Defense Department officials need the information generated from this survey to make smart decisions, Morrell said.

"We need people to participate in this survey to get a scientific understanding of the attitudes of the force, or the concerns, or issues or opportunities that may result from a repeal of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell,'" he said.



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— Geoff Morrell



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