



New Advocacy Film About 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' Debuts in Washington

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Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN) joined representatives of the Brave New Foundation at the Take Back America Conference in Washington earlier this week for the debut of a new film and web advocacy campaign aimed at building grassroots support for repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," the military's ban on lesbian, gay and bisexual personnel. The film, also available online at www.lifftheban.org, features Stephen Benjamin, a former Arabic linguist and SLDN client dismissed under the law. SLDN, along with other organizations, has joined the Foundation in launching an online petition to Congress and an aggressive outreach and education program about the issue of gays in the military.

"This dynamic new project from the Brave New Foundation showcases the impact 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' continues to exact on our armed forces," Steve Ralls, director of communications for SLDN, said in a release. "Stephen Benjamin's story reminds us that discrimination has a very real price. Since 1993, at least 58 Arabic speakers have been dismissed under the law, as well as countless other specialists who bring much-needed skills to our national defense. With this new campaign, the public can speak out against the ban and join our coalition partners in building support for repeal. We are proud to be working alongside Brave New Foundation to build grassroots support for toppling 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell.'"

More than 11,000 service members have been dismissed since implementation of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" in 1993. According to the Government Accountability Office (GAO), nearly 800 of those dismissed had skills deemed 'mission-critical' by the Department of Defense, including more than 300 language specialists. The cost to U.S. taxpayers for maintaining the ban is estimated at \$363.8 million.

"It seemed incomprehensible to us that the United States would deny the ability to serve based solely on sexual orientation, especially considering that dozens of other countries allow gays to serve openly," said Jim Miller, executive director of the Brave New Foundation. "We are honored and proud to stand with so many influential organizations in our push to lift the ban and see the Military Readiness Enhancement Act passed."

Other organizations partnering in the film launch include the California Council of Churches, Campaign For America's Future, Campus Progress, Democrats.com, Human Rights Campaign, Log Cabin Republicans, National Center for Lesbian Rights, **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force**, People for the American Way, SEIU, Unitarian Universalists Association of Congregations, Young Democrats of American, and Young People For.

To view the film, and for more information on the campaign to repeal "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," visit www.lifftheban.org.