

Alexander Nicholson's Press Conference Statement - July 8, 2009

Thank you Jarrod, and good morning everyone. As Jarrod said, I am Alexander Nicholson and I am the founder and Executive Director of Servicemembers United, the nation's largest organization of gay and lesbian troops and veterans and their straight allies. Servicemembers United is an all-veteran organization that represents the gay military and veteran community and the issues that affect their service and their lives, including and especially the flawed, outdated, and so-called "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy.

We are especially honored to have Congressman Patrick Murphy here with us today, and with us moving forward now as the lead sponsor of the Military Readiness Enhancement Act in the House of Representatives. Congressman Murphy is a true leader in every sense of the word. As an officer in the Army, he led service members in Bosnia and Iraq. Now as a distinguished member of Congress, he is leading the way in championing the repeal of a harmful and discriminatory law, the demise of which is long overdue.

While it is one thing for me to stand up here and tell you that the professional men and women of today's military do not have a problem working alongside me and openly gay men and women, it is entirely another thing to have our straight fellow troops and veterans, people like Congressman Murphy and Genevieve Chase, who you will hear from next, stand up and say first hand that they will be able to function and continue to do their jobs just fine if openly gay men and women are allowed to serve beside them.

Their selflessness in stepping forward to attest to this reminds me of Fredrick Douglass's famous quote about advocating on behalf of others. He said, "When I ran away from slavery, it was for myself; when I advocated emancipation, it was for my people; but when I stood up for the rights of women, self was out of the question, and I found a little nobility in the act." Congressman Murphy, Genevieve, Steve, your nobility in advocating for the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" is a source of inspiration for us all, and we truly honored and grateful.

In 2002, just six months after 9/11, I was personally affected by this law when my command was forced to honorably, but involuntarily discharge me pursuant to "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" because I had been outed as gay within my unit. I was trained by the Army as a human intelligence collector - one of the critical intelligence fields within the U.S. military - and I speak five languages, including Arabic. Yet, this law forced my command to fire me and barred me from re-entry into the military, depriving our armed forces of yet another critical asset when that asset was needed most.

My own experience is exemplary of the unquantifiable costs of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," costs

that the general public rarely hears first hand. This is why, once again, we are taking our advocacy and our message on the road with the "Voices of Honor" tour to show the American public that this is face of a gay soldier, and this is cost of maintaining "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" - a multi-lingual human intelligence collector who speaks Arabic, has an advanced degree, and, despite everything, would go back into the military in a heartbeat if "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" were repealed today.

And with that, I would like to introduce Genevieve Chase, the Executive Director of American Women Veterans.