

Genevieve Chase's Press Conference Statement - July 8, 2009

Thank you, Alex, for the opportunity to be here today to speak about something that means a great deal to me and to a lot of my fellow service members. I thought the hardest part about this would be finding the right words, but to be honest, the most difficult part of this is adhering to the three-minute time limit.

I'm Genevieve Chase. I served in the U.S. Army and I am a veteran of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. I am also straight.

Those who oppose repealing the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" law would have you believe that allowing gays to serve openly in the military would disrupt unit cohesion. They would also have you believe that we are incapable of working alongside openly gay men and women. I beg to differ. I not only don't believe this, I *know* from my experience, that it is NOT true.

In over six years of military service, I have trained and served with many gays and lesbians. Our teams consistently functioned efficiently and cohesively, even when they included openly gay soldiers. Those who oppose repealing the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy have taken the phrase - unit cohesion - and turned it into something that does not match our generation's understanding of cohesion in the modern military. To service members, cohesiveness means "one team, one fight," and no generation in the history of this country embodies that spirit more than today's modern military professionals. Allowing *discrimination* and *bigotry* to continue and *forcing dishonesty* within our ranks, is what disrupts the cohesion of our armed forces.

On April 7, 2006, while in Afghanistan, a suicide bomber drove his car, packed with explosives, into our vehicle. Everyone in our team survived the attack and in the moments after the explosion, we pulled together. In the heat of combat, what mattered was getting everyone back alive. Our focus was on the mission and on the survival of our team, not on gender, race, religion or sexual orientation.

In my personal observation, sexual orientation discrimination was used as a way to demean soldiers that stood above the rest. Perception is reality in the military and I found that when women kept their relationships and personal lives private, and rejected advances made by interested men, rumors would spread that "she must be a lesbian." The accusation itself, is enough to warrant an investigation and it is all too often true, that troops are guilty until proven innocent. DADT is used as a tool levied against women and I could easily have been one of those women. The numbers reflect this issue as women represent a disproportionately significant number of those discharged under DADT.

Those who oppose repealing the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy would have you believe that

doing so would disrupt unit cohesion. I'm here to tell you that gays have been and *are already* serving openly. Unit cohesion across the spectrum of the military is better than it has ever been because our generation *embraces* diversity. Oppositionists would also have you believe that today's professional service members are incapable of living alongside gays and lesbians but I'm here to tell you that we already do.

We are service members of a new era and not only is this policy outdated but it **WILL** and **MUST** change to reflect the values, integrity and honored service held in high esteem by our generation.

Thank you.