

Jarrold Chlapowski's Press Conference Statement - July 8, 2009

Good morning.

First let me thank Congressman Murphy for his leadership on this issue and for so ably stepping in as the lead sponsor of the Military Readiness Enhancement Act. I watched Congressman Murphy on C-Span last year during the first hearings on "Don't Ask Don't Tell" in over a decade, and was instantly impressed by what a strong ally we have on this issue. His commitment to repeal bodes well for the progress of this necessary legislation. Having the first Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran in Congress as lead sponsor of the bill is very indicative of the fact that "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," is not, nor has it ever been, simply a gay issue--it impacts all service members.

"Don't Ask, Don't Tell" harms our national security. Our military is not nearly as strong as it could be due to the restricted recruiting pool the policy presents. It disrupts units by forcing a generation of service members comfortable with lesbians and gays to witness the lengthy discharge of not only a valuable unit asset, but a core member of the team. Unit cohesion, combat readiness, and troop morale do not benefit from "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," but suffer. "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" does not just affect the estimated 65,000 gay and lesbian troops already serving, but the entire military. Congressman Murphy, I know, can attest to that. Stephen Vossler, my best friend in the Army, my straight best friend, who witnessed firsthand the effects of my being open about my sexual orientation to the entire and who is in the audience today, can attest to that the fact that unit cohesion benefitted from my honesty.

With Congressman Murphy as lead on the bill at a time when so much attention is being placed on "Don't Ask Don't Tell," we have an opportunity to aggressively go forward and push repeal through this Congress. To promote this effort, the Human Rights Campaign and Servicemembers United are announcing today the 'Voices of Honor' Tour.

Over the next two months, a group of young, Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom-era veterans, both gay and straight, will be touring the country bringing the issue to America's doorstep. These veterans will be sharing their stories of serving under "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" from both the gay and straight perspective, placing a face on the policy and sharing the effects of DADT from a firsthand perspective. These are members of an entire generation that has lived and breathed DADT.

With me today are a number of veterans who represent that generation. Each one will provide an overview of what we hope to bring to this tour. I'd like to first introduce a veteran I've worked with in the movement for repeal for quite a few years, Alexander Nicholson, Executive Director of Servicemembers United.