

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus  
Secretary of the Navy  
Pentagon Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transgender Pride Month Ceremony  
The Pentagon  
Arlington, VA  
Wednesday, June 8, 2016

Thank you, Major. To my fellow service secretaries, Secretary Fanning, Secretary Murphy, and distinguished guests, and most importantly to the Sailors, Marines, soldiers, airmen, Coast Guardsmen and DOD civilians, those here representing and those supporting the LGBT community, today's a good day. Although it took way too long for policy to match reality, and while there's still work to be done, we've made a lot of progress toward achieving DoD Pride's goal of ensuring that all members of the Department of Defense are empowered to support its mission in an inclusive workplace, free of discrimination.

Now, a statement like that just shouldn't be controversial. It shouldn't be a problem. But just five years ago an event like this would not have been possible. There were those in uniform, on the Hill, and in the American public who favored continuation of "don't ask, don't tell." That policy required LGBT service members to lie, to hide, in order to serve. It's a policy that was insidious and morally wrong. Throughout this debate, though, those opposing the repeal of "don't ask, don't tell" used exactly the same flawed logic as those who had earlier opposed racial integration or gender integration, claiming that policies of inclusion would erode the warfighting capabilities of the United States.

That's a suggestion that's not only an insult to the professionalism of our armed forces, but it undermines our core values as servicemen and -women, and as Americans. It's because of individuals like the people here today, the members of DOD Pride, who fought for dignity and equality, and because of institutional leaders that will be honored here today, like Admiral Mike Mullen, who had the courage to do what's right, on September 20<sup>th</sup> we'll celebrate the fifth anniversary of the repeal of "don't ask, don't tell."

A lot's happened in those five years. In the immediate aftermath, service members who had lived parts of their lives in the shadows and often in fear were able to be fully open about who they are. They were able to be with, and now to marry the people they love, able to see senior leaders speak honestly about their experiences. The numbers are big – 65,000 active duty LGBT members, a million LGBT veterans. But it's the individual stories that bring home what this means.

Not long after the repeal, I was in Manas, Kyrgyzstan, on the base that people came through on their way into or out of Afghanistan. And after an all-hands call, a Navy corpsman came up to me and said: I just want to tell you how relieved I am, because I'm gay and I just finished my third combat deployment. And the thing I was worried about the most was not being able to serve. Now, how bad is that? Somebody who has done three combat deployments on

behalf of this country and his biggest fear is he would not be allowed to continue to serve because of who he loved.

More recently, in this last five years, we've adjusted equal opportunity policies to include gay and lesbian members. The Supreme Court decided states cannot ban same-sex marriage. And just a few weeks ago my good friend and colleague, Eric Fanning, was confirmed as Secretary of the Army. (Applause.) And I got to do this. And I apologize. It's not in my notes. But Eric, we're going to show that we're absolutely equal opportunity at the Army-Navy game. (Laughter.) Fifteen years in a row this year. (Laughter.) Sorry, I had to. (Laughter.)

In our department, the Department of the Navy, we've reached out to people discharged under "don't ask, don't tell." And we're working with organizations like DoD Pride and others that advocate for the LGBT community. We've met with a lot of those organizations, and other VSOs, to reach out and tell people: If you were discharged under "don't ask, don't tell," come in. The Board of Corrections for Naval Records will take a look at changing that discharge characterization. And I would ask you all to do the same thing. If you have colleagues that were discharged under that, ask them to come in – if it's under the regulations, get that discharge characterization changed.

All of this is the basic idea, if you can meet the job standard you should be able to do the job. Whether it's opening submarine service and riverines to women, whether it's opening all positions including SEALs and Marine ground combat to women, time and again history has shown this is the right thing to do. When we faced racial integration, when we integrated women into the service, when we repealed "don't ask, don't tell," every time those changes were proposed – every time – there were naysayers saying the force would be weakened and unit moral would decrease.

And yet, the Navy, the Marines, the Army, the Air Force, the Coast Guard are the most powerful forces in the world today. And it shows that a more diverse force is a stronger force. When we talk about diversity, the main thing we're talking about is diversity of background, diversity of thought. We have to continue to recruit, train, and develop a force from all of America's talent. We need a force representative of and reflective of the nation it defends. And because of that, we're a more effective fighting force.

If a person qualifies in every way for service, how can we possibly say – how can we possibly say that they cannot share in the honor of defending this country because of who they love or the shape or the color their skin? We cannot. We should not. And now we do not.

I'm happy to be here with you today, by your willingness to serve, and serve as who you are. You epitomize the Navy motto, Semper Fortis, Always Courageous; the Marine motto, Semper Fidelis, Always Faithful. Thank you all.