



Gay Veterans to Lobby Congress

Washington, DC - The military's highest-ranking openly gay officers will join other veterans and activists from across the country in Washington for Servicemembers Legal Defense Network's (SLDN) second annual lobby day, May 23-25. American Veterans for Equal Rights (AVER) will convene their annual convention of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender veterans in conjunction with the lobby days, on May 20-22. BG Keith H. Kerr, CSMR (Ret.), BG Virgil A. Richard, USA (Ret.) and RADM Alan M. Steinman, USCG (Ret.) will headline both events, joining activists in calling for an end to the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" ban on lesbian and gay service members.

"Our community brings the strength of one million lesbian, gay and bisexual veterans to Washington," said SLDN Director of Law & Policy Sharra E. Greer, citing a recent study from the Urban Institute. "Their stories evidence the sacrifice and bravery of these patriotic men and women. There is a growing consensus in our country that anti-gay discrimination in our armed forces is wrong, and we're bringing that consensus directly to Congress."

Nearly 10,000 servicemen and women have been fired under "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" during the last decade. SLDN estimates it costs between one quarter billion dollars and 1.2 billion dollars just to train replacements for those men and women fired simply because of their sexual orientation. "The message," said Greer, "is simple: 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' is counterproductive to our national interests."

On Tuesday afternoon, Rep. Jim Moran (D-VA) will address lobby day attendees at a Capitol Hill reception.

Prior to SLDN's lobby days, the AVER National Convention will include three days of workshops, panels and activities related to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender veterans.

"From the American Revolution to the war on terror, America's LGBT veterans have served our country with honor and distinction," said A.J. Rogue, national president of AVER. "Our convention brings together the men and women who have served on the frontlines of our national defense. We will share our experiences, build on our commitment to service and look to a future free of federally sanctioned discrimination in our military."

Presenters and guests at the AVER convention include BG Kerr, BG Richard, RADM Steinman and Osburn as well as Nathaniel Frank, senior research fellow at the Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military at UC-Santa Barbara; MAJ Jeffery M. Cleghorn, USA (Ret.), project director of the Military Education Initiative; David Mixner, from the Campaign for Military Service; Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard Vincent W. Patton, III, USCG (Ret.), the Coast Guard's former highest ranking enlisted member; and Urvashi Vaid, former executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce and author of Virtual Equality.

"This joint endeavor with SLDN presents a truly unique opportunity for all LGBT veterans and their allies to make a real difference in the struggle for equality in the U.S. Armed Forces," said Rogue. "The time to allow Americans of every sexual orientation to serve is now. The service of veterans continues in our efforts to topple this un-American law of exclusion and bigotry."

Registration details and additional information on all the events are available online at www.sldn.org/action.