

# Powell defends military gay ban

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said yesterday that the military maintains its ban on homosexuals to avoid potential problems of discipline and morale.

Gen. Colin Powell told the House Budget Committee he agrees with Defense Secretary Dick Cheney's view that the ban is not justified by the department's one-time contention that homosexuals pose a greater security risk.

But Gen. Powell said homosexual behavior "is inconsistent with maintaining good order and discipline."

"It's difficult in a military setting where there is no privacy ... to introduce a group of individuals — proud, brave, loyal good Americans, but who favor a homosexual lifestyle — and put them in with heterosexuals who would prefer not to have somebody of the same sex find them sexually attractive," he said.

The chairman noted that uniformed men and women must live and work in close quarters.

"I think that's a very difficult problem to give the military. I think it would be prejudicial to good order and discipline to try to integrate that into the current military structure," Gen. Powell told the panel.

All branches of the military ban homosexuals.

Rep. Barney Frank, Massachusetts Democrat, questioned Gen. Powell during an appearance before the House Budget Committee. Mr. Frank, a homosexual, asked Gen. Powell why the policy remains.

In July, Mr. Cheney said he'd "inherited a policy that has been in the department now for many years"

and that the policy was "based upon the proposition that a gay lifestyle is incompatible with military service."

"There have been times in the past when it's been generated on the notion that somehow there was a security risk involved, although I must say that's a bit of an old chestnut," he said.

In June the Pentagon, in response to queries about its policy, issued a little-noticed statement that said the Department of Defense had "no empirical data" supporting the notion "that gays present a greater or lesser risk to the national security than heterosexuals."

"However, if an individual with a security clearance attempts to conceal information of potential security significance that may tend to subject them to coercion or pressure, regardless of whether it involves such matters of homosexuality, adultery, illegal drug use, alcoholism or financial problems, it becomes an issue of possible concern from a security standpoint," the statement said.

The Pentagon said homosexuality "is not now, and never has been, a *per se* grounds for denial of a security clearance." But it said homosexuality is "a relevant factor in a determination of whether a person is reliable and trustworthy to the extent that he or she should be entrusted with classified information."

The statement said security clearances had been granted and denied to homosexuals employed by the Defense Department as civilian or contract employees, "depending on the particular factors involved in each case."

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