

# The Washington Times

## Senate GOP blocks bill to lift military gay ban

By Anne Flaherty - Associated Press  
September 21, 2010

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Republicans on Tuesday blocked an effort to repeal the law banning gays from serving openly in the military.

Democrats fell short of the 60 votes needed to advance the legislation, which authorizes \$726 billion in defense spending, including a pay raise for troops.

Sen. Susan Collins, Maine Republican, earlier was seen as the crucial 60th vote because she supports overturning the military ban. But Ms. Collins sided with her GOP colleagues in arguing that Republicans weren't given sufficient leeway to offer amendments to the wide-ranging policy bill.

The partisan vote was a defeat for gay rights groups, who saw the provision in a defense authorization bill as their last chance any time soon to overturn the law known as "don't ask, don't tell."

"The whole thing is a political train wreck," said Richard Socarides, a former White House adviser on gay rights during the Clinton administration.

Mr. Socarides said before the vote that President Obama "badly miscalculated" the Pentagon's support for repeal, while Democrats made only a "token effort" to advance the bill.

"If it was a priority for the Democratic leadership, they would get a clean vote on this," he said.

With little time left for debate before this fall's congressional elections, the authorization bill received little attention until gay rights groups backed by pop star Lady Gaga began an aggressive push to turn it into an election issue.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, Nevada Democrat, gave Republicans the chance to offer only one amendment to address GOP objections on the military's policy on gays.

Jim Manley, a spokesman for Mr. Reid, said the senator would be willing to allow more debate on the bill after the November elections.

But "today's vote isn't about an arcane Senate procedure," he said. "It's about a GOP's pattern of obstructing debate on policies important to the American people."

An estimated 13,000 people have been discharged under the law since its inception in 1993. Although most dismissals have resulted from gay service members outing themselves, gay rights groups say it has been used by vindictive co-workers to drum out troops who never made their sexuality an issue.

Top defense leaders -- including Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates and Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff -- have said they support a repeal but want to move slowly to ensure changes won't hurt morale.

Mr. Gates has asked Congress not to act until the military finishes a study, due Dec. 1, on how to lift the ban without causing problems.

He also has said he could live with the proposed legislation because it would postpone implementation until 60 days after the Pentagon completes its review and the president certifies that repeal won't hurt morale, recruiting or retention.

In another blow to the bill, Mr. Obama's pick to lead the Marine Corps told a Senate panel on Tuesday that he worried that changing the policy would serve as a "distraction" to Marines fighting in Afghanistan.

"My primary concern with proposed repeal is the potential disruption to cohesion that may be caused by significant change during a period of extended combat operations," Gen. James Amos said in a written statement provided to the panel for his confirmation hearing.

During one exchange with Sen. Pete Sessions, Alabama Republican, Gen. Amos said he would implement any changes in the law on gay service made by Congress. He said that the Marine Corps would rely on discipline and leadership to ensure order, but that he didn't envision a gag order on troops who disagreed with revoking the ban.

Some Republicans have suggested they fear troops who openly oppose gay service would be punished for speaking out.

"I don't see this as a racist issue," Gen. Amos said. "I see this as an anxious issue . . . because we don't have the answers yet."