

## 11<sup>TH</sup> GRADE FIRST PLACE WINNER: KAILA BROWN

“Lie or Deceive” by Kaila Brown, Eastside High School  
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“Should men and women who have served with distinction be excluded from the military service solely on the basis of their status? I believe they should not.” President Bill Clinton stated this thought in 1992. Within a year, the policy that became known as “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” was released. During this time, the policy relaxed the long-standing ban against gay men and women serving in the United States military. Even though “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” was initially hailed as progress for gay rights in the service, today it is considered by many to be a liability.

The policy really meant this: the government would no longer “ask” recruits about their sexual orientation. As long as they didn’t tell military personnel of their sexual preferences and didn’t engage in homosexual acts, they were free to serve in the military. By the end of 1993 the only real compromise was the barring of the pre-enlistment question about sexual preference and homosexuality. Elaine Donnelly, president of the non-profit Center for Military Readiness, which wants to continue the policy says, “the law respects the power of sexuality and the normal human desire for modesty in sexual matters.” I, for one, completely disagree, for many reasons. For one thing, there has been a distinct shift among military personnel and civilians who favor welcoming gay patriots in the armed military forces. Congress should follow the examples set by those in the military who fight to protect the rights that we take for granted every day, and repeal the shallow, unnecessary bill once and for all.

Several recent polls show the significant increase in America’s acceptance of gays serving in the military. Zogby International and the Michael D. Palm Center recently put out our new polls that reveal 73% of military personnel are comfortable with serving with lesbians and gays. The new results are one more nail in the coffin for “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.” Many have openly argued that having gay personnel would harm military readiness. The recent polls emphasize the ridiculousness of such a premise. Not only are there more than 65,000 lesbians and gays serving in the military armed forces, but many are serving openly. Most importantly their heterosexual colleagues are fine with that. At a time when the armed forces are stretched to the breaking point, and the recruiters are scraping the bottom of the barrel, it is more than time for Congress to dispose of this outdated policy. Lieutenant General Claudia Kennedy, the first female to achieve three-star rank in the army, referred to “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” as a “hollow policy that serves no useful purpose.” Even General Daniel W. Christman shared his opinion of the policy by stating that national attitudes towards the issue of homosexuality in the service have evolved considerably and that Congress should take a more relaxed and tolerant view toward it. A poll released by CNN showed that 79% of all Americans feel that sexual preference should not determine whether or not a person should be allowed to serve in the military. With all this proof, it is past time for Congress to step up and do its part. Military personnel are professionals. They are able to work together effectively and

efficiently without regard to differences in race, gender, religion, and sexuality. This obsolete policy should, no, desperately needs to be repealed.

There are some people who disagree with “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell. For instance, Aubrey Sarvis, an executive director of the Service Members Legal Defense Network, replied, “I see very few, if any, good things about the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy -- it means you have to lie or deceive every day.” I couldn’t have found a better way to state the truth of the situation. Gay rights advocates told the House of Armed Services that, “the policy is hurting the military by allowing the enlistment of some-what qualified people, but the immediate discharge of highly trained military personnel, who have acknowledged their sexual orientation.” A few advocates even went so far as to suggest that when pressed for personnel, the military is willing to ignore sexual preferences, especially during a war when recruiting becomes a lot more intricate. Between 1994 and 2007, 12,340 gay men and women were discharged for breaching the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy. Shortly after the 9/11 attack these numbers began to drop dramatically. So does this prove the gay-rights advocates right or would you merely like to consider it a coincidence?

As recently as November 17, 2008, 104 retired admirals and generals signed a document pleading for the repeal of the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy. So again I ask: are all these experienced admirals and generals wrong? I don’t believe so. Attitudes toward homosexuality have evolved in a new generation so repeal *is* possible. Not only is it possible, it is rather essential for keeping talented, highly qualified personnel in the military. Even our newly elected Commander and Chief Barack Obama, supports the repeal of this policy.

So what happens if this policy does get repealed? Many people questioned where gay personnel would be housed? Some even argue that housing gay personnel in the quarters of their same gender colleagues would be equivalent to housing men with women. This is true in some part, but what about self control? Heterosexuals can control themselves around the opposite sex, what makes homosexuals any *different*? Isn’t their level of self control just the same? They should be able to honor their country, without being forced to lie and deceive every day. Congress needs to repeal the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, not later but *NOW*!