

Is Obama administration listening to the troops?

Service members oppose integrating gays in the military

GRACE VUOTO

BASE NEWS

The majority of American service members oppose integrating gays openly in the military, according to a poll conducted by the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA).

The nonprofit, nonpartisan organization consists of about 370,000 members representing every branch of the armed forces. It includes active-duty officers, reservists, military retirees and veterans.

MOAA is the nation's largest association of military officers, its Web site says, and it plays a leading role in advocating for legislation on behalf of its members.

MOAA Director of Public Relations Col. Marvin J. Harris described the organization's policy on gays in the military as follows:

"The 1993 'Don't Ask, Don't

Tell' policy is grounded in statute. MOAA's primary concern continues to be sustaining a cohesive, effective and resilient U.S. military. If Congress or the administration proposes a change in the statute, MOAA will continue to look to senior military leadership to assess any potential effect on readiness or our military missions that this may have."

The issue is a sensitive one for the organization, which recently surveyed its members online about "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." It received 1,664 responses. The results initially were posted on the organization's Web site but have since been taken down.

Col. Harris declined to discuss reasons for the removal.

However, one member, who disagreed with that decision, provided a copy of the survey results to The Washington Times.

The survey asked regular active-duty, drilling or active-duty guard and reserve troops, veterans and family members five questions, including the respondent's age and current military status. The majority of those who responded were younger than 45: 34 percent were younger than 30 years of age, and 30 percent were between 30 and 45. Also, 51 percent of the respondents were regular active-duty or drilling in the guard

or reserves.

Just 16 percent of respondents said the current law is working. One-third, or 31 percent, said it should be repealed to allow all individuals to serve regardless of sexual orientation, while 52 percent supported "an outright ban on military service by homosexuals."

If the law were changed to allow gays to serve openly, 48 percent said this would have a very negative effect on troop morale and military readiness; 20 percent said it would have a moderately negative effect; 15 percent said very little or no effect either way, 6 percent said moderately positive effect, and 10 percent said very positive effect.

The poll also suggests that respondents do not think attitudes have changed much over the years. A plurality, or 45 percent, said the attitude of current service members toward gays in the military is no different now than in the 1980s and earlier; 21 percent said service members are much more tolerant, 14 percent said moderately

more tolerant, 15 percent said moderately less tolerant and 2 percent said much less tolerant.

"Don't Ask, Don't Tell" was implemented in 1993, during the Clinton administration, as a compromise measure barring professed gays from serving in the military; superiors should not investigate service members in the absence of prohibited conduct.

President Obama has pledged to change the law to allow openly gay members to serve in the armed forces, but he has said he will act at some unspecified point in the future.

The MOAA survey is one of several polls showing that Mr. Obama is likely to meet substantial resistance from within the military if he proceeds.

The MOAA poll tracks with a separate poll conducted by the Military Times media organization four years in a row. The 2008 Military Times poll showed that 58 percent of active-duty respondents were opposed to efforts to repeal "Don't Ask, Don't Tell."

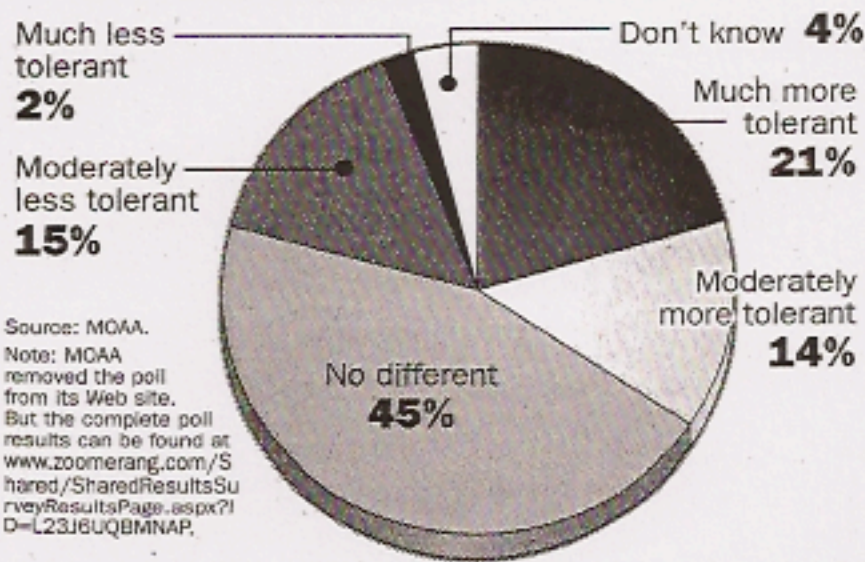
Perhaps more important, the poll seems to discount claims by some that younger members of the military are growing more comfortable with openly gay soldiers. One could conclude from the data that military culture has not changed much on the issue of gays in the military.

• Grace Vuoto is the editor of Base News, a citizen journalism project of The Washington Times.



MILITARY'S VIEWS ON GAYS IN SERVICE

A poll commissioned by Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) asked members: "To what extent do you think the attitude of today's service members toward homosexuals in the military differs from the attitude of service members in the 1980s and earlier?" The results are based on 1,664 responses:



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