



AMERICAN VIEWPOINT®

To: Vet Voice Foundation

From: Lake Research Partners and American Viewpoint, Inc.

Re: Results From Recent Research among Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans on Don't Ask, Don't Tell

Date: March 17, 2010

A recent survey conducted among military personnel who served in the Afghanistan or Iraq wars shows that by six points Iraq and Afghanistan veterans under age 35 lean toward favoring allowing gay and lesbian people to serve openly (41% favor to 35% oppose) while veterans over age 35 lean toward opposing by five points (31% favor, 36% oppose). This recent bipartisan survey, conducted among service members in the United States, in many ways runs counter to the idea being asserted by many, that service members and the military cannot handle this change and are unwilling to do so. There is widespread agreement among Iraq and Afghanistan veterans on three core principles: that veterans are comfortable around gay and lesbian people, that being gay or lesbian has no bearing on a service members' ability to perform their duties, and that, ultimately, these veterans would find it acceptable if gay and lesbian people were allowed to serve openly.

- **Iraq and Afghanistan veterans believe being gay or lesbian has no bearing on a service member's ability to perform their duties.** Overall, 60% of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans agree with that statement, including 42% who strongly agree. Only 29% disagree. Two-thirds of those veterans under age 35 agree (66%) with that statement, including almost half (47%) who strongly agree. Iraq and Afghanistan veterans over age 35 also agree (57% agree, 40% strongly). Agreement also extends across the branches of service, including 64% of Air Force veterans, 59% of Army and Marines veterans, and 58% of Navy veterans. It is clear from a policy standpoint that Iraq and Afghanistan veterans believe being gay or lesbian has no bearing on a service member's ability to perform their duties.
- **An overwhelming majority of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans say it is personally acceptable to them if gay and lesbian people were allowed to serve openly in the military.** Seven in ten (73%) say it is acceptable, including 42% who say it would be acceptable and 31% who would find it acceptable even though they would not like it. Only a quarter (25%) would find it unacceptable. Generational differences exist here as well, but they are not as dramatic as conventional wisdom might indicate. Forty-seven percent of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans under age 35 find it acceptable and would like the policy change and another 30% find it acceptable and do not like it, for a total of 77% who find it personally

acceptable if gay and lesbian people were allowed to serve openly in the military. Seventy percent of veterans over age 35 would find it acceptable and only a quarter would find it unacceptable (26%).

- In total, 81% of those in the Air Force, 78% of those in the Navy, 67% of those in the Army, and 68% of those in the Marines would find it acceptable if gay and lesbian people were allowed to serve openly in the military. Half of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans from the Navy (54%), half of those from the Air Force (50%), and a plurality of those from the Army (37%) find it acceptable without reservations; and while the Marines are less accepting without reservation (25%), a plurality would find it acceptable but would not like it (43%).
- **The notion that today's military members are uncomfortable around gay and lesbian people is unfounded; the data prove it is untrue. Iraq and Afghanistan veterans say they are personally comfortable in the presence of gays and lesbians.** Seven in ten Iraq and Afghanistan veterans (73%) are personally comfortable, including 37% who are very comfortable. Only a quarter (23%) is uncomfortable, and hardly anyone is very uncomfortable (only 7%). Notably, younger Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are more comfortable overall (80%) and show increased intensity around the issue (41% are very comfortable). Older Iraq and Afghanistan veterans also express comfort (69% overall, 35% very comfortable) but even among older veterans, very few are very uncomfortable in the presence of gay and lesbian people (only 7%). At least seven in ten veterans who served in Iraq or Afghanistan from across the branches say they are comfortable in the presence of gays and lesbians: Air Force 78%, Navy 73%, Army 70%, and Marines 69%.

As mentioned, younger veterans lean toward favoring allowing gay men and lesbian women to serve openly while older veterans lean toward opposing the change, but there is little intensity in either direction. It is just simply not a burning issue that overwhelms these veterans' lives. Thirty-four percent of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans favor allowing openly gay and lesbian women to serve in the military, 36% oppose it, and another third (30%) are not sure (28%) or do not know (2%). A quarter is strongly in favor of allowing gay and lesbian people to serve, and 29% are strongly opposed. By six points, veterans under age 35 favor open service (41% favor, 35% oppose) including 28% who strongly favor it; while by a similar five points, veterans over age 35 oppose it (31% favor, 36% oppose). By twelve points veterans in the Air Force favor allowing gay and lesbian people to serve openly, while those in the Navy (+1) and Army (-4) split. Veterans from the Marines are against it (-17).

In summary, an overwhelming majority of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are comfortable around gay and lesbian people, believe that being gay or lesbian has no bearing on a service member's ability to perform their duties, and would find it acceptable if gay and lesbian people were allowed to serve openly in the military. Any notion that ending Don't Ask, Don't Tell would disrupt the military or that service members would be unwilling to meet the change is debunked.

Methods: Lake Research Partners and American Viewpoint designed and administered this survey, which was conducted by phone using professional interviewers. The survey reached a total of 510 veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom (Iraq) and/or Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan). The survey was conducted February 8-23, 2010. Telephone numbers for the sample were generated randomly from a military sample and a radius sample drawn from military bases in the United States. The margin of error for the total sample is +/- 4.4 percentage points.