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RI Veterans for Justice Grievance over ROTC Discrimination

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To the Editor

The military has called the bluff of two New England colleges. The University of Rhode Island Faculty Senate at the urging of President Carothers has just voted to follow the route of Dartmouth College by deciding to continue its ROTC program reversing a previously touted move to boot ROTC from campus by Sep '95 unless the military ended its discriminatory ban against gays and lesbians. Dartmouth and URI are willingly abandoning their leadership roles of being in the vanguard of schools standing tall against a military policy which is inherently unfair, unethical, and discriminatory toward a segment of our citizenry and students.

The selling out of noble university ideals to politics, money, and pragmatism creates strange bedfellows and sends a disturbing message to Congress and the Pentagon at a time when strong resolve is called for. These universities are prostituting their principles, lending their hallowed ivy towers to an institution which has practiced the most egregious form of proactive government discrimination against some of its own citizens for the past 50 years in exchange for scholarship monies. The Pentagon, with the universities' complicity, thereby is given the right to perpetually reinforce prejudice and indoctrinate each generation of students into the ways of government-sanctioned discrimination.

Do Dartmouth and URI officials wish to join a more morbid "Schindler's List" -- those who acquiesce and fail to help change an environment which could save the lives of victims like Navy Seaman Allen Schindler and could save countless others from being separated from their chosen careers?

Close scrutiny and evidence to date reveal that Senator Sam Nunn's highly prejudiced solution for gays and lesbians -- "Don't, don't, don't, ask, tell or pursue" -- is not an improvement over the old policy. In fact, it is worse! For the first time Congress, with the aid of Rep. Ron Machtley, wrote into law policy which blatantly discriminates against homosexual Americans which will be more difficult to change in the future. Rep. Bob Dornan (R-Calif.) whose homophobia puts Jesse Helms to shame characterized the new policy as "Ban Plus." We are not talking deodorant here; this is people's lives! Senator Strom Thurmond admitted why the new policy was codified by Congress: "So some future president won't be tempted to lift the ban."

The New York Times reported on its (May 9) front page that the new policy has not made life easier for many gay servicemen and women and in some ways has made it worse. Servicemembers around the country report a number of commanders are misusing the broad new authority granted under the policy to ferret out

homosexuals. Many feel the burden of proof now falls on the servicemember if accused of engaging in homosexual acts.

Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, a volunteer attorney network headquartered in Washington whose purpose is to block discharges and bring cases to trial says the reality of the new policy -- its breadth, its scope, and its vagueness -- has the potential to ensnare many more people, both straight and gay, than under the old policy. Under the new policy:

- witch hunts are still not prohibited
- commanders may seize and read personal diaries, letters and computer files to search for evidence.
- military men may still retaliate against women who have rebuffed sexual advances or reported sexual harassment.
- clergy, doctors and psychiatrists may reveal confidential conversations;
- servicemembers cannot object to the admission of any evidence against them even if obtained through coercion or threats.

In short, gays and lesbians who love their country, who want to serve and advance their careers, must still live a lie. They are still treated like second-class citizens. When they are issued uniforms, they are also ordered to wear chastity belts and muzzles for up to 20 or 30 years. Their quarters will be a closet zipped as tight as a body bag. Nor can they ever presume it is safe to settle into a lasting, loving relationship with anyone. Sam Nunn, et al., have created servitude -- not service!

In theory, the most meritorious argument for retaining ROTC on campuses is, as *The Journal* editors suggest (May 12) to "encourage a wider range of talented individuals to enter the officer corps, an important service for volunteer armed forces in a democracy. We do not want to run the risk of a military coup d'etat, do we? Officer Candidate School (OCS) could be expanded, however -- even replace ROTC -- and accomplish the same goal while saving the taxpayers, who subsidize ROTC, a huge amount of money in times of shrinking military budget and ghastly national debt. OCS recruits the majority of its candidates from university graduates across the country and gives them several months of condensed, intensive military training.

Given that a ROTC scholarship will pay as much as 80% or \$8,000 per year (which ever is HIGHER) for tuition, plus other expenses, at the candidate's chosen school, it is little wonder the program is tempting some universities to abandon principles for the bucks. But it makes no sense, in these economic times and the end of the Cold War, for taxpayers to bankroll a student's attendance at a pricey Ivy League school like Dartmouth (costing \$25,000 per year) just to give the military another officer.

when a qualified candidate can obtain a perfectly good education for less cost at any of the fine state universities. Most economical though is the OCS program. But since when have the Pentagon and Congress -- infamous for their \$1,000 toilet seats and \$100 wrenches -- seriously considered not wasting taxpayer money? Consider, also the hundreds of thousands the military wastes each year ferreting out perfectly qualified gays and lesbians. Dartmouth and URI in their grab for a piece of the pie thus become collaborators in running up the national debt.

The two schools can espouse all the pragmatic and altruistic arguments they choose -- to provide opportunity to those who cannot otherwise afford college, to liberalize the military, to teach leadership and provide valuable experience -- but they are smokescreens for the all-too-obvious. Never mind that poorer students who might also be homosexual are denied this opportunity unless they are willing to sacrifice their dignity and personal happiness. Anyone who buys the argument that ROTC is likely to help liberalize the discriminatory policy has been sold a bill of goods. Fifty years of discrimination, in the conservative bastion that is the military, was not ended with ROTC in place. Indeed, for African Americans it was only the fortitude of a bold president and manpower demands of the Korean War which ended their discrimination. And it is only because of a prodding Congress, shameful scandals, and an outraged public -- not ROTC grads with well-rounded educations -- that living conditions and opportunity are finally normalizing for women. The very nature of the beast, where you do as you are told, is likely to continue to overwhelm basic human values of fairness and equality. The system swallows the individual.

Dartmouth College, URI, and "The Journal" editors who blessed the decision would do well to re-examine their positions. They have sold their souls and compromised noble ideals at the heart of institutions of higher learning -- high ethical standards, freedom of thought and expression, non-discrimination, political correctness. They have been lured into a position which endorses and assists proactive government discrimination, denying equal opportunity to some citizens while appeasing homophobia and bigotry in the ranks of the military. They have acquiesced to social injustice rather than provide leadership for change. This is a sad and disappointing predicament for prestigious colleges and a newspaper, not to mention the countless uniformed gays and lesbians who now, and in the future, must bear the burden of such archaic policy.

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