



SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
1000 DEFENSE PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1000

G-872

OCT 25 2010

The Honorable John McCain  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Armed Services  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator McCain:

Thank you for your letter of September 28, 2010, regarding the Department's comprehensive review of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) law and policy. I appreciate the opportunity to respond.

I wholeheartedly agree with you about the critical importance of obtaining the views, concerns, and perspectives of those who will be most affected by a change in the DADT policy: our men and women in uniform. That is precisely why I directed that systematic engagement of the force and families be a centerpiece of the Department's comprehensive review.

It is not part of the working group's mandate to ask Servicemembers the broad question of whether they think DADT should be repealed, which, in effect, would amount to a referendum. I do not believe that military policy decisions -- on this or any other subject -- should be made through a referendum of Servicemembers. I instructed the working group to obtain the input of Servicemembers so that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and I, as well as the Service Chiefs, can more fully understand how a change in the DADT policy may impact unit cohesion, military readiness and effectiveness, recruiting and retention, and family readiness. This will ensure that we can properly advise the President and the Congress on the impacts of a repeal and develop an implementation plan that appropriately addresses any such impacts.

To accomplish its task, the working group has undertaken what may well be the most comprehensive study of a personnel issue in the history of the U.S. military. As you know, the working group conducted an extensive, 103-question survey, which was developed by a professional research company and sent to a representative sample of approximately 400,000 Servicemembers, both active duty and reserve. Over 115,000 responses to the survey were received. The working group also surveyed approximately 150,000 military spouses on issues pertaining to family readiness, to which over 44,000 responses were received. Both of those surveys have been completed and their results are

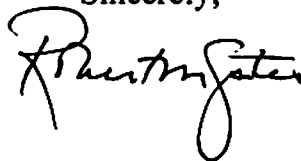


currently being analyzed. In addition, among other things, the working group has visited over 50 military installations during the past 7 months, where they have interacted with over 23,000 Servicemembers. They have also obtained over 72,000 responses from Servicemembers and their families regarding a change in the DADT policy through a website established for this purpose.

The Chairman and I personally reviewed the survey questions, as did the Service Chiefs. We are confident that, through the survey and the working group's other engagements with the force, the Department is obtaining the wide-ranging and candid views of our Servicemembers and their families on all aspects of this issue. Furthermore, I am confident that the co-chairs of the working group will provide the Chairman and me with their honest assessment of the impact of a change in the policy, and if implementation would present insurmountable challenges, they will report that to us.

The Chairman and I fully support the approach and the efforts of the working group, as do the Service Chiefs. We are confident that the working group's report will provide us with the information we need to appropriately advise the President, and, if requested to do so, to provide our fully informed views to Congress as it considers legislative action.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert M. Gates". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R" and a long, sweeping tail.