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January 29, 2007

Robert M. Gates
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Mr. Secretary,

This past fall, I asked your predecessor, Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, to respond to concerns raised by recent developments concerning 10 USC 654, which is commonly referred to as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" or DADT. In responding on behalf of Secretary Rumsfeld, Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense Michael Dominguez stated that he "sees no need to change" the military's ban on gay and lesbian service members. I found the Under Secretary's statement to be extremely troubling and would like to revisit this issue with you.

Like me, many military leaders are also questioning the wisdom of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." For instance, retired General John M. Shalikashvili stated in a January 2, 2007 New York Times op-ed that the time has come to reexamine DADT. According to the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "if gay men and lesbians served openly in the United States military, they would not undermine the efficacy of the armed forces. Our military has been stretched thin by our deployments in the Middle East, and we must welcome the service of any American who is willing and able to do the job."

Similarly, former Secretary of Defense William Cohen indicated that Congressional leaders should re-visit the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" ban on lesbian, gay and bisexual service personnel. Secretary Cohen stated that "[i]t's time to start thinking about it and starting to discuss it." Other prominent military leaders, including retired Lieutenant General Claudia Kennedy, retired Rear Admiral John Huston, and former West Point superintendent Lieutenant General Daniel Christman have also expressed support for revisiting "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." In addition, a December 2006 Zogby/Michael D. Palm Center poll found that most service personnel are comfortable with lesbians and gays.

In light of the growing call of military leaders to reconsider DADT and the mounting evidence that calls into question the rationale for this policy, I would like you to revisit the issues I raised with your predecessor and in particular, what, if any, negative effect the repeal of DADT might have on the United States military.

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I would appreciate your response to this request by March 16. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ron Wyden". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Ron Wyden
United States Senate