

Clinton to end military gay ban

WASHINGTON (AP) — As president, Bill Clinton will be forced to deal with one of the most explosive issues affecting the military in decades — the Pentagon's 50-year ban on homosexuals and his promise to end it.

Clinton has not said when or how such a policy change would be instituted. And few inside the Pentagon have begun to prepare the military's 1.8 million members for such a major change, officials said.

But Lawrence Korb, Pentagon personnel chief during the Reagan administration, predicted, "Even if he doesn't act — which he could be by signing an executive order — the courts will make the Pentagon do it."

Tuesday, a federal judge in Los Angeles reaffirmed his order that the Navy, though the judge did not rule on the overall issue of whether the military ban is legal under the Constitution.

Speaking to reporters Wednesday in Little Rock, Clinton said, "I don't think (homosexual) status alone, in the absence of some destructive behavior, should disqualify people" from serving.

The president-elect said he intends to consult with military leaders about "the mechanics" of a change in policy but did not say when that might occur.

"I think there are ways that we can deal with this that will increase the comfort level of a lot of military folks," he said.

Adm. William Crowe, the retired chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and a Clinton adviser on defense issues, said in a separate interview that he has told the governor to move "carefully ... and I wasn't joking when I said carefully."

Crowe said he was specifically asked about the issue in a meeting with Clinton and that he told him, "I didn't necessarily agree with the governor." They agreed to discuss it further, Crowe added.

Revoking the ban would be one of the most far-reaching social changes imposed on the armed services since President Truman ordered blacks integrated into the military in 1948. Proponents of a change in the policy have expressed hope that Clinton will remove the ban in his first days in office.

About 14,000 men and women have been kicked out of the services during the past 10 years because they were homosexual.

In the past, the courts have backed the Pentagon directive that states that "homosexuality is incompatible with military service" and that the presence of homosexuals in the military impedes "discipline, good order and morale."

And two of the Pentagon's most senior officers — Gen. Colin Powell, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Gen. Gordon Sullivan, the chief of staff of the Army — have repeatedly declared their opposition to any change in the policy.

Both four-star generals, who are expected to continue in service under Clinton, contend the issue affects troops' battle readiness, morale and rights to privacy.

"It is difficult in a military setting where there is no privacy, where you don't get choice of association, where you don't get choice of where you live to introduce a group of individuals who are proud, brave, loyal, good Americans but who favor a homosexual lifestyle," Powell said in congressional testimony earlier this year.

And privately, other top military officers say they are concerned about a wave of resignations and disruptions should the ban be lifted.

"It would be a wrenching change," said one four-star general who heads a service branch, speaking on condition of anonymity. "We're not ready for it. Good people will leave the military in droves over this."

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— Four-star general speaking on condition of anonymity

Fired federal official says she did no wrong

WASHINGTON (AP) — A State Department official dismissed by President Bush said Wednesday she had done nothing "wrong or inappropriate" and had merely tried to make sure the department acted properly in pursuing media requests for information from Bill Clinton's passport records.

Former Assistant Secretary of State Elizabeth M. Tamposi made the comment in a statement sent to a newspaper in New Hampshire, the day after Bush decided to relieve her of her duties.

President-elect Clinton said Wednesday he appreciated the step Bush had taken. "I thought it was an appropriate gesture," he said.

Bush acted following reports that Tamposi's bureau had conducted pre-election searches into the files of Ross Perot as well as Clinton.

The State Department ordered Tamposi to vacate her office by Wednesday afternoon. A few hours before that deadline she said in a statement to *The Telegraph* of Nashua, N.H., that she was proud of her three years of service in the Bureau of Consular Affairs.

Concerning pre-election news media requests for information on Clinton, Tamposi said, "I took no action that I deemed wrong or inappropriate."

She did not make the same statement regarding allegations that her bureau searched for Perot's files and those of Clinton's mother. However, she said at no time did she "initiate or attempt to expedite a review of any passport files."

She said her involvement in file searches was undertaken

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— Elizabeth M. Tamposi, former Asst. Sec. of State

exclusively to ensure that her bureau properly conducted the media requests "with appropriate safeguards for all passport information."

She said, "I did not approve, encourage or condone any review of passport records other than those specifically identified" in media requests under the Freedom of Information Act.

According to published reports quoting State Department officials, there have been FOIA requests for information on Perot but none pertain to passport files.

Efforts to reach Tamposi, who has long been active in Republican politics, for additional comment were unsuccessful. A person who answered a call to her State Department office was unresponsive to questions about her whereabouts.

Tamposi said in the statement that she would not comment further until she has an opportunity to read a report on an investigation begun by the State Department inspector general three weeks ago. The report is expected to be made public soon.

The core issue in the controversy is whether Tamposi and her colleagues in the Consular Affairs bureau attempted to bolster Bush's re-election campaign by trying to dig up dirt on his opponents.

Fake bomb discovered on airplane

NEW YORK (AP) — A harmless device that looked like a bomb was found aboard a jetliner during a flight Wednesday after United Airlines received a bomb threat, an official said. The jet landed safely at Kennedy Airport.

The Boeing 767 was taken to a remote area of the airport where the 48 passengers and 10 crewmembers left the plane using portable staircases.

A package found on the aircraft contained a harmless device rigged to resemble a bomb and a note demanding \$600,000, said Port Authority Spokesman Bill Cahill. The FBI is investigating the incident.

Law enforcement sources said a rambling letter was faxed to the airline's Chicago headquarters while Flight 46 was en route from Los Angeles to New York. The letter ordered that the money be delivered to an office in midtown Manhattan, said the sources, who insisted on anonymity.

The sources said a crewmember found the package in an overhead bin, where the note said it would be, and immersed it in water at the rear of the plane.

Passenger Harold Delbeck, an accountant from Orange County, Calif., said the captain told passengers there was a bomb threat and asked them to move forward to empty seats. He said the passengers were calm.

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