

Board recommends lesbian remain in Navy Reserves



NATIONAL

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — In a surprising decision, a Navy tribunal decided Thursday that Lt. Zoe Dunning's career in the Reserves should not end with the statement "I am a lesbian."

A board of inquiry unanimously ruled that Dunning had proved she would not engage in homosexual acts, in line with the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy.

"The board of inquiry recommends retention in the Naval service," said Capt. Thomas Berns, senior member of the board.

Dunning stood while the findings were being read, her hands clenched. Afterward, she smiled briefly as she clasped lawyer Greg Bonfiglio's hands.

Dunning's attorneys had maintained that when she made the statement "I am a lesbian" at a January 1993 rally, she was not broadcasting her intentions to practice homosexuality but merely indicating her sexual orientation.

"She felt that to continue to hide who she was would be a lie," Bonfiglio said.

He had warned the board that discharging Dunning would mean "needlessly destroying the career of a dedicated, distinguished officer."

Dunning, 31, has been working one weekend a month as a supply officer at the Naval Aviation Depot in Alameda.

Co-workers and supervisors testified Wednesday

that she is an excellent officer whose discharge would be the Navy's loss. They said her sexual orientation, and the controversy surrounding it, has not affected unit cohesion.

Navy prosecutors told the board they had no choice but to order Dunning separated from the service, regardless of her achievements.

"We're not saying that Lt. Dunning is a bad person or an evil person because she made a personal decision ... but what has happened now, because she has said that, the fact is it's not acceptable with the Armed Forces," said Lt. Ingrid Turner.

Prosecutors said that under "don't ask, don't tell," service members who declare they are homosexual face discharge unless they can prove they won't engage in homosexual acts while in the service. Dunning did not do that, prosecutors said.

The case played out at the Treasure Island Naval Station was being watched as an indication of how the policy will work.

Navy sonar operator Keith Meinhold was discharged after he announced he is gay but won a court battle for reinstatement. The Clinton administration said it will not appeal the reinstatement.

That left intact an appellate court ruling that simply saying one is homosexual does not express a desire to engage in prohibited sexual conduct. Dunning's attorneys made frequent reference to the Meinhold decision but Navy prosecutors insisted it didn't apply because Meinhold's case predated the "don't ask, don't tell" policy.

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Crawford and Gere separated

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Richard Gere and Cindy Crawford, whose marriage three years ago created perhaps the most beautiful gene pool in Hollywood, have separated.

The couple announced their breakup in a statement issued Thursday by their public relations firm.

"This personal and painful decision was made between us in July," they said. "Since that time we have been trying to work things out, but due to the recent conjecture in the press, we have decided to make a statement at this time."

Last month, a British tabloid published a photo of a woman hopping over Gere's garden wall. But model Laura Bailey said she was visiting a friend next door.

Gere, 45, and Crawford, 28, married three years ago. There have been recurring rumors that each of them is gay and their marriage troubled.

In May, the couple published a full-page ad in the *Times of London*, proclaiming their heterosexuality and their commitment to one another.

Evangelist Jim Bakker free man after jail release

HENDERSONVILLE, N.C. (AP) — His penance all but paid — at least in the eyes of the law — former TV evangelist Jim Bakker could be back in the pulpit soon alongside his daughter.

Bakker, who did 4 years in prison, a month at a halfway house and four months under house arrest for bilking followers of his PTL television ministry out of millions, became a free man at the stroke of midnight Wednesday.

But the fallen preacher, who rose to fame in front of a TV camera, spent his first day of freedom since 1989 in seclusion at his mountain home in western North Carolina, where had been living under house arrest.

"He's been sitting in jail for five years, so a few more days by himself doesn't matter," said his lawyer Chris Nichols.

Bakker still must complete five years' probation.

The 54-year-old preacher has been quiet about his plans, but his daughter, Tammy Sue Chapman, recently hinted to supporters of her singing ministry that her father may join her in the pulpit.

"I just can't wait to minister alongside my Dad in some of

our future crusades," she wrote in a Nov. 9 mailing.

While in prison, Bakker was divorced by his wife of 30 years, Tammy Faye. She later married Roe Messner, the chief builder at Heritage USA, the Bakkers' Christian theme park and retreat near Charlotte.

Bakker was convicted in 1989 of defrauding thousands of followers who sent him at least \$1,000 each in return for a promise that they could stay at Heritage USA for three days and four nights every year for the rest of their lives.

Prosecutors charged that the hotels at Heritage USA could never accommodate that many people and that Bakker spent \$3.7 million of the \$158 million he raised through the scheme on homes, jewelry, cars and vacations.

Bakker's initial sentence of 45 years in prison was thrown out when a federal appeals court ruled that the judge had improperly injected his religious beliefs at sentencing.

Another judge reduced Bakker's sentence to 18 years and lowered it a second time to eight years. He ended up serving about five years.

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