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NATIONAL news

NORTH CAROLINA

Watchdog groups Sept. 27 criticized an editorial cartoon by Capt. Clay Mountcastle that appeared in the Sept. 20 issue of *Paraglide*, Fort Bragg's official base newspaper.

The *Flop Zone* depicts three servicemembers—two assumed to be heterosexual and one who is portrayed as an effeminate gay man—in a combat environment. The gay servicemember is depicted with a butterfly and the caption: "Well hello, Mister Butterfly!!! My, you look very majestic today!!!"

Meanwhile, two other servicemembers look on derisively under the caption: "Don't ask. Don't tell."

Critics noted the cartoon's tone was in stark contrast to *Dignity & Respect*, an Army training guide issued earlier this year stating, "Harassment will not be tolerated...every soldier has a right to fair, equitable and respectful treatment." The Pentagon also has stated that harassment is detrimental to unit cohesion.

"The Army has emphasized dignity and respect, but this cartoon shows a clear lack of both," said C. Dixon Osburn, Servicemembers Legal Defense Network executive director. "Army leaders have a responsibility to uphold the Army's highest values, not to malign or stereotype fellow soldiers. It is especially harmful that this cartoon has been published as our soldiers are being called to fight for our country. At this time, we must have one country, indivisible."

Cathy Renna, Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation news media director, added: "The use of stereotypes like this reinforces the image of lesbian and gay enlisted personnel as objects of contempt rather than as dedicated, equal soldiers. When personnel see media images like these, it only exacerbates the oppressive atmosphere gay and lesbian servicemembers already face in the armed forces. We would hope that they would exercise better editorial discretion in the future."

The groups called on Fort Bragg leaders to reiterate the Army's guidelines and commit to curbing anti-gay harassment among its troops.

"Images such as this one hurt readiness, morale and unit cohesion," Osburn said. "The message it sends is never an appropriate one, but is never more inappropriate than during a time such as the one our troops face today."

NATIONAL

The Air Force has announced it has implemented a 30-day stop-loss, temporarily suspending some administrative discharges but exempting discharges "for cause," including discharges under "don't ask, don't tell." The order, which was implemented Sept. 22, includes language specifically instructing leaders to continue processing gay discharges despite halting many other discharges.

C. Dixon Osburn, Servicemembers Legal Defense Network executive director, noted that this singles out lesbian, gay and bisexual servicemembers for second-class treatment. "It is detrimental to our military and our nation as a whole whenever we lose qualified men and women in our armed forces," he said.

The Air Force is the first branch of the armed forces to implement a stop-loss, which was authorized last month by Defense Secretary

Donald Rumsfeld in anticipation of a widespread military mobilization. Although it is not yet known when the other services—the Army, Navy and Marine Corps—might issue orders, a decision is expected soon.

Osburn noted, however, that all servicemembers—regardless of the branch in which



they serve—should continue to operate with the knowledge that the U.S. ban on lesbian, gay and bisexual military personnel remains in full effect and will be enforced as usual.

The House voted 226-194—including 41 Republicans—to defeat an amendment Sept. 25 denying funding for domestic partner benefits to District of Columbia employees and residents. At a time when the United States is coming together in the spirit of unity, the Human Rights Campaign expressed disappointment that a few politicians pressed the divisive measure.

"The House vote upheld the value of family by removing unnecessary barriers and making it easier for families to acquire health coverage," political director Winnie Stachelberg said. "We will now work with key Senate leaders from both parties to allow the law to be enacted."

The D.C. Health Care Benefits Expansion Act, passed in 1992, gives domestic partners of employees access to health benefits purchased at their own expense. But for almost a decade, Congress has blocked the district from using any local or federal funds to implement the law.

If the act receives funding, it would:

- Require all health care facilities in the district to allow domestic partners visitation rights.
- Create a program allowing domestic partners in the district to register as such with the mayor's office.

- Allow registered couples, if one of them is an employee of the district government, to purchase health insurance at their own expense for a domestic partner. It also would allow employees of the district to take sick leave or bereavement leave for a domestic partner.

"These benefits are part of a common-sense limited law that costs the district very little to implement," Stachelberg said. "Employees are required to pay for any additional health care costs, and it helps expand vital access to health insurance."



C. Dixon Osburn

The Gay and Lesbian Medical Association board of directors announced Sept. 29 that Christopher Harris, a pediatrician from Nashville, Tenn., will be the San Francisco-based organization's new president. The announcement came during a meeting preceding its 19th annual conference in New Orleans.

"In 1981, 64 physicians founded GLMA to