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WE'LL BEAD TOGETHER

**NATIONAL news**



Saundra Toby-Heath and Alicia Heath-Toby, who are suing New Jersey for the right to marry, participated in the National Black Justice Coalition's press conference Dec. 8

**NATIONAL**

African American queer leaders and activists have launched a campaign to generate black support for same-sex marriage and to fight against the recently proposed Federal Marriage Amendment.

Speaking at a press conference Dec. 8 in Washington, D.C., members of the National Black Justice Coalition vowed to engage all major black political and civil rights leaders and many black religious leaders to support their effort. The group also called on all black civil rights organizations and political leaders to take a strong position against the amendment.

"African Americans support civil rights for all Americans, and our judgment will not be clouded by the smoke and mirrors of a few vocal opponents," said best-selling author Keith Boykin, one of the coalition members. The group also includes Cambridge, Mass., City Councilor Ken Reeves and Mandy Carter of Freedom to Marry and Southerners on New Ground.

"The right wing fired the first shots in this battle, but today we fire back," said coalition member Donna Payne, Human Rights Campaign senior constituency field organizer. "We will not allow the out-of-touch radical right to divide the black community on this issue."

The coalition announced a major national campaign that will include raising and spending \$100,000 for targeted advertisements in the black media, developing a Web site to counter right-wing misinformation and holding press conferences to announce new allies. The group already has the support of Coretta Scott King; U.S. Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga.; former U.S. Sen. Carol Moseley Braun, D-Ill.; the Rev. Al Sharpton; actress Whoopi Goldberg; and several other key African American public figures who have come out in favor of same-sex marriage.

community makes important, lasting contributions to our armed forces," he said. "Our nation should salute them for their service, their honesty and their courage."

The officers also joined 13 other retired senior military leaders in issuing a statement condemning the gay ban. "There is one inescapable conclusion—'don't ask, don't tell' does not work and should be repealed," they said. "Today, no credible evidence exists to support a continued ban. Indeed, all studies, including those commissioned by the Pentagon, have come to that conclusion."

The *Times* story and statement came on the 10th anniversary of the "don't ask, don't tell" policy. Since it became law, nearly 10,000 men and women have been discharged for being gay, lesbian or bi. According to figures from the General Accounting Office, the cost alone of training replacements for those discharged has exceeded \$300 million in the past decade.



Retired Brig. Gen. Virgil A. Richard, Rear Adm. Alan M. Steinman and Brig. Gen. Keith Kerr spoke out against "don't ask, don't tell" on the policy's 10th anniversary

The U.S. Naval Academy Alumni Association board of trustees unanimously rejected a proposal Dec. 5 to create a chapter for its gay, lesbian, bi and trans graduates.

USNA Out had filed a petition for official recognition on Veteran's Day last month. Jeff Petrie, the group's elected president, said the decision against recognizing USNA Out was based on the board's desire to exclude gay men and lesbians from establishing a formal alumni chapter.

According to the association's official statement, the board denied the request because it did not want to establish a chapter that served a "discreet group": "The alumni association has never before chartered a special-interest chapter and does not want to begin that practice." Rather, the statement says, the association will sanction chapters on the basis of geography.

However, Petrie noted that the association has,

Two generals and an admiral publicly acknowledged their sexual orientation for the first time Dec. 10 in *The New York Times*. The three retired officers are the highest-ranking military leaders to reveal they are gay.

Brig. Gen. Keith Kerr, Brig. Gen. Virgil A. Richard and Rear Adm. Alan M. Steinman said the military's queer ban damages readiness and the recruitment and retention of service-members. They also called on the Pentagon to curb anti-gay harassment. They said they hoped other officers would follow their lead.

C. Dixon Osburn, Servicemembers Legal Defense Network executive director, praised Kerr, Richard and Steinman for their courage.

"They provide irrefutable evidence that our