

"Civil rights seldom comes as a bolt of lightning. It takes patience, it takes careful planning, it takes hard work," said C. Dixon Osburn. The executive director of Servicemembers Legal Defense Network was addressing the organization's 12th annual "End the Witch Hunts" national dinner Oct. 2 in Washington, D.C.

There are only two ways to get rid of the anti-gay military policy known as "don't ask, don't tell," he said, "either through the courts or through Congress."

Osburn announced that by the end of the year, his organization "will file a new lawsuit challenging the constitutionality" of "don't ask, don't tell" and will have drafted a model bill to repeal the law in Congress.

"We have interviewed some 200 of our clients from the past two to three years. It's been somewhat of an *American Idol* contest for gays in the military. I can tell you that once we file the lawsuit, these individuals will inspire you with their courage, their sacrifice and their selflessness. They are going to do a phenomenal job for us."

Osburn explained that in striking down state sodomy laws last year, the U.S. Supreme Court said: "The state cannot demean our existence. It cannot impede our destiny by punishing us. We plan to go back to the court and take them at their word: You cannot demean our existence."

He also outlined how his organization has been building its lobbying capacity and has met with more than 150 members of Congress,

MILITARY OFFENSIVE

Servicemembers Legal Defense Network announces new legal challenge to "don't ask, don't tell"

by Bob Roehr

including most of those who sit on committees with jurisdiction over the military. He concluded, "None of us is truly a full citizen of the United States of America until the ban is lifted."

Retired Lt. Steve May related the fight he went through when the Army called him back to active duty from the Reserve. He had declared that he was gay during debate on the floor of the Arizona House of Representatives, where he served as a Republican state legislator. Although the Army tried to use that to discharge him, he was allowed to complete his term of service.

May said that the gay ban "undermines our national security" because competent, trained gay men and lesbians continue to be kicked out of the military even

while their skills are in short supply. The policy "was imposed upon us by the enemies of freedom. By that I mean the congressmen who threaten our liberties. It is in conflict with who we are as an American people.... It is a continuation of the aspirations that started in 1776."

Patricia Kutteles—the mother of Pfc. Barry Winchell, who was murdered in a 1999 anti-gay assault at Fort Campbell, Ky.—presented the

"Today, thousands of gays and lesbians are living a lie to defend our country"

—Ted Kennedy

the other sons and daughters of this nation."

In a video acceptance of the award, Kennedy outlined the many ways in which Clark was derelict in allowing an anti-gay atmosphere to fester on the base and in the investigation of that murder. He called "don't ask, don't tell" an "utter and unrelenting failure" and concluded, "Today, thousands of gays and lesbians are living a lie to defend our country."

Retired Brig. Gen. Keith H. Kerr took aim at organizations that preach hatred against queers. "We must confront those institutions; those individuals and those churches who take self-respect from us."

The former commander of the California National Guard noted that Matthew Shepard was murdered by an Eagle Scout and a Mormon. He said the Pat Robertsons and Jerry Falwells of the world "pick and chose their abominations [in Leviticus] very carefully, while avoiding others."

"They do not own the Judeo-Christian Bible," Kerr said. "We need to confront the Christian right and fight back."

Former Navy Lt. j.g. Jen Kopfstein, who was discharged for being a lesbian despite her commander fighting to retain her services, spoke movingly of the measures she had to take when her partner of three years was deployed to the Persian Gulf in order to protect her identity. Gay and lesbian servicemembers and their families "have fewer resources than the soldier or sailor next to them." □



Former Navy Lt. j.g. Jen Kopfstein called Servicemembers Legal Defense Network "a lifeline from the isolation and loneliness" of being gay in the military

"Courage Award" named after her son to U.S. Sen. Ted Kennedy, D-Mass. It was the first time a politician had been given the award.

Kennedy led the unsuccessful fight to deny a promotion to Gen. Robert T. Clark, who commanded Fort Campbell at the time of Winchell's death. Kutteles said, "When it mattered, Sen. Kennedy stood up for my family...and to protect

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