

After nearly 18 years under the controversial and discriminatory policy known as "Don't ask, don't tell," United States soldiers are on the precipice of legally serving openly in the armed forces. Full repeal of the Clinton-era policy, issued in December 1993, occurs Tuesday, September 20. More than 13,500 service members have been discharged under the military ban on gays and lesbians serving openly, many of whom have expressed a desire to re-enlist after repeal.

Here in the Northwest, the Vancouver, Wash.-based Veterans for Human Rights, as well as the Human Rights Campaign's Portland Steering Committee and Q Center, are organizing celebratory events to mark the occasion. VfHR has worked tirelessly, along with national LGBT veterans support organizations like the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, in reporting and engaging the public on the issues facing the long haul toward repeal of DADT. Now, for the first time, those behind the scenes of these organizations are able to look on the policy from the rearview mirror.

"Being involved with Veterans for Human Rights has allowed me to see the effect that many service members went through being outed and discharged," explains VfHR treasurer James Freed. "The pain of being denied to serve your country as you swore to do when enlisting was detrimental."

Freed wasn't out during his career as a civilian worker for the Air Force, and says he only realized his orientation in college after he was

discharged. But he says he did work with gay active duty personnel who were not allowed to recognize their partners—erasing a critical support base for soldiers.

"With the repeal of DADT, these families should now have the support of their co-workers," Freed explains. "I knew of a few that resigned their commission rather than leave their partners behind."

Dan Koperski is a Gulf War veteran of the U.S. Army Signal Corps, serving from 1990 to 1994. Koperski, a member of VfHR and now an administrator at the VA Northwest Health Network, served on active duty during the time that DADT was implemented. He says he witnessed the problems and difficulties it posed for service members firsthand.

"Not only was DADT debilitating to the cohesion and morale of the soldiers in my unit, it turned them against one another and created a situation where I had to lie about whom and what I was in order to keep my friends and

job," Koperski explains. "I hope that with this repeal, the stigma and frustrations that many GLBT Americans face will be lifted. I was honored to be given the chance to serve our country as a GLBT American and fully support the rights of each and every citizen of the United States to do the same."

Freed will be on hand September 20 during the annual "Veterans Stand Down" event, an effort presented by Central City Concern, the Department of Veterans Affairs, Returning Veterans Project, Oregon Paralyzed Veterans of America and WorkSource Oregon. "Stand Down" takes place at the Oregon Convention Center (777 NE Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.) from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. as an event primarily for homeless veterans, but also features a job fair for all military veterans and their families.

More than 50 potential employers and 70 service providers are expected to attend "Stand Down," and Medical Teams International will

be on site with their dental van, providing all-day free dental care.

"Stand Down" is one among a day of celebratory events, themed "As American As Apple Pie," set for Tuesday, September 20. Along with a press conference and Color Guard presentation at Portland City Hall at 11:30 a.m., a DADT Repeal Celebration and Remembrance event at Q Center (4115 N. Mississippi) will run from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., featuring appearances by Mayor Sam Adams and representatives from HRC Portland and VfHR. From 6 to 7 p.m., KBOO Community Radio will broadcast live from the event.

Before and/or after the Q Center reception, revelers can head to CC Slaughters (219 NW Davis) for another Repeal Celebration Party in partnership with the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, beginning at 3 p.m., with happy hour extended to 9 p.m. There is no cover, though donations to the SLDN are strongly encouraged.

As *Just Out* went to print, it was announced that House Armed Services Committee Chairman Rep. Buck McKeon (R-Calif.) and Rep. Joe Wilson (R-S.C.) drafted a letter arguing for a delay of DADT repeal. The Pentagon, however, insisted that repeal would commence as scheduled. **JO**

For more information about DADT repeal events, visit [pdxqcenter.org](http://pdxqcenter.org), contact VfHR's Ron Rasmussen at 360-896-9394, or visit [vfhr.org](http://vfhr.org). For more information or to volunteer for the CC Slaughters celebration, call Robert Irwin at 503-875-3174.



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