

Soldier Fights for Equality

continued **▲** from front

DOMA in court, after the Obama Administration determined the policy was unconstitutional.

But even if DOMA is repealed, Title 10 of the U.S. Code, which pertains to the Armed Forces, defines a spouse as a person of the opposite sex and consequently prevents spouses of gay military members and veterans from receiving the same military benefits as their heterosexual counterparts.

It means that even if Sue and Michelle were married in a state that recognizes same-sex marriages, the

National Guard held a retirement ceremony for Leavy and the other Oregon soldiers who were completing their honorable service.

"I got to introduce Michelle as my wife. I never thought I would see that day come in my military career," she said.

But when it came time to honor the spouses of retired military, Michelle's name was never called.

"Michelle was supposed to get a spousal certificate of recognition," she said. "It was approved by the chief of staff."

Leavy said she was hurt when

one spouse passes away, the other spouse receives their retirement pay for the rest of his or her life. But because Sue and Michelle's relationship is not considered federally recognized, Michelle will get nothing, said Leavy.

For the future, Leavy looks forward to the day her marriage and partnership will become recognized by the military for equal benefits.

She said there are others in the Army and in the civilian world who have the same barriers and wants. "It's a shame. There is a lot of grey."

But Leavy remains hopeful. "The bigotry is still going to be there, but as more soldiers sign up, their values are going to be different," she said. "They don't judge. There are some that do, but it is not like the 'old school'."

Both agreed that it is highly unlikely gay marriage will be legal in the military anytime soon.

"I just don't understand why who I love should affect the entire nation," said Martin.

"But small steps have been made," Leavy said. "Our partners can come to where you are deployed and give you a hug and a kiss. But we still have a long way to go."



PHOTO BY MINDY COOPER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Michelle Martin and her career-military spouse Sue Leavy are pictured departing a church after a wedding last year with family and friends. By law, the couple is in a domestic partnership recognized by the state of Washington, but the union is not recognized by the military or federal government.

federal government would still deny military benefits to her spouse and child, like medical care. Other benefits include retirement pay, housing assistance, family separation benefits, and burial in national cemeteries.

Last month, the Oregon Army

someone in command said, 'No.' The recognition would have meant so much.

"Being there, and at least being recognized as her wife, I was okay with that, knowing the situation and being realistic," Martin said.

In a heterosexual marriage, if



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