

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2021

**Statement on the 10th Anniversary of the Repeal of the United States Military's
Don't Ask, Don't Tell Policy**

September 20, 2021

Ten years ago today, a great injustice was remedied, and a tremendous weight was finally lifted off the shoulders of tens of thousands of dedicated American servicemembers. The repeal of "don't ask, don't tell," which formally barred gay, lesbian, and bisexual servicemembers from openly serving, helped move our Nation closer to its foundational promise of equality, dignity, and opportunity for all. It was the right thing to do. And it showed once again that America is at its best when we lead not by the example of our power, but by the power of our example.

Despite serving with extraordinary honor and courage throughout our history, more than 100,000 American servicemembers have been discharged because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, including some 14,000 under "don't ask, don't tell." Many of these veterans received what are known as "other than honorable" discharges, excluding them and their families from the vitally important services and benefits they had sacrificed so much to earn.

As a U.S. Senator, I supported allowing servicemembers to serve openly, and as Vice President, I was proud to champion the repeal of this policy and to stand beside President Obama as he signed the Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act into law. As President, I am honored to be Commander in Chief of the strongest and most inclusive military in our Nation's history. Today, our military doesn't just welcome LGBTQ+ servicemembers, it is led at the highest levels by brave LGBTQ+ veterans, including Under Secretary of the Air Force Gina Ortiz Jones and Assistant Secretary of Defense for Readiness Shawn Skelly, who served under "don't ask, don't tell." I was gratified to appoint the first openly gay Senate-confirmed Cabinet member, Secretary Pete Buttigieg, a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy Reserve and Afghanistan veteran who joined the military under the "don't ask, don't tell" policy. And during my first week in office, I proudly delivered on my pledge to repeal the discriminatory ban on open service by patriotic transgender servicemembers.

On this day and every day, I am thankful for all of the LGBTQ+ servicemembers and veterans who strengthen our military and our Nation. We must honor their sacrifice by continuing the fight for full equality for LGBTQ+ people, including by finally passing the Equality Act and living up to our highest values of justice and equality for all.

NOTE: The statement referred to H.R. 5.

Categories: Statements by the President : U.S. military "don't ask, don't tell" policy, 10th anniversary of repeal.

Names: Buttigieg, Peter P.M.; Jones, Gina M. Ortiz; Obama, Barack; Skelly, Shawn G.

Subjects: Air Force, Department of the : Under Secretary; Armed Forces, U.S. : "Don't ask, don't tell" policy, repeal; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: LGBTQ+ servicemembers; Defense, Department of : Assistant Secretaries :: Readiness; Legislation, proposed : Equality Act; Transportation, Department of : Secretary.

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