

(Newspaper Editorial, Phoenix AZ, date unknown)

The Chief is right on this one!

Barry M. Goldwater

After more than 50 years in the military and politics, I am still amazed to see how upset people can get over nothing. Lifting the ban on gays in the military isn't exactly nothing, but it's pretty damned close.

Everyone knows that gays have served honorably in the military since at least the time of Julius Caesar. They'll still be serving long after we're all dead and buried. That should not surprise anyone. But most Americans should be shocked to know that while the country's economy is going down the tubes, the military has wasted a half-billion dollars over the past decade chasing down gays and running them out of the armed services.

It's no great secret that military studies have proven again and again that there's no valid reason for keeping the ban on gays. Some thought gays were crazy, but then found that wasn't true. Then they decided gays were a security risk, but again the Department of Defense decided that wasn't so – in fact, one study by the Navy in 1956 that has never been made public found gays to be good security risks. Even Larry Korb, President Reagan's man in charge of implementing the Pentagon ban on gays, now admits it was a dumb idea. No wonder my friend Dick Cheney, secretary of defense under President Bush, called it "a bit of an old chestnut."

When the facts lead to one conclusion, I say it's time to act, not to hide. The country and the military know now that eventually the ban will be lifted. The only remaining questions are how much muck we will all be dragged through, and how many brave Americans like Tom Panaccia and Col. Margarethe Cammermeyer will have their lives and careers destroyed in a senseless attempt to stall the inevitable.

Some in Congress think I'm wrong. They say we absolutely must continue to discriminate, or all hell will break loose. Who knows, they say, perhaps our soldiers may even take up arms against each other.

Well, that's just stupid.

Years ago I was a lieutenant in charge of an all-black unit. Military leaders at the time believed that blacks lacked leadership potential – period. That seems ridiculous now, as it should. Now, each and every man and woman who serves this nation takes orders from a black man – our own Gen. Colin Powell.

Nobody thought blacks or women could ever be integrated into the military. Many thought an all-volunteer force could never protect our national interest. Well, it has – and despite those who feared the worst, I am among them, we are and will continue to be the best.

The point is that decisions are always a lot easier to make in hindsight, but we seldom have that luxury. That is why the future of our country depends on leadership and that's what we need now.

I served in the armed forces. I have flown more than 150 of the best fighter planes and bombers this country built. I founded the Arizona National Guard. I chaired the Senate Armed Services Committee. And I think it's high time to pull the curtains on this charade of policy.

What would undermine our readiness would be a compromise policy like "Don't ask, don't tell." That compromise doesn't deal with the issue – it tried to hide it. We have wasted enough precious time, money and talent trying to persecute and pretend. It's time to stop burying our heads in the sand and denying reality for the sake of politics. It's time to deal with this straight on and be done with it. It's time to get on with more important business.

The conservative movement, to which I subscribe, has as one of its basic tenets the belief that government should stay out of people's private lives. Government governs best when it governs least – and stays out of the impossible task of legislating morality. But legislating someone's version of morality is exactly what we do by perpetuating discrimination against gays.

When you get down to it, no American able to serve should be allowed, much less given an excuse, not to serve his or her country. We need all our talent.

If I were in the Senate today, I would rise on the Senate floor in support of our Commander in Chief. He may be a Democrat, but he happens to be right on this question.

Barry Goldwater, a former senator from Arizona, was the Republican nominee for president in 1964