

On Senate floor, Senator Coons celebrates final enactment of Don't Ask, Don't Tell repeal: Sen. Christopher A. Coons (D-DE) News Release

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U.S. Senate Documents WASHINGTON - U.S. Senator Chris Coons (D-Del.), a cosponsor of the Senate legislation that repealed the military's discriminatory Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy, spoke on the floor today to note the final enactment of the repeal. - It's been 60 days since Secretary Panetta, Chairman Mullen, and President Obama have certified that the United States Armed Forces are ready for the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell. [...] after 18 long years, today that policy finally comes to an end. When he graduated from ROTC back in 1980, Charlie's boyfriend, Dennis, was there. [...] he wrote me recently about his experience. Madame President, this is how we make it better. Don't Ask, Don't Tell was discrimination, plain and simple, but today it is no more. Read this original document at: <http://coons.senate.gov/newsroom/releases/release/on-senate-floor-senator-coons-celebrates-final-enactment-of-dont-ask-dont-tell-repeal>

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U.S. Senate Documents

WASHINGTON - U.S. Senator Chris Coons (D-Del.), a cosponsor of the Senate legislation that repealed the military's discriminatory Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy, spoke on the floor today to note the final enactment of the repeal.

- As Delivered on September 20, 2011 -

I rise today to mark a momentous day, and to stand with the millions of Americans for whom the end of Don't Ask, Don't Tell means the beginning of a new era of real equality for our nation.

It's been 60 days since Secretary Panetta, Chairman Mullen, and President Obama have certified that the United States Armed Forces are ready for the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell.

And after 18 long years, today that policy finally comes to an end.

This is an important day, Madame President, a good day.

Today is a good day because our nation - in my view - is taking a major step forward -- not just in the pursuit of equal rights, but in the pursuit of equal responsibility.

Today is a good day, because we always talk about equal rights, but with Don't Ask, Don't Tell, we're talking about Americans who sought equal responsibility. Americans who wanted to serve their nation.

Nearly 14,000 LGBT Americans wanted to serve their nation in their military, but were deemed unfit to serve not because of what they did, but because of whom they loved.

As if loving another man made a soldier unable to aim a rifle -- or unwilling to die for his country.

But for as many service members who were drummed out -- both literally and figuratively -- under Don't Ask, Don't Tell, I can't help but wonder how many more served in silence, proud of their uniform but made to feel ashamed of the person underneath.

Lt. Col. Charles George served his country for more than 30 years, including 28 years as a commissioned officer in the United States Army. His uniform is decorated with a wide range of medals and ribbons for his dedicated service.

When he graduated from ROTC back in 1980, Charlie's boyfriend, Dennis, was there.

And he wrote me recently about his experience.

He said, "I sat next to Charlie's mother, keeping quiet so I wouldn't draw attention in any way to our relationship. During his actual pinning, my eyes never left his. I was so proud of him. At one moment his eyes found me in the audience and we smiled. I still remember that moment."

That was the last of those moments they'd have.

In 30 years, in 30 years, of dedicated Army service that ROTC ceremony was the only military activity of Charlie's that Dennis would be able to be a part of. Charlie was determined to serve our nation, so they had to keep their relationship a secret.

Charlie steadily rose through the ranks, to 1st Lieutenant, then to Captain. He was promoted to Major, and ultimately to Lieutenant Colonel. These were all proud moments, but Dennis couldn't be in the room for any of them.

"The only thing harder than being a soldier is loving one," they would later recall hearing. I would offer that perhaps the only thing harder than loving a soldier might be having to keep that love a secret from the world for decades.

After 9/11, then-Major Charlie George was activated from reserve duty, and like so many military families, they discussed their now uncertain future.

If Charlie had died in the service of his country, there would be no call on Dennis' phone from the Army. No knock on his door. Dennis would receive no crisply folded flag presented by a military honor guard. Dennis would never be able to be buried next to Charlie at Arlington National Cemetery.

For 31 years they kept their relationship and their love a secret. Colonel George retired this year -- a milestone he will celebrate next month at home in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware. For the first time since that ROTC ceremony more than three decades earlier, Dennis will be there, proudly looking on.

No more secrets.

No more hiding.

Just the respect and dignity they both deserve, not just because of Charlie's long and dedicated service to the United States Army or because of Dennis' silent sacrifice, but because they are both Americans.

I was proud to cosponsor the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell last fall. I was even prouder to vote for it.

Three months ago, I was one of 13 U.S. senators to record a video telling the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth of this country that "It Gets Better." As Americans, we **tell** our kids that "equality for all" is a founding principle of our nation.

But our actions in so many ways have in the past failed to live up to these brave words.

Our video was a promise to this generation of Americans, to the generation of my children -- a promise that we are working to build an America free of legal discrimination -- free of discrimination in our society. That LGBT youth have a future in this country where they will be entitled to the same rights, privileges, and responsibilities as every other American.

Bit by bit, we're going to tear down these walls of discrimination.

Madame President, this is how we make it better.

Don't Ask, Don't Tell was discrimination, plain and simple, but today it is no more.

Today is a good day.

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Word count: **918**

Indexing (details)

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Title

On Senate floor, Senator Coons celebrates final enactment of Don't Ask, Don't Tell repeal: Sen. Christopher A. Coons (D-DE) News Release

Publication title

[Congressional Documents and Publications](#)

Publication year

2011

Publication date

Sep 20, 2011

Year

2011

Publisher

Lanham

Publisher

Federal Information & News Dispatch, Inc.

Place of publication

Lanham

Country of publication

United States

Journal subject

[Law, Political Science](#)

Source type

Reports

Language of publication

English

Document type

REPORT

Subfile

Armed forces, Equal rights, Rites & ceremonies

ProQuest document ID

893097088

Document URL

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/893097088?accountid=15185>

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Last updated

2011-09-21

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