

**PRESS RELEASE**



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## Gay, Lesbian & Bisexual Veterans of America, Inc.

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### **SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT MEETS WITH GAY, LESBIAN & BISEXUAL VETERANS OF AMERICA**

On May 7, 1997 the White House welcomed seven gay and bisexual veterans of the United States Armed Forces to a meeting with Richard Socarides, Special Assistant to the President and Senior Advisor for Public Liaison. Representing GLBVA at this meeting were James Darby, Mel Tips, Edward Clayton, Cliff Arnesen, Patrick Bova, John Belseth and John MacWilliams.

The meeting began with James Darby, GLBVA National President, briefing Socarides on the meeting with Pentagon officials. During the meeting, which was held in the Old Executive Office Building overlooking the east wing of the White House, GLBVA members presented a slate of five issues to Socarides. While expressing general dissatisfaction with the current DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL, DON'T PURSUE policy, the group pointed out that homosexual related discharges have increased dramatically under this policy to an all-time high in 1996 when 850 servicemembers were discharged due to their actual or perceived sexual orientation. The group also called for an independent military review board to be established to investigate reported or suspected violations of the DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL, DON'T PURSUE policy and hold base commanders responsible for violations which occur within their commands.

Additionally, the group of veterans called for:

- \* the repeal of Article 125 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice pointing out that this article, commonly known as "the sodomy clause", is disproportionately used against gay and bisexual servicemembers
- \* the end to efforts by the military to seek recoupment of expenses for training from servicemembers who are discharged for being gay, lesbian or bisexual
- \* improvements in the treatment of veterans with HIV and AIDS at Veterans Administration hospitals; and
- \* the upgrading of less-than-honorable discharges to the status of "honorable" in all cases where servicemembers were separated solely on the basis of their actual or perceived sexual orientation.

In response, Socarides thanked the group for the work GLBVA has been doing to assist veterans affected by this policy and passed on the President's dissatisfaction with the implementation of the DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL, DON'T PURSUE policy. He offered continued support for GLBVA as the fight to lift the ban continues and assured the group of continued access to administration officials to discuss issues of concern.

**GLBVA, Inc.** is the only national non-profit organization for gay, lesbian and bisexual active duty, reserve and veteran members of the United States Armed Forces, their families, friends and supporters.