

Letters to the Editor

The following letter was received in response to a call to Senator Jeffords' office regarding the issue of lesbians and gays serving openly in the military.

Thank you for contacting me about the question of lifting the ban on service by homosexuals in the U.S. military. Few issues have generated as much debate and emotion over the last few months,

My office has received many calls and letters from people on both sides of this issue.

It is generally recognized there have always been gays in the military and there are many homosexuals serving their country today. In spite of the current ban that prohibits their serving, these men and women have chosen to serve, do so honorably, and hope to stay. The tests for suitability for military service should be conduct and performance.

Our society's concept of individual rights has evolved, and I do not believe we can rationally demand that all homosexuals be forced out of the military. This is reflected in our legal institutions. The Central District Court of California ruled in January, 1993 that the Department of Defense be permanently enjoined from discharging or denying enlistment to any person based on sexual orientation in the absence of conduct which interferes with the military's mission.

We should determine how we can best confront the reality of military service by homosexuals and manage the transition to a more stable and just policy. I believe the President and the Congress have reached a reasonable compromise to hold hearings before any final policy changes are made. But it will be quite

some time before this issue is finally resolved.

Having served over three years on active duty in the U.S. Navy on board ship and over 25 years in the U.S. Naval Reserves, I am well aware of the concerns that many people have raised about the conduct of military personnel. And I share some of those concerns. No serviceman or servicewoman should have to worry about his or her privacy or safety. But this is primarily a question of conduct. Sexual harrassment, no matter what the orientation or motivation of the individual, must not be allowed.

Similar concerns were raised when the decision was made to desegrate the military and to integrate women into the armed forces. In order to protect all members of the military, and to maintain order and discipline, appropriate regulations clearly governing behavior were instituted. The same will have to happen now to ease this transition to a new policy.

This type of change cannot happen overnight. Hearings must be held, rules of conduct re-evaluated and military procedures reviewed. The concerns of military personnel at all levels must be listened to and taken into account. Facts on the performance of homosexuals in the military, and other relevant issues, must be reviewed. It is critical that this change, as with any substantive change in the armed forces, not result in any drop in the morale or effectiveness of our military. The highest standards of discipline must be maintained.

Again, thank you for sharing your views with me on this issue.

Sincerely,

James M. Jeffords
U.S. Senate

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March 11, 1993

An open letter to our community,

Valerie Taylor is one of our oldest living na-

tional treasures. Whether you bought *Whisper Their Love* from a drugstore rack in 1957 or *Prism* in a women's bookstore in 1981, or have just heard her name, the fact is, she has made a difference in your life.

Valerie, now 79, was creating lesbian literature before most of us came out. She writes with humor, hope and triumph about the struggle of old lesbians, poor lesbians, disabled lesbians and all gay people. Even in the early 1960s her Erica Fromm series dared happy endings.

When Jeannette Foster, ground-breaking author of *Sex Variant Women In Literature* (1956), was in a nursing home, Valerie was instrumental in creating the lesbian-supported fund which helped pay for Jeannette's care until her death.

Today, Valerie Taylor needs us to return some of the support and love she has given. She lives with a variety of medical problems. Because of nerve damage in a leg she uses her arms and a cane for balance. Now she has fractured a shoulder and cannot walk, write or care for herself.

Immediate special care is needed for about six weeks. Although Medicare and basic donated health insurance cover a portion of her needs, she has only a social security check to pay for the rest. Arizona has no Medicaid and, low-income as Valerie is, she doesn't qualify for the state program. With your help we can insure that a pioneering lesbian writer gets the care she needs.

Please mail contributions to: Valerie Taylor Fund c/o Antigone Books 600 N. 4th Avenue Tucson, AR 85705. Make checks payable to Valerie Taylor. If you can't afford to donate money, let Valerie know what her books have meant to you!

Thank you for your generosity,

Jean Sirius, Carol Seajay, Lee Lynch, Cara Louise Vaughn, Tee Corinne, Barbara Grier

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