

## Capital Region Reacts to "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"

The military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy is on its way out after Saturday's historic Senate vote.

"This is a great day for America. It means that those gay and lesbian service members who are in now, who will come in the future, don't have to go through what those of us who were discharged under don't ask don't tell went through," said Noel Freeman, a former Airman in the Air Force. Freeman is just one of the more than 13,000 troops who have been dismissed under the law since 1993.

Some former military members said they support the bill and that this is a crucial step for civil rights.

"I think overall it's definitely a step in the right direction socially and morally," said Adam Neff, from Niskayuna who used to serve in the military.

"I was a Marine and I don't think it would change anything from their perspective, they are pretty much set in their ways and I think if a Marine was gay they would pretty much keep it a secret, but you know I'm all about equality and all that stuff," said Eric Tator, from East Greenbush.

"It's definitely a historic day. I mean its been coming for many years. It's definitely a historic day but, we're not there yet because there is still implementation that will need to take place," said attorney Greg Rinckey, a managing partner for Tully Rinckey Law Firm.

Rinckey, who is a former army jag, said he has received several e-mails already and expects a busy day on Monday as many of his clients are wondering what is next.

"We are starting to hear people that are interested in enlisting or reenlisting, especially people that were forced out, maybe they lost their GI benefits or retirement because they were forced out short of the 20 years you need in the military to get a retirement. If you're forced out at 14 years you only six left. With the economy the way it is, it's a good option to go back in do another six years and be able to retire," said Rinckey. Who is also telling people to be patient; the change will come but, not overnight.

"Are people still going to be openly gay in the military? I'm sure there will be some. For most I still think there will be a little bit of holding back until it gets really integrated into the military culture," Rinckey said.

"I hope that someday it doesn't matter that it's not an issue at all," Tator said.

The Capital District Gay and Lesbian Community Council said they thrilled that members of the community will serve openly and proud in the military. Other advocates say this is a step toward equality but a fight for other social changes like same sex marriage still lies ahead.

The president is expected to sign the legislation soon.

Gov. David Paterson said in a statement:

"Not very long from now, Americans will look back on today's momentous vote to repeal 'Don't Ask Don't Tell' and wonder why something so basic and fundamentally American as the right to serve and protect our nation openly was ever in dispute.

"Much as early resistance to racial integration of our Armed Forces seems ludicrous in hindsight, it will be difficult for future generations to comprehend an official policy that forced gays and lesbians - under threat of expulsion - to hide their sexual orientation for the privilege of defending the freedom and safety of their fellow Americans.

"The good news today is that this unjust, doomed policy has finally been consigned to relic status by a 65-31 majority. The members who voted for repeal can be justly proud that they upheld the principles of democracy, freedom, and equality that Americans value most.

"I also congratulate President Obama. Let the history books show that the repeal of 'Don't Ask Don't Tell' was achieved under his watch and would not have happened without his leadership.

"Together, Congress and President Obama have taken the nation a bold step forward. At a time when gays and lesbians are fighting and dying in Iraq and Afghanistan, their sacrifice deserves - at the bare minimum - that we honor their full humanity abroad and here at home."