

*WASHINGTON, DC (December 22, 2010) – Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), founding member and Vice-Chair of the LGBT Equality Caucus, released the following statement today after President Obama signed H.R. 2965, the Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act of 2010, into law.*

“This is a landmark day in the history of the United States of America. We have ended the misguided military policy, Don't Ask, Don't Tell, which has prevented highly-skilled, patriotic American men and women from serving their country simply because of their sexual orientation. I cosponsored this legislation because the policy was wrong 17 years ago when it was put in place and it is wrong today. With the undoing of Don't Ask, Don't Tell, America becomes a more just country and I am incredibly proud to have cast an historic vote to make it so. Today is truly a highlight of my career, which I have dedicated to the basic principal of equality for all.

“American men and women should never have had to choose between the opportunity to serve their country and being honest about their sexual orientation. Yet since 1993, over 13,000 men and women have been discharged from our military under Don't Ask, Don't Tell.

“In 2002, Lee Reinhart of Chicago was forced to join the ranks of the individuals discharged from the military under Don't Ask, Don't Tell. He told me his story, explaining his deep dedication to protecting his country and the desire to some day return to service. With the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell, he plans to reenlist, and has contacted a recruiter at the Navy Reserves, calling the opportunity to give one's life for his country a 'high honor.'

“An overwhelming majority of Americans, including those in the military, support ending Don't Ask, Don't Tell. Many of our closest military allies, including Israel, the United Kingdom, and Canada, have implemented policies of open service without negative consequences to unit cohesion or military performance. Particularly at a time when our armed forces are stretched thin, we cannot afford to turn away Americans who are willing and able to serve. The GAO reports that hundreds of men and women with unique abilities, including critical language skills, have been discharged under this policy.

“However, the most compelling reason for ending Don't Ask, Don't Tell is that this policy is not only damaging, it is discriminatory. It is a policy that forces young men and women to lie about their identity in order to serve their country.

“In February, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, told the Senate, ‘No matter how I look at this issue, I cannot escape being troubled by the fact that we have in place a policy which forces young men and women to lie about who they are in order to defend their fellow citizens. For me personally, it comes down to integrity – theirs as individuals and ours as an institution.’

“In December, Secretary Gates called for legislative action, stating ‘I would hope that the Congress would act to repeal ‘don't ask, don't tell.’ Today, we finally ended this damaging, discriminatory policy.”

