



## General Pace's 'immoral' comment continues to echo

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by Anthony Glassman

**Washington, D.C.**--Defense Secretary Robert Gates stood by the chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff over comments he made using his personal beliefs to support the "don't ask, don't tell" policy.

In an interview run on March 12, Marine Gen. Peter Pace told the *Chicago Tribune* that he thought homosexuality was immoral, and the country's policies should not lend legitimacy to "immorality."

The general later noted that he was expressing his personal opinion and would not apologize for it, although he expressed "regret" that he did not focus more on military policy in the interview and less on his own beliefs.

Pace's statements brought a rebuke from Virginia Sen. John Warner, a Republican, who said that he strongly disagreed with the general.

However, on the March 18 edition of CBS' *Face the Nation*, Gates told host Bob Schieffer, "I think General Pace has made pretty clear that he wished he had avoided his personal opinion."

"Let me say, you know, Pete Pace is one of the finest people I've ever worked with. He's a man of enormous principle and integrity and a tremendous - and of tremendous skill," Gate continued. "I think the American people are lucky to have him as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff."

When Schieffer asked Gates if he thought Pace's comments were a slur on members of the military, Gates sidestepped the issue with, "I think I'll leave it at the fact that I don't think this is an issue where personal opinion has any place."

Gates also indicated that reviewing "don't ask" was not a high priority to him.

"Look, I've got a war in Iraq, a war in Afghanistan, challenges in Iran and North Korea and elsewhere, global war on terror, three budget bills totaling \$715 billion," he said. "I think I've got quite a lot on my plate."

*Newsweek* magazine pointed out that Pace had commented on homosexuality in 2005, while giving a leadership seminar to graduate students at Wharton.

"The U.S. military mission fundamentally rests on the trust, confidence and cooperation amongst its members," he said. "And the homosexual lifestyle does not comport with that kind of trust and confidence."

The statements were made in support of the "don't ask" policy, which was passed in 1993.

Lesbian *Detroit News* columnist Deb Price had a different reaction to Pace's comments last week.

"Hey, Gen. Pace, thanks for the insult," she wrote.

She noted that he had "restarted the national conversation about the treatment of gay Americans fighting for our country.

"In the uproar that followed, something wonderful happened," she noted. "We got very public signals that even among Republicans who voted for the gay ban, there's a refreshing willingness to reconsider it. Alan Simpson, a retired three-term Republican senator from Wyoming, eloquently explained in a *Washington Post* guest column why he no longer supports the ban."

Pace's comments also brought old-school protest to New York's Times Square, where the military has had a recruiting booth since World War II.

Two days after activist Larry Kramer's March 13 speech on the 20th anniversary of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, ACT UP's New York chapter, along with the Queer Justice League and other organizations, organized the action.

**Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum, the leader of Congregation Beth Simchat Torah, and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force executive director Matt Foreman stretched a rainbow banner across Broadway in front of the recruiting station. Police confiscated the banner, which was blocking traffic, so Kleinbaum and Foreman sat down in the middle of the street and were arrested.**

The action harkened back to the early, in-your-face protests of ACT UP, which brought HIV and AIDS to the public consciousness through demonstrations and street theater.

Foreman, Kleinbaum and Kramer, who helped found ACT UP, repeatedly knocked on the door of the recruiting station and speeches were delivered in front of a banner written in English and Arabic stating, "We will not be silent."

Protesters called for Pace to be fired for his comments.

Sens. Hillary Rodham Clinton and Barack Obama initially refused during interviews to refute Pace's statements, Obama turning the question to the policy banning openly gay service members and Clinton stating that she thought it was a question for someone else to decide.

Later, spokesmen for both Democratic presidential candidates said that the senators did, in fact, disagree with Pace.

Steve Sanders, a gay Democrat and former platform committee member, told *Newsday*, "Hillary and Barack have made very public overtures to religious Americans. They are trying to figure out how progressive Democrats can also make appeals to Americans of faith. It's a work in progress."