

PUBLIC AFFAIRS APPROACHHOMOSEXUALS IN THE CANADIAN FORCESAIM

1. The aim of this document is to outline a public affairs approach in response to the Cabinet Committee on Social Development's pending decision to either:

- a) Allow homosexuals into the Canadian Forces; or
- b) Maintain the status quo.

BACKGROUND

2. Current policy does not allow the enrolment or retention of homosexuals in the Canadian Forces. Reasons cited include:

- a) Due to the unique demands of service life, homosexual behavior could create conflicts in interpersonal relationships which could reduce mutual acceptance and respect, diminish confidence in leadership and adversely influence discipline, affecting morale and having a detrimental effect on the operational efficiency of the Canadian Forces; and
- b) Because of the unavoidable lack of privacy in the military, any forced association with homosexuals would appear to violate the equality rights of heterosexuals.

3. The Canadian Forces has justified its prohibition against the recruitment and retention of homosexuals on the basis of Section 1 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and Section 14 of the Canadian Human Rights Act. Respectively, these provisions state that rights and freedoms may be subject to reasonable limits, and that there may be restrictions based on bona fide occupational requirements.

4. The upcoming decision of the Cabinet Committee on Social Development may change the current Canadian Forces policy.

PUBLIC ENVIRONMENT

5. There is continuing interest in the application of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to the Canadian Forces, primarily from the media and special interest groups. Recent developments and activities in this area, such as the ongoing CREW trials, serve to sustain this interest. In addition, the decision just taken by a U.S. court of appeals, calling it unconstitutional to ban homosexuals from the U.S. military, could stimulate further discussion in the Canadian media and be perceived to add weight to the arguments for allowing homosexuals to be retained in the Canadian Forces.

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Media Commentary

6. The specific issue of homosexuals in the Canadian Forces has received sporadic interest in the past. The March 1986 federal government announcement that discrimination against homosexuals would be outlawed in the federal jurisdictions, coupled with the release of the Charter Task Force Final Report in February 1987, attracted a great deal of media commentary. In addition, media attention has centered on individual cases, such as the Sutcliffe (March, 1986) and the Shelburne, N.S. (1984) cases. Both of these were reported somewhat sympathetically toward the individuals involved. A lengthy article in Saturday News, summer, 1986, which examined the Shelburne incident from a personal perspective, prompted a story in the Halifax Daily News, 23 July 1986 (two years after the incident), which focussed on the civil liberties issue.

7. The most recent media commentary was in the summer, 1987. Two articles appeared in GO INFO, a monthly tabloid published by Gays of Ottawa. These articles argued in favour of homosexuals in the military, and paralleled those which advocate women in combat roles, ie the difficulties would be the reactions of heterosexuals and unit cohesiveness, rather than job performance abilities of homosexuals.

8. In addition, most other media have dismissed national security as a valid reason for prohibiting homosexuals from the military.

9. An overview of media commentary during the past two years revealed three columns and one editorial opposing homosexuals in the Canadian Forces. These appeared in the Toronto Sun and Halifax Chronicle Herald. In the same period, three columns and five editorials were published advocating that homosexuals be allowed in the Canadian Forces. These appeared in the Toronto Star, Globe and Mail, Saint John Telegraph Journal, Calgary Herald, Montreal Gazette and Winnipeg Free Press.

10. As a final note concerning media reaction, very little has been written in the province of Quebec, most articles having been straightforward reports.

Opinion Surveys

11. A 1986 DND survey of military personnel revealed that 62% of male and 41% of female personnel would refuse to share showers or accommodation with homosexuals. 45% of males and 20% of females would refuse to work with or be supervised by homosexuals. 80% of males and 47% of females felt that the presence of homosexuals in the Canadian Forces would decrease the effectiveness of the military.

12. A public opinion survey conducted by Focus Canada in the summer, 1986, revealed that 52% of respondents felt that the employment of homosexuals in the Canadian Forces would have no influence on the effectiveness of the military. 6% felt that effectiveness would somewhat or greatly increase. 33% felt effectiveness would somewhat or greatly decrease. When respondents were asked if they thought that homosexuals should be employed in the Canadian Forces, 52% said yes, 36% said no, and 12% had no

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opinion. In profiling respondents, it was found that a higher percentage of the following thought homosexuals should be employed in the Canadian Forces:

- women;
- younger people (18 to 44 years of age);
- single people;
- French-speaking Canadians;
- working;
- higher level of education;
- higher income; and
- a higher percentage in the public sector.

TARGET AUDIENCES

Media

13. Given the media's tendency to support the full application of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to the military, a decision not to allow the recruitment and retention of homosexuals would be mixed, but could lean toward the negative.

Members of Parliament

14. Given the emotional controversy of this issue, there could be increased pressure from MPs having either viewpoint, as they respond to the petitions of their constituents

Special Interest Groups

15. It is estimated that should a decision be rendered which opposes homosexuals in the military, special interest groups such as Gays of Ottawa and human rights activist groups will be highly vocal, and could continue to campaign vigorously. On the other hand, should the decision to allow homosexuals in the Canadian Forces be rendered, defence lobby groups such as the Royal Canadian Military Institute and the Canadian Defence Association could be expected to be highly opposed and lobby against the decision.

Internal Public

16. Based on the 1986 military opinion survey, members of the Canadian Forces could be expected to react negatively, should a decision be rendered which allows the recruitment and retention of homosexuals. This could be the case particularly with the male population of the military.

Canadian Publics

17. Based on available survey data, the Canadian public appears to be tolerant for the most part toward homosexuals and it is estimated that a decision either way would be received with only mild interest. A decision to allow the enrolment and retention of homosexuals in the Canadian Forces, would likely induce mixed reactions, leaning slightly toward the positive. A negative decision would also induce mixed reactions, with slight negativity.

Not sure I agree!

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MESSAGES18. Option 1: Decision to maintain the status quo:

- a) Due to the unique nature of military demands and environment, it is considered that the employment of homosexuals in this field would be so divisive as to have a profound effect on the operational effectiveness of the Canadian Forces.
- b) In compliance with the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, it is considered that the Canadian Forces policy on the recruitment and retention of homosexuals is reasonable and justifiable.

19. Option 2: Decision to allow homosexuals into the military:

- a) Prior to and after the decision by the Cabinet Committee on Social Development, the Canadian Forces were within the provisions outlined in the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.
- b) In keeping with overall government policy, it has nevertheless been decided to liberalize Canadian Forces policy in this matter.

Internal Public Messages:

- c) During the period of adjustment as a result of this decision, steps will be taken to ensure the maintenance of operational effectiveness; and
- d) Measures will be undertaken to address concerns of personnel and to ensure the protection of individual rights and freedoms.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS APPROACHOption 1: Decision to maintain status quo:

20. Should this decision be rendered, a low-key public affairs approach is recommended due to the issue's volatility. This would consist of:

- a) Preparation of a backgrounder; and
- b) Preparation of a Response to Query and Q's and A's.

Option 2: Decision to allow homosexuals in the military:

21. Due to the negativity within the military toward the employment of homosexuals, an active internal communication approach is recommended. This would consist of:

- a) Internal news release to be issued to all bases and stations; and

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- b) Briefings to be conducted at the base level to explain the policy and address individual concerns. In addition, regardless of the Committee's decision, it is recommended that the internal public affairs program include training to prepare members to treat future incidents of homosexuality with sensitivity.

22. A low-key active approach to deal with the public is recommended due to the controversy surrounding this issue. Public affairs activities would be as follows:

- a) A news release to be issued;
- b) Preparation of a backgrounder; and
- c) Preparation of a Response to Query and Q's and A's;

FOLLOW-UP

23. DND's Director General Information will monitor and evaluate news media reports and commentary. Further public affairs activities will be conducted if required.