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HOMOSEXUALS IN THE MILITARY

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CBC: The army has always had a policy on homosexuals. It wouldn't hire them. Always, that is, until now. But a Conservative MP says that the federal government is about to change that. It will direct the military to accept gay men and women. Michelle Douglas is gay and two years ago she was discharged from the military for that reason. She's suing the federal government. She says the military's anti-gay policy violates the Charter of Rights and Freedom. And while Douglas is satisfied with the government's latest proposal she says it's too late to help her. She joins me now from her home near Barrie, Ontario.

Ms Douglas, can you tell me why you say it's too late to help you?

DOUGLAS: Well, obviously it's a really encouraging sign today to have this now into the works, but for me it has come a bit too late. I was in the military at the time when the policy was not to permit gays and lesbians in the military, so you know, I certainly

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have suffered as a result of that policy. But no doubt that many people will benefit from this day forward, as a result of the change in policy.

CBC: Do you gain some measure of satisfaction, because of court cases like yours that, according to this Conservative MP anyways, that forced the change in the government?

DOUGLAS: Well, I think that's true, and I don't know whether it was one specific case that was the impetus to get the military to move on this. But I suspect it's a variety of pressures that have come to bear on the military. Certainly societal change, the acceptance of gays and lesbians now and I think that certainly I have heard various accounts from certain Members of Parliament saying that, you know, there was a number of cases before the court which they didn't feel they could win.

Now, you know, I hope that the military has done this for the right reasons, not simply because they would lose a lawsuit, but because they've come to the realization that this policy was a bad policy and it hurt people and it really did nothing for the military.

CBC: Do you think that that was the real reason? Rather than the potential of losing lawsuits?

DOUGLAS: Well, I mean, I like to be optimistic in this and I probably will never know really the real bottom line as to what has caused this to change. I do think that my lawsuit and others probably did have some impact on this, as I say, but I'm just encouraged

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that they've done it. I'm glad. It is long overdue. But it's a really good day, I think, today for gays and lesbians.

CBC: Do you think that a ruling such as this would encourage more gays to join up, or do you think that they've been a little scared off by the treatment that you and others received?

Well, I guess we've lost our contact with Michelle Douglas. Hello, are you there?

DOUGLAS: Yes, I'm here.

CBC: Oh okay, I'm sorry.

DOUGLAS: Yeah, I think no doubt that gays and lesbians would be a bit nervous to join the military given the conditions on which they would become subject, if they were known to the military, but I don't expect that much will change by way of increased enrolment of specifically gays and lesbians. But I suspect that people, gays and lesbians, will simply go about the job which they've chosen to do and really just go about it free from the threat of harassment and dismissal and just simply do the job and that's, of course, why we were all there in the first place.

CBC: You know, about a year ago you said that you would never consider joining the military, going back to the military. Would you reconsider that decision now in light of this (inaudible)...

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DOUGLAS: Well, I'm not so sure that I've maintained I would never go. I think that, you know, certainly all of this is now before me and I've got to make a decision no doubt as to whether or not I will consider going back in. I think, you know, obviously the environment will be significantly different than it was when I was released from the military. And that's a good sign.

I don't...I haven't made any firm decisions right now about that. But I think in many ways if I was to go back in the military I think it would certainly be symbolic and significant that, you know, the victory was won, and so from that perspective I may consider it. But I really haven't made up my mind yet to either go or to stay out of the service.

CBC: Okay Michelle Douglas, thank you very much for talking with us today.

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