

Our nation's armed forces, no doubt, have the smartest, most sophisticated weaponry in the history of the world. If only we could say the same for our military's top brass. In the face of a readiness crisis, our military leaders are demonstrating a disturbing lack of mental firepower.

The U.S. military has severe problems recruiting and retaining qualified men and women.

The Army could fall 10,000 short of its recruitment goal this year. The Navy's ships have put out to sea with an astounding 22,000 berths unfilled. And the Air Force projects that within three years it will plunge to 2,000 pilots under full strength.

Huge new sums of taxpayer money are being pumped into swelling the ranks of military recruiters and filling the airwaves with enlistment commercials. Desperate recruiters prowl suburban shopping malls in hopes of sweet-talking uninterested high school dropouts into signing up.

Meanwhile, dedicated, decorated, highly trained officers are among those being purged at taxpayer expense from our armed forces simply for being gay.

The armed services are booting out twice as many gay people as when the irrational "Don't ask, don't tell" law took effect five years ago. Last year, the number of gay discharges soared to 1,145.

You and I are footing the bill as the services ground experienced fliers, beach seaworthy sailors and sideline able soldiers because of an un-American law built on prejudice. And gay discharges are just the tip of the iceberg.

It's impossible to estimate how many talented gay men and women simply don't join an organization that's made clear it doesn't want them. Nor is it possible to put a number on how many gay service members cut their careers short so they can break free from the stifling and fearful life of the military's closet.

The situation is absurd: We're needlessly losing countless good people who are difficult and expensive to replace at the very time we're

experiencing the greatest peacetime shortage of military personnel in U.S. history.

The service members' Legal Defense Network, a gay legal watchdog group, estimates that it costs taxpayers \$29 million a year simply to find and train replacements at the boot camp level.

That doesn't include what it costs to replace someone who's highly trained and deep into a military career. Nor does it include the huge investigative and legal costs stemming from enforcing the "Don't ask, don't tell" nightmare.

"Don't ask, don't tell" not only hurts gay service members, it hurts military readiness as well," notes lawyer Michelle Benecke, codirector of the gay service members group.

But instead of begging Congress to repeal this costly law, the military is lowering its standards.

For example, Army Secretary Louis Caldera recently told Pentagon reporters that his branch wants to reduce his service's already minimal education standards by taking more dropouts.

"Frankly, right now we have rules that don't make sense," Caldera said, in a statement filled with unintended irony considering the effects of the "Don't ask, don't tell" law.

"Every day we turn away people who want to join," he said.

And the Navy is keeping more sailors who don't merit promotion or can't pass fitness exams.

The military should exemplify our nation's finest qualities) equal opportunity, tolerance, strength through diversity and a determination to overcome mindless prejudice.

Prejudice is no excuse for settling for less than the best military

we can muster.

Deb Price is a columnist for the Detroit News.

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CREATOR: rwockner (rwockner@netcom.com@INET@LNGTWY [UNKNOWN])

CREATION DATE/TIME: 3-MAR-1999 04:39:00.00

SUBJECT: NC9594: NLGJA event criticized

TO: Richard Socarides (Richard Socarides@EOP [UNKNOWN])

READ:UNKNOWN

TO: Stuart D. Rosenstein (Stuart D. Rosenstein@eop [UNKNOWN])

READ:UNKNOWN

TEXT:

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current issue

Participation of Time, Michael Huffington

In Gay Journalists' Party Draws Flak

By Duncan Osborne

A fundraiser for the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association is drawing criticism from association members and non-members who object to Time, a magazine faulted for poor gay coverage, hosting the event and to the association's embrace of Michael Huffington, another event host, who supported Proposition 187, a California ballot initiative that was widely seen as attacking Latino immigrants.

"It seems to me that it is a mistake to take money from a guy like Michael Huffington," said Albor Ruiz, 57, a columnist with the Daily News and a member of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists. "This is a guy

who has behaved in ways that are detrimental to many, many people."

Huffington, who made a fortune in his father's oil and gas business, contributed \$2,500 to the NLGJA to be listed as a host. In 1994, he made support for Proposition 187 a centerpiece of his failed bid to unseat Democratic U.S. Senator Diane Feinstein. Huffington spent \$29.9 million on the race and lost. Proposition 187 passed by a wide margin. It prevented government agencies from serving undocumented aliens and required all public officials to report such aliens.

"People do change," Ruiz said. "The problem is that money should not buy you legitimacy, it should not buy you respect... He has to put himself on the line to earn the respect of the gay community. He has to renounce his past."

The NLGJA flap comes as activists are pressing gay community groups to be more responsive and accountable. Ruiz is not an NLGJA member, but he has represented the NAHJ at NLGJA events. Offering a similar critique was Ernie Glam, 36, also an NAHJ member and a writer who publishes in the Village Voice and the New York Blade News.

"It was an absolutely horrible thing," Glam said of Proposition 187. "My own father came to this country as an undocumented alien... I would have no problem with the NLGJA accepting a donation from him if he would repudiate his past support for Proposition 187."

Glam has considered joining the NLGJA, but the Huffington episode has made