

Repeal of "Don't Ask; Don't Tell" Fails in Senate

Michael Sean Winters | Sep. 22, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

The Senate did not break a Republican filibuster yesterday on the Defense Authorization Bill. The two Democratic senators from Arkansas joined every member of the GOP in sustaining the filibuster.

There were problems with the bill, to be sure, starting with a provision that would allow abortions to be performed on military bases. The DREAM Act, which would grant permanent residency to those immigrants who, brought to America by their parents, wish to join the U.S. military or who complete two years of college, was another sticking point for the anti-immigrant haters. But, the central impediment was the provision that would allow the President to repeal "Don't Ask; Don't Tell," the 1993 compromise that allowed gays and lesbians to serve in the military provided they did not disclose the fact of their sexual identity.

"Don't Ask; Don't Tell" is not really about homosexuality. It is about deceit. It requires some members of the Armed Forces to lie, to conceal their sexual identity, to stay in the closet. In the context of the early 90's, this was the best that could be achieved. But, in the years since, a dominant aspect of the American national character has manifested itself more and more on the issue of gays and lesbians in society, our sense of fair play. The existence of two sets of rules, one for heterosexuals and one for homosexuals, offends that sense of fairness which is why an overwhelming majority of Americans, including a majority of Republicans, support repeal of "Don't Ask; Don't Tell."

I am curious to know what Christine O'Donnell thinks of the proposal. She has said that her commitment to veracity is so absolute that she would not have lied to shield Anne Frank from the Nazis. (If ever there was an argument for the much maligned (jesuitical!) practice of mental reservation, there it is!) Does she support this enforced lying by gay and lesbian members of the military? Perhaps, only if they also commit to abstaining from self-pleasuring themselves.

During the debate on health care, Republicans took to the floor of both chambers to argue that polls indicated a majority of Americans opposed the reform measures. They said breezily that the Democrats were acting against the stated wishes of the American people. That concern for the views of the American people was not in evidence yesterday.

Catholics, as Catholics, can believe what they want about "Don't Ask; Don't Tell." This is not gay marriage after all: Allowing gays and lesbians to serve openly in the military poses no "threat" to any traditional institutions. The USCCB took no official position on the matter although Archbishop Timothy Broglio of the military archdiocese had some [ridiculously foul things](#) [1] to say about gays and alcoholics. But, in one sense, Catholics do bring one particular experience to the issue of "Don't Ask; Don't Tell," our experience with the clergy sex abuse scandal. That scandal was not the result of gays in the priesthood. It had its genesis in a culture of deceit and closets and the sexual immaturity such a culture enables. We have seen the wreckage that comes from such a culture and we have, collectively, from the average person in the pew to the Pontiff in Rome, come to understand that sexual naivete is a form of clerical malpractice. The same holds true for the military.

When the bill comes to the floor again, I would hope that the abortion provisions are stripped from it. (As far as

I can tell, of course, no Republican Senator cited those provisions in announcing their opposition to the bill, nor did I hear any promise to vote for cloture if those provisions were removed. Beware of red herrings.) Let there be a (no pun intended) straight up-or-down vote on 'Don't Ask; Don't Tell.' Let Republicans vote for deceit, rather than just practice it when discussing the economy. Let them, and their Arkansas friends, tell those brave gay and lesbian Americans who serve in our military that we want them to lie, we want them to violate the Commandment against bearing false witness, we want to encourage the culture of the closet with all its potential for real harm. Let Republicans come out of the closet of their hypocrisy and say that they encourage lying on principle.

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