

House directs Pentagon to uphold DOMA law on gay marriage

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July 8, 2011

WASHINGTON (RNS) House lawmakers voted Thursday (July 7) to order the Pentagon to uphold the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act that defines marriage as between one man and one woman.

In an amendment to a larger Defense Department funding bill, the House voted 248-175 to restrict the Pentagon from granting same-sex couples the same rights or benefits as married couples. The amendment is also aimed at keeping military chaplains from officiating at same-sex weddings.

The move comes at the Pentagon appears poised to lift the ban on gays and lesbians serving openly in the military. After the Obama administration called the 1996 law unconstitutional and signaled it will no longer defend it in court, conservatives said the Pentagon needs strict guidance on following the law.

Earlier this year, the Navy suspended a plan to allow Navy chaplains to conduct same-sex weddings on military bases in states where it is legal. After pushback from religious conservatives, Navy officials agreed to study the issue further before adopting any new policies.

"I believe it's incumbent on the Congress to make this issue very clear so that we don't have confusion on these military bases when we talk about same-sex marriages," said Rep. Dan Burton, R-Ind.

The House has yet to act on another amendment, sponsored by Rep. Tim Huelskamp, R-Kan., that would prohibit the Pentagon from implementing a chaplain training program on the repeal of the Don't Ask/Don't Tell (DADT) policy.

House Minority Whip Steny Hoyer, D-Md., said that amendment "would substitute Congress's micromanagement for the judgment of our military leaders on training issues, and it is a transparent attempt to interfere with the repeal of DADT in any way possible."