After DADT

September 22, 2011 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

September 20, 2011, can now take its rightful place alongside the other major milestones in the long and winding road to equality for LGBT people.

The death of the discriminatory “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT) policy will not be mourned.

Predictions that the sky would fall or that HIV would increase in the military if DADT were repealed be damned.

Now that the celebrations have settled down a bit, it’s worth being reminded that this victory -- no matter how significant it is -- cannot make us complacent.

The most obvious issue that remains is that transgender people are still not allowed to serve openly.

But even for the newly liberated lesbian, gay and bisexual military members, a great article in *Mother Jones* reminds us of the inequalities that remain for them and their loved ones:

While the official end of DADT at midnight on Monday is a historic turning point, unresolved issues with the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) and military regulations mean that service members and their partners in same-sex relationships will continue to suffer second-class treatment ...

But many of the hardships that he and other same-sex partners of service members have faced will remain,

because of legal restrictions that prevent same-sex couples from receiving the same benefits that married, heterosexual service members get. That includes health care benefits, help finding work, and financial assistance that eases the difficulty of moving and paying for a new home. Same-sex couples won't be eligible for the additional pay given to partners when a service member is given an assignment that prevents his or her family from coming along. They won't have access to family-support services provided by the military that often serve as crucial conduits of information regarding what forms of assistance are available and how to take advantage of them.

And, when a service member makes the ultimate sacrifice, his or her partner will be denied the same financial support that heterosexual families receive. Unless the two had children together, the partner may not even be the first to know about the death.

Even with these obstacles, I remain hopeful. An interesting article in *The New York Times* about Marines recruiting for gays and lesbians in Oklahoma underscores my hope:

The Marines were the service most opposed to ending the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy, but they were the only one of five invited branches of the military to turn up with their recruiting table and chin-up bar at the [Tulsa LGBT community center] Tuesday morning. Although Marines pride themselves on being the most testosterone-fueled of the services, they also ferociously promote their view of themselves as the best. With the law now changed, the Marines appear determined to prove that they will be better than the Army, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard in recruiting gay, lesbian and bisexual service members.

Although it was the Marines that told me I was HIV positive, I was always still fearful that I would be outed by them. As a closeted member of the Marine Corps during the time DADT was implemented, never in my wildest dreams could I ever have imagined Marine recruiters at an LGBT community center.

Since HIV remains so identified with gay men, overcoming homophobia is always a good thing for people living with the virus. And make no mistake -- the repeal of DADT has gone and will go a very long way to conquering homophobia.

How can I be anything but hopeful, now that pigs have flown? That said, this is only one flock of flying pigs. I won’t be satisfied until the last flying pig takes flight.

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