

Obama weighs appeal of DADT injunction

By Anne Gearan
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

WASHINGTON — The White House weighed a quick appeal of a judge's order abruptly allowing gays to serve openly in the military as Pentagon chief Robert Gates warned on Wednesday of "enormous consequences" for men and women in uniform if the ruling stands.

A day after the federal judge in California ordered the Pentagon to cease enforcement of the "don't ask, don't tell" law, Gates told reporters traveling with him in Europe that repealing the law should be a question for Congress — and only after the Pentagon completes its study of the issue.

Allowing gays to serve openly "is an action that requires careful preparation and a lot of training," Gates said. "It has enormous consequences for our troops."

In Tuesday's ruling, U.S. District Judge Virginia Phillips ordered the military "immediately to suspend and discontinue any investigation" or other proceeding to dismiss gay service members. The 1993 law says gays may serve in the military but only if they keep secret their sexual orientation.

Phillips wrote that the law "infringes the fundamental rights" of current and prospective service members.

Gay rights advocates cautioned gay service members to avoid revealing their sexuality for fear that the Phillips ruling could be tossed out on appeal and they would be left open to being discharged.

Defense Department officials would not say what was happening to current discharge cases, or even confirm how many pending cases there might be. A Pentagon spokesman, Col. David Lapan, said no written guidance had been issued to commanders on how to deal with the court order.

When asked by a reporter whether the ruling had had any impact yet, a two-star U.S. Army commander in eastern Afghanistan suggested he was unsure anything would change and said it was unlikely that his soldiers even knew about the court order.

"If that law is changed, they'll abide by the law," but "that's probably the farthest thing from their mind" as they fight, said Maj. Gen. John Campbell, commander of the 101st Airborne Division.

The Justice Department is considering whether to appeal the Phillips ruling, and its first response may well be another trip to the judge's courtroom in Riverside, Calif., to seek a stay, or temporary freeze. If Phillips turns down the request, the Justice



Pablo Martinez Monsivais, Associated Press

Discharged members of the military, including Lt. Dan Choi, second from left, handcuff themselves to the fence outside the White House in Washington during a protest for gay rights in this April 16 file photo.

Department probably would then turn to the federal appeals court in California. If the government does appeal, that would put the Obama administration in the position of continuing to defend a law it opposes.

White House press secretary Robert Gibbs said time is running out for the ban on gays serving openly.

"This is a policy that is going to end," he said.

Gates, who supports lifting the ban once the Pentagon puts in place a plan for minimizing disruptions, said that besides developing new training for troops, regulations will have to be revised. Gates and Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, face disagreement by some

senior general officers on whether lifting the ban would cause serious disruption at a time when troops are fighting in Afghanistan and winding down a long war in Iraq.

The incoming Marine commandant, Gen. James Amos, and his predecessor, Gen. James Conway, both have told Congress that they think most Marines would be uncomfortable with the change.



I. Pat Carter/Associated Press

Hundreds of thousands of homeowners may be victim to broken foreclosing laws by mortgage companies.

Officials launch foreclosure probe

By Alan Zibel
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

WASHINGTON — Officials in 50 states and the District of Columbia have launched a joint investigation into allegations that mortgage companies mishandled documents and broke laws in foreclosing on hundreds of thousands of homeowners.

The states' attorneys general and bank regulators will examine whether mortgage company employees made false statements or prepared documents improperly.

Alabama initially did not sign on to the investigation. It reversed course after the joint statement was released.

Attorneys general have taken the lead in responding to a nationwide scandal that's called into question the accuracy and legitimacy of documents that lenders relied on to evict people from the homes. Employees of four large lenders have acknowledged in depositions that they signed off on foreclosure documents without reading them.

The allegations raise the possibility that foreclosure proceedings nationwide could be subject to legal challenge. Some foreclosures could be overturned. More than 2.5 million homes have been lost to foreclosure since the recession started in December 2007, according to RealtyTrac Inc.

The state officials said they intend to use their investigation to fix the problems that surfaced in the mortgage industry.

"This is not simply about a glitch in paperwork," said Iowa Attorney General Tom Miller, who is leading the probe. "It's also about some companies violating the law and many people losing their homes."

Ally Financial Inc.'s GMAC Mortgage Unit, Bank of America and JPMorgan Chase & Co. already have halted some questionable foreclosures. Other banks, including Citigroup Inc. and Wells Fargo & Co. have not stopped processing foreclosures, saying they did nothing wrong.

Army employee accused in bribes

According to a criminal complaint, the employee took money from a company seeking projects in Iraq.

By David Porter
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

NEWARK, N.J. — An employee of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers took hundreds of thousands of dollars in bribes from a construction company seeking contracts for projects in Iraq worth millions of dollars, according to a criminal complaint filed Wednesday.

John Alfy Salama Markus, also known as John Salama, made an initial court appearance Wednesday afternoon, where U.S. Magistrate Mark Falk ordered him released on \$500,000 bond secured by property. He did not enter a plea.

Markus faces charges of conspiracy to defraud the United States and

money laundering. The money laundering count carries a 20-year maximum prison sentence.

Also charged in the alleged scheme was Ahmed Bahjat, vice president of a construction and engineering company seeking work in Iraq. Nouri was still at large Wednesday.

Markus' attorney, Stacy Biancamano, said he was a soldier in Iraq before working for the Army Corps of Engineers and had earned a Purple Heart and Bronze Star.

According to the criminal complaint, Markus, an Egyptian-born U.S. citizen who lived in central New Jersey, monitored contracts as a project engineer for the Army Corps of Engineers in Iraq in 2007 and 2008.

The complaint alleges Markus took bribes from Nouri in exchange for providing confidential information to Nouri's company, Iraqi Consultants & Construction Bureau, about bidding negotiations on certain projects.

Markus also allegedly steered

Army Corps of Engineers projects to Nouri, including a \$6.25 million project to enhance security at the Baiji Oil Refinery in central Iraq for which Markus allegedly received at least \$200,000 in bribes.

Citing Army Corps of Engineers records, the complaint alleges four more contracts were awarded to ICCB in the summer of 2007 totaling approximately \$6.3 million. For those projects, Markus allegedly sought \$550,000 in bribes.

The U.S. attorney's office alleges Markus deposited the bribes in bank accounts in the Middle East and in the U.S. and used the money to build a \$1.1 million house for himself and his wife in Nazareth, Pa.

They had previously lived in Belle Mead, N.J.

In a November 2007 e-mail, Markus wrote to Nouri, "I saved a lot of money for you guys and I need at least 400K form ICCB for all the work I done for you I made you a lot of profit," the complaint alleges.

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