DEOMI News Highlights

DEOMI News Highlights is a weekly compilation of published items and commentary with a focus on equal opportunity, equal employment opportunity, diversity, culture, and human relations issues. DEOMI News Highlights is also a management tool intended to serve the informational needs of equity professionals and senior DOD officials in the continuing assessment of defense policies, programs, and actions. Further reproduction or redistribution for private use or gain is subject to original copyright restrictions.

Court rules Marine’s religious rights not violated [Dianna Cahn, Stars and Stripes, 11 August 2016]

- The highest U.S. military court has upheld the bad conduct discharge of a Marine whose case had climbed to the top of the legal system over the question of whether her religious freedom had been violated.
- In a 4-1 ruling, the U.S. Court of Appeals of the Armed Forces upheld lower court determinations that Lance Cpl. Monifa Sterling’s religious rights were not violated when a superior ordered her to take down signs containing a biblical passage that she’d posted around her desk at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina.
- The judges upheld lower court conclusions that Sterling’s refusal, in the context of a contentious relationship with her bosses and the combative nature of the passage, was less an exercise of religion than an act of insubordination.

Poll: Young people’s fear of White extremism varies by race [Melinda Deslatte, The Associated Press, 8 August 2016]

- The threat of violence by people inspired by foreign extremists invokes fear in a majority of young Americans across racial groups. But for young people of color, particularly African Americans, that fear is matched or surpassed by worries about violence from White extremists.
- Sixty-two percent of young African Americans and 55 percent of Hispanics surveyed said they were very concerned about the threat of violence committed by White extremists, compared to one-third of Whites and 41 percent of Asian Americans.
- GenForward is a survey by the Black Youth Project at the University of Chicago with the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. The poll is designed to pay special attention to the voices of young adults of color, highlighting how race and ethnicity shape the opinions of a new generation. Other topics in the July 2016 report include the 2016 campaign, attitudes toward the political parties, perceptions of race and the criminal justice system, gun control, and LGBT policy attitudes.

Sailors, Marines will be able to declare transgender status this fall [Meghann Myers, Navy Times, 8 August 2016]

- Following the Defense Department’s lifting of the ban on transgender service members in June, the Navy Department is preparing to provide medical and administrative support for transitioning sailors and Marines, train personnel on the particulars of serving in a transgender-inclusive force, and, by next summer, accept transgender recruits into boot camp.
- For the department’s purposes, a transgender service member is defined as someone who has been diagnosed by a military medical professional who determines that a transition is medically necessary, according to ALNAV 053/16.
- As of the release of Navy Secretary Ray Mabus’s message on August 5, transgender sailors and Marines may serve openly and cannot be involuntarily separated or denied re-enlistment for their gender identity.
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Culture
Daesh destroys ancient treasures in Syria’s Tal Ajaja

Militants dug up artifacts that archeologists had not yet uncovered, destroying or trafficking priceless pieces

By Agence France-Presse

Gulf News, August 7, 2016

The Tal Ajaja archeological site in Syria's northeastern Hassakeh province. When the Islamic State group captured Tal Ajaja, one of Syria's most important Assyrian-era sites, they stripped it of millennia-old statues and cuneiform tablets that even archeologists had not uncovered. (Image Credit: Agence France-Presse)

When Daesh captured Tal Ajaja, one of Syria’s most important Assyrian-era sites, they discovered previously unknown millennia-old statues and cuneiform tablets, and then they destroyed them.

The terrorist group, which has ravaged archeological sites under its control in Syria and Iraq, was chased from Tal Ajaja in northeastern Hasakeh province in February by Kurdish fighters.

But the destruction IS wrought there over two years remains.

Perched on a large hill around 50 kilometers (30 miles) from the Iraqi border, the site is now a vision of desolation, riven with long tunnels.

Fragments of broken artifacts are strewn throughout and large holes dug by looters pockmark the ground.

The Assyrian empire, with its capital in Nineveh in modern-day Iraq, flourished in the first millennium BC.

It produced celebrated artifacts, particularly bas-reliefs often depicting scenes of war.

“Tal Ajaja, or ancient Shadikanni, was one of the main cities of Assyria,” said Cheikhmous Ali of the Association for the Protection of Syrian Archeology.

Most of the known treasures of Tal Ajaja, discovered in the 19th century, had long been removed and placed in museums in Syria or abroad.

But the militants, as well as local looters, dug up artifacts that archeologists had not yet uncovered, destroying or trafficking priceless pieces.

“They found items that were still buried, statues, columns. We’ve lost many things,” lamented Maamoun Abdulkarim, head of Syria’s antiquities department.

“More than 40 percent of Tal Ajaja was destroyed or ravaged by IS,” added Khaled Ahmo, director of the antiquities department in Hasakeh.

“The tunnels that were dug destroyed invaluable archeological strata” that would have revealed the economic, social and political history of the era, he told AFP.

In IS’s extreme interpretation of Islam, statues, idols and shrines amount to recognizing objects of worship other than God and must be destroyed.

But the group is also believed to have benefited from the trafficking of antiquities seized from sites under its control.

In 2014, photos emerged of sledgehammer-wielding militants destroying Assyrian statues from Tal Ajaja dating back to 2,000-1,000 BC.
“These barbarians have burnt pages of Mesopotamia’s history,” said Abdulkarim.

“In two or three months, they wiped out what would have required 50 years of archeological excavations,” he added.

In 2014, the antiquities department on its website published a series of photos of items from Tal Ajaja that had been destroyed, including cuneiform tablets and bas-relief depictions of the lamassu - the famous winged Assyrian deity.

The lamassu is a creature from Mesopotamian mythology, often depicted with a human head, the body of a lion or bull, and the wings of an eagle.

Though traditionally considered protectors and placed outside temples to guard them, the lamassu of Tal Ajaja were unable to escape IS’s ravages.

“IS turned the hilltop into a military zone,” said local resident Khaled, who spoke on condition a pseudonym be used because he still fears IS might return.

“No one was allowed to enter the site without authorization,” he added.

“Hordes of armed men came in, along with traffickers of archeological objects,” added another resident, Abu Ibrahim.

Tal Ajaja was also known by the name Tal Araban in the Islamic era. But “even the upper strata dating back to that era were razed,” said Ahmo.

Abdulkarim said numerous artifacts from the site were smuggled to neighboring Turkey and on to Europe, adding that he had alerted Interpol in a bid to retrieve some of the items.

Since its rise in 2014, IS has ravaged numerous archaeological sites in Iraq, including the ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud, provoking outrage.

The UN cultural organization has described the militants’ actions as “cultural cleansing”.

In Syria, more than 900 monuments and archeological sites have been affected, damaged or destroyed by the regime, rebels or militants since the conflict began in March 2011, according to the Association for the Protection of Syrian Archeology.

Among the worst incidents was the destruction by IS of temples in the famed ancient city of Palmyra, which provoked international outrage.

Between 2014 and 2015, Syria’s antiquities department moved some 300,000 objects and thousands of manuscripts from across Syria into storage in Damascus.

But Abdulkarim has watched in horror as sites are laid waste by war and looters.

“Our heritage is hemorrhaging.”
Kandahar official outspoken in her fight for equality

By Dianna Cahn
Stars and Stripe, August 6, 2016

Afghan politician Sarina Faizy, right, participates in a television outreach program in Kandahar, Afghanistan, where she advocates for women’s rights, education and peace. She is in the U.S. on a State Department international leadership exchange program.

COURTESY OF SARINA FAIZY

WASHINGTON — The young woman draped head-to-toe in traditional Afghan garb was easy to pick out from the crowd during a recent meeting here in the U.S. capital. She sat comfortably, oblivious to the lux surroundings and bare-shouldered patrons of a Washington hotel lobby on a sweltering July day.

As a member of the male-dominated local Kandahar government, called the provincial council, Sarina Faizy is accustomed to standing out.

She comes from the heartland of Pashtun culture, where a woman’s place is hidden and where the Taliban established its rule in 1994 based on the unyielding doctrine of Islamic Sharia law. Women are forbidden to work, to seek an education or to participate in governance and the shaping of their communities. Yet she sits on the government and is outspoken in her fight for equity and peace in her country.

Besides, Faizy, 26, was far more interested in getting across the many ideas that tumble from her in rapid-fire, sometimes patchy English.

“Generally, for a female, it’s not easy to fight for the rights of women to get education, to participate in politics, in the peace process,” she said. “But we females should do that. … We should not leave our country. ... Because we are the youth and everyone is looking to us. We are the hope of that country.”

To keep that hope alive, Faizy not only holds a seat on the provincial council but also runs a charity she founded to help mothers learn to raise healthy children. She is a frequent guest on local television to get out her message that peace is possible and women can make a difference.

She readily acknowledges that her choice to tackle the male system in Kandahar is fraught with hardship. She and her fellow female politicians are often disrespected and threatened.

“Every day, every day we have problems,” she said. “But I shall not leave my fight.”

Her mother was a medical doctor. Her father was a businessman. The two met in Kabul and wed out of love during a period of freedom in Afghanistan. Though she and her siblings – a brother and five sisters -- grew up in Kandahar mostly under the Taliban, they learned the value of respect, education and women’s rights.

Like Faizy, three of her sisters are unmarried and pursuing professional careers in the footsteps of their mother, who died four years ago.
Two sisters are in India studying law and engineering on scholarships. Another is studying medicine. And Faizy, when she is not practicing politics, is studying law at Kandahar University. That can be surprising, she said, even to other Afghans.

“Even when I go to Kabul people say, ‘Oh my god, you are not from Kandahar! In Kandahar there is a lot of Taliban – you can’t go to school.’ So I say, ‘No, it’s not like that! You can come out. See? I can speak English! I learned that in Kandahar!’”

The Taliban have hold in some of the rural areas, she said. But in the city, women are attending university and getting jobs.

That’s not to say women don’t get heckled on campus. Faizy said she’s often harassed by male students who try to silence her and are in shock when she asks questions.

But she tells them that she is educated and in politics, and that it’s her turn to speak. “Because at their homes they are talking and women are just listening,” she said. “At university, they are listening and we are talking!”

Faizy started her activism early. She organized a girls basketball team in her high school, playing intramurals with teams from Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif, she said, though she said she’s wary of pictures from her playing days because the girls wore pants and she fears she will not be taken seriously as a politician.

In 2011, she heard about a job opening in the media office of the International Security Assistance Force, the NATO-led security mission in Afghanistan. It was a dangerous endeavor with the Taliban stronghold in wartime. But she was driven to get involved in social change and applied for the job. “I said, ‘I want to take that risk,’ ” she said.

When she received threats or was bullied by Afghan men who believed she had overstepped her boundaries -- and when her parents urged her to stop working there -- Faizy said she was determined to continue.

But after two years at ISAF, she learned that her reputation was being damaged by rumors that she was working with Americans and behaving inappropriately. She resigned in 2013.

Meanwhile, she volunteered with the National Democratic Institute, an international nonprofit that supports democratic institutions. Even after the institute closed its Kandahar office, she said she and few others continued working to sustain some of its women’s programs.

In late 2014, Faizy saw another opportunity to challenge the system. Using what she’d learned from the institute, ISAF and her family, she launched a campaign for provincial council, talking to women, knocking on doors and ultimately winning a seat.

**Earning respect**

Faizy won by promising to fight for women’s rights and for education and by being an avid proponent of the peace process.

And because she refused to be silenced.

She and the other women on the council are frequently told to shut up, she said. It can be humiliating and challenging, and she had to learn to navigate the fine line between pushing the boundary and stepping so far beyond it that she was at risk.

“The men behave very badly with us,” she said. “They are not respecting us. They don’t have any value for females. … Hopefully, they will understand someday.”

Taking on cases of corruption or individual women’s rights, she’s received death threats against herself and her family.

Early on, she had a disagreement with one of the men on the council, and she said she was summoned to a meeting with Gen. Abdul Raziq, the powerful Kandahar police chief credited with keeping the peace in the city and keeping the Taliban at bay, but also of using brutal force.
Raziq looks out for the interests of women, she said. But he and others told her she needed to watch her step. “They said, ‘Be careful Sarina. ... We know you have your own goals, but try to understand the situation of Kandahar,’” she said.

They told her to do what she wanted, but also give the men their say.

“I am not shutting my mouth,” she said with a big smile. “When they tell me to, I say, ‘OK, it’s your turn to speak.’ And then when everyone talks, I say, ‘Please give me a chance. I also have a right to talk and give my advice.’” During her meetings here in the states, she asked for U.S. Agency for International Development support to expand her outreach.

“I think she’s a strong, committed leader,” said Belquis Ahmadi, a program director at the U.S. Institute for Peace, who met with Faizy and her group in Washington. The work she is doing “is very brave, especially for a young woman working in Kandahar.”

A different kind of future

Faizy said she is often asked why she doesn’t apply for political asylum in the United States. She answers that maybe one day she will, but her work is not done. Her country is divided. In Kabul, President Ashraf Ghani is challenged by chief executive Abdullah Abdullah, who insists Ghani stole the 2014 elections. The Taliban is fighting the government, and Islamic State fighters are making inroads and seeking to gain control.

The national parliament is filled with corrupt politicians and stolen seats, she said. “No one is working independently,” she said. People have lost faith in elections, she said, so they don’t participate.

Faizy believes it is her job to try to restore trust in government. To educate people on the promise of peace. To help give women their voices.

“We don’t want a fight anymore in our country. We want peace. We need education. We need also a great life like people have here in America. We are also human. We, especially females, want a part in politics, in the peace process.’’

She won’t marry, she said, until she achieves her goals.

“Because I am sure my husband will not allow me to do work,” she said. “I faced a lot of struggles to be a PC member. I don’t want to lose that.”

Showing more determination than faith, Faizy said she is hopeful for her country and has no intention of letting that go either. “Everything is possible,” she said.
Discrimination
Baltimore officials, Justice Department promise sweeping overhaul of city police

By Lynh Bui and Peter Hermann
The Washington Post, August 10, 2016

A mural dedicated to Freddie Gray is shown near the location where he was arrested in Baltimore. (Win Mcnamee/Getty Images)

Baltimore’s top law enforcement and political leaders on Wednesday vowed a sweeping overhaul of the city Police Department after a searing rebuke of the agency’s practices, which the Justice Department said regularly discriminated against black residents in poor communities.

Officials promised improved community relations, a purge of race-based policing and a modernized department that better trains officers and holds them accountable. But they warned that reforming an agency entrenched in a culture of unconstitutional policing would be a slow process and could cost millions of dollars.

“Police reform won’t happen overnight or by chance,” Vanita Gupta, principal deputy assistant attorney general, said at a news conference officially unveiling the Justice Department’s 163-page report. “It’s going to take time, and it’s going to require a focused and sustained effort.”

The Justice Department explicitly condemned many long-standing discriminatory enforcement practices by Baltimore police that allowed for illegal searches, arrests and stops of African Americans for minor offenses. But the highly critical report is also an indictment of “zero tolerance” and “broken windows” policing, which seek to quell crime by targeting minor offenses. Once heralded as groundbreaking crime-fighting strategies, they are now the subject of intense scrutiny amid the national debate over racially biased law enforcement.

“The powerful thing about this report is the way in which it validates what many of us have been saying about zero-tolerance policing in Baltimore for a very long time,” said Sherrilyn Ifill, the president of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, who lived in the city for 15 years. “There are many of us who recognized that it was making the community less safe.”

Often listed among the country’s deadliest cities, Baltimore has long struggled with racial strife, poverty and high crime. The city’s population had dropped significantly by the 1980s, as the crack epidemic drove the homicide rate to among the highest in the nation.

As political leaders in Baltimore sought ways to stem the bloodshed, City Council member Martin O’Malley won the 1999 mayoral election with a “tough on crime” platform. Confronting a decade of 300 or more homicides annually, O’Malley adopted the zero-tolerance policing strategy of New York City.

Arrests soared — topping 108,000, prompting lawsuits and forcing judges to free prisoners to avoid overcrowding at the city jail.

Homicides dropped to 261 in O’Malley’s first year in office. But the numbers leveled off and then crept back up to 282 in the last year before he took office as Maryland governor in 2007.

A decade ago, with new leadership in the mayor’s office, the city abandoned zero-tolerance policing. The new administration concluded that it was not reducing crime and had badly damaged community relations.
The Justice Department, after its 14-month investigation, said despite that change, the old practices persisted.

“The Department’s current relationship with certain Baltimore communities is broken,” the report states. “This fractured relationship exists in part because of the Department’s legacy of zero tolerance enforcement, the failure of many BPD officers to implement community policing principles, and the Department’s lack of vision for engaging with the community.”

In a statement released Wednesday, O’Malley, who made a failed bid for the Democratic presidential nomination this year, defended his record. He said the Justice Department’s report doesn’t consider “data and trends on enforcement levels, discourtesy, excessive force, and police involved shootings prior to 2010.” The statement also said the report doesn’t consider efforts by his administration to reform the police department and improve training.

“Such a review would have shown reductions in each of categories of police misconduct even as Baltimore closed down open air drug markets and achieved historic reductions in violent crime,” the statement said. “Make no mistake about it — enforcement levels rose when we started closing down the open air drug markets that had been plaguing our poorest neighborhoods for years. But after peaking in 2003, arrest levels declined as violent crime was driven down.”

The Justice Department found that zero-tolerance policing in Baltimore focused too much on the raw numbers of arrests and stops, which resulted in disproportionate stops of black residents over petty crimes such as loitering or trespassing.

The report cites several examples of how the enforcement strategy went wrong: a boy with no criminal record arrested for loitering outside his home; a black man in his mid-50s stopped 30 times in less than four years; and a police sergeant telling a patrol officer to “make something up” when there was no reason to stop and question a group of black men sitting on a corner.

“These and similar arrests identified by our investigation reflect BPD officers exercising nearly unfettered discretion to criminalize the act of standing on public sidewalks,” the report says.

Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake (D) said that while the findings of the report are “challenging to hear,” the investigation created a “crucial foundation” that will allow the city to change the department. “The report and its follow-up will help to heal the relationship between the police and our communities,” Rawlings-Blake said.

Now that the investigation is complete, city officials will work with the Justice Department to implement a series of court-mandated reforms outlined in what is known as a “consent decree.” The mayor said it could cost the city $5 million to $10 million annually to make the suggested changes, which include improved training and new technology and equipment to modernize the police force.

The court-enforced order will be independently monitored.

City Police Commissioner Kevin Davis said he has already fired officers as a result of the Justice Department’s investigation. Davis also said he would not tolerate policing that is sexist, racist or discriminatory.

“Change is painful, growth is painful,” he said, “but nothing is as painful as being stuck in a place that we don’t belong.”
Baltimore has long struggled with strained relations between residents and police, but the need to ease those tensions became more urgent after the death of Freddie Gray in April 2015. Gray, 25, suffered a fatal spine injury in police custody, triggering demonstrations and riots that flung the city into the national debate over race-based policing and fatal law enforcement encounters involving black men.

Prosecutors dropped charges against three of the six officers charged in the Gray case after a city judge acquitted the other three in bench trials.

Gray’s death prompted a number of police reforms, including installing cameras in the back of police vans, accelerating the city’s body-camera program and developing new policies on the use of force.

Wednesday’s report — which focused on agency-wide, institutional practices — is separate from a specific, ongoing probe into Gray’s death.

Perry Stein and Wesley Lowery contributed to this report.

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- Baltimore pledges police reforms after scathing U.S. report [Reuters, 2016-08-10]
- Scathing report on Baltimore cops vindicates black residents [The Associated Press, 2016-08-10]
- Civil rights probe of Baltimore Police Department finds serious flaws [The Washington Post, 2016-08-09]
- Federal probe finds Baltimore Police Dept. racially discriminated in practices that target blacks [The Washington Post, 2016-08-09]
- Here’s How Racial Bias Plays Out in Policing [The New York Times, 2016-08-10]
- A Policing Culture Built on Racism in Baltimore [The New York Times, 2016-08-10] [OPINION]
Energy Department Steps Up Whistleblower Protections

By Charles S. Clark

Government Executive, August 8, 2016

Following up on a watchdog’s July critique of its whistleblower outreach efforts, the Energy Department announced new steps to better protect whistleblowers who work for contractors from supervisor retaliation.

“Employees and contractors are at the heart of the Department of Energy’s mission areas—and the department is committed to protecting them against retaliation for raising concerns about health, safety and management issues,” wrote General Counsel Steven Croley in an Aug. 4 blogpost.

Noting that both employees and contractors work with “some of the most complex machinery and dangerous materials on Earth,” he stressed that the department has “gone to great lengths” to make it clear that the mission is best served when employees can raise concerns without fear of retaliation.

Among Energy’s tools being strengthened is the Employee Concerns Program, an alternative venue where issues can, in theory, be discussed without supervisors or conflicts of interest.

But now Energy is going further with two new steps, Croley added. “The first is detailed guidance to our personnel responsible for entering into and administering contracts that makes it clear if and when the department will reimburse legal costs in whistleblower cases,” he wrote. “Second, the department is publishing a proposed rule clarifying that the department can assess civil penalties against contractors and subcontractors for retaliating against any employee who raises concerns relating to nuclear safety.”

The moves appear to respond to the report from the Government Accountability Office released at a July 14 press conference showcasing Energy Department contractor whistleblowers Sandra Black and Walt Tamosaitis. Both have claimed retaliation: Black at Energy’s Savannah River facility in Charleston, S.C.; and Tamosaitis at the department’s Hanford Reservation in Washington State. The press event was organized by Sens. Ron Wyden, D-Ore.; Edward Markey, D-Mass.; and Claire McCaskill, D-Mo.

GAO studied 87 whistleblower cases and interviewed officials at 10 sites. The watchdog agency concluded that the department “has infrequently used its enforcement authority to hold contractors accountable for unlawful retaliation, issuing two violation notices in the past 20 years. Additionally, in 2013, in response to proposed revisions to its enforcement guidance, DOE determined that it does not have the authority to enforce a key aspect of policies that prohibit retaliation for nuclear safety-related issues—despite having taken such enforcement actions previously,” it said.

The general counsel said that under Secretary Ernest Moniz, Energy “has redoubled our efforts to implement the Whistleblower Protection Pilot Program by modifying major contracts to make that program applicable to more contractors.”

In addition, “Along with our existing regulations and specific prohibitions against retaliation in contracts, we have robust procedures in place for the investigation of whistleblower claims when employees believe they have been mistreated for raising issues,” he wrote. “In cases where an employer can be shown to have retaliated against whistleblowers, department regulations allow for reinstatement, back pay and reimbursement of reasonable costs such as attorneys’ fees.”

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The FBI headquarters in Washington, D.C. houses many counterterrorism offices and law enforcement functions. Photo taken on June 21, 2016. (Tong Wu/McClatchy)

A former Sacramento-based FBI special agent who turned whistleblower and successfully challenged his subsequent firing now must take his case to court again.

In at least a temporary reversal of fortune for ex-agent John C. Parkinson, the Justice Department this week persuaded a full federal appeals court to reconsider an earlier decision that the FBI wrongly fired the Iraq War veteran.

The move marks the latest turn for Parkinson, a Marine Corps lieutenant colonel who served in the FBI’s Sacramento office for about 10 years, beginning in 1999. It’s also relatively uncommon for the appeals court itself, which rarely convenes all 12 of its active judges to review a smaller panel’s decision.

“We believe the original . . . panel decision was correct,” attorney Jesselyn A. Radack said Tuesday, adding that “Lt. Col. Parkinson has been phenomenally patient since blowing the whistle eight years ago on FBI pilots misusing government aircraft to solicit prostitutes, and he remains confident justice will ultimately prevail.”

Radack is national security and human rights director for the Whistleblower & Source Protection Program at ExposeFacts, a whistleblower advocacy group. Along with fellow attorney Kathleen M. McClellan, she has been representing Parkinson.

The appeals court ordered a rehearing Monday.

Parkinson’s original whistleblower allegations were incendiary, charging two fellow agents with sexual improprieties. In one 2008 whistleblowing letter, Parkinson alleged that a Sacramento-based colleague had a “career-long pattern of soliciting sex with prostitutes.” This agent, Parkinson alleged, “utilized the FBI’s plane to fly at night to Reno, Nevada, for the sole purpose of engaging prostitutes in acts of illicit sex.”

Another Sacramento-based colleague, Parkinson alleged, had a “history of viewing Internet pornography” during work hours.

“Mr. Parkinson was concerned that (the two colleagues) would defile the furniture by engaging in sexual activity and masturbating on it and watching pornography on the television,” his attorneys recounted in a filing with the Merit Systems Protection Board.

The revived arguments before the full U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit will focus on a quieter issue of potentially broader importance.

In particular, the court will address in the so-called en banc hearing whether Parkinson could use his whistleblower status in challenging his firing before the Merit Systems Protection Board. The Justice Department contends he can’t.

“There is no dispute that Congress treats whistleblower claims by FBI employees differently from whistleblower claims by most other federal employees,” the Justice Department argued in a legal brief.
Federal law, the Justice Department added, “requires claims of whistleblower reprisal by FBI employees, without exception, to be handled internally” by the department rather than by the independent board.

The FBI declined to comment Tuesday.

In a Feb. 29 ruling, a three-judge panel of the appeals court disagreed and reasoned that Parkinson should have been allowed a whistleblower defense at the Merit Systems Protection Board because of his preferred status as a veteran.

“Preference eligible FBI employees against whom adverse employment action has been taken may appeal such action to the Board, though non-preference eligible FBI employees do not have such a right,” the federal circuit panel stated.

Citing problems with the board’s reasoning, the panel further concluded that Parkinson’s 2012 termination for alleged unprofessional conduct and lack of candor “cannot be sustained.”

Parkinson lost his case before the merit board, prompting him to file his lawsuit with the federal circuit appeals court, which often also handles highly technical patent cases.

The Justice Department, in urging the full appeals court to reconsider Parkinson’s case, contended that special FBI whistleblower procedures are warranted because of the nature of the bureau’s work.

“Permitting the MSPB to entertain such claims increases the risk of unintended disclosure of sensitive or classified national security information,” the Justice Department said.

mdoyle@mcclatchydc.com
Gay and Lesbian High School Students Report
‘Heartbreaking’ Levels of Violence

By Jan Hoffman

Members of the Alliance of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Youth marched at the Miami Beach Gay Pride parade in April. (Credit: Lynne Sladky/Associated Press)

Doctors and teachers who work with gay, lesbian and bisexual teenagers have long warned that they are especially vulnerable to a host of psychological and physical harms. Now the first national study to identify these high school students and track their health risks confirms those fears: sexual-minority teenagers are indeed at far greater risk for depression, bullying and many types of violence than their straight peers.

“I found the numbers heartbreaking,” said Dr. Jonathan Mermin, a senior official at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which includes a division that administers this school health survey every two years.

The survey documents what smaller studies have suggested for years, but it is significant because it is the first time the federal government’s Youth Risk Behavior Survey, the gold-standard of adolescent health data collection, looked at sexual identity. The survey found that about 8 percent of the high school population describe themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual, which would be 1.3 million students.

These children were three times more likely than straight students to have been raped. They skipped school far more often because they did not feel safe: at least a third had been bullied on school property. And they were twice as likely as heterosexual students to have been threatened or injured with a weapon on school property.

More than 40 percent of these students reported they had seriously considered suicide, and 29 percent had made attempts in the year before they took the survey. The percentage of those who use various illegal drugs was many times greater than heterosexual peers. While 1.3 percent of straight students said they had used heroin, for example, 6 percent of the gay, lesbian and bisexual students reported having done so.

“Nations are judged by the health and well-being of their children,” said Dr. Mermin, who is the director of the National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention. “Many would find these levels of physical and sexual violence unacceptable and something we should act on quickly.”

These comparisons have emerged because the federal survey, which looks at more than 100 health behaviors, included two new questions last year. It asked how students identified themselves sexually, and also the sex of those with whom they had “sexual contact” — leaving students to define that term.

While transgender youth have increasingly appeared on the national radar, most recently in debates around school bathroom access, this survey did not include an option for teenagers to identify themselves as transgender. But that possibility may be forthcoming. The C.D.C. and other federal health agencies are developing a question on gender identity to reliably count transgender teenagers which, a spokeswoman said, might be ready for a pilot test in 2017.

Some 15,600 students across the country, ages 14 to 17, took the survey. The population who identified as a sexual minority is in line with estimates from other state or local surveys, and with national studies of
young adults. While the figures paint a portrait of loneliness and discrimination that is longstanding and sadly familiar, they are important because they now establish a national databank.

Dr. Debra Houry, an emergency medicine physician who directs the C.D.C.’s National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, said the numbers argue for more comprehensive intervention and prevention programs. She praised programs like Green Dot, which trains students in how to support a victim of bullying or a physical altercation. Other programs, she said, teach coping skills to vulnerable students. As the data suggests, she said, these students need better access to mental health care, as well as support from families, schools and communities.

The report does not delve into why these students are at such risk for so many types of harm.

Dr. Elizabeth Miller, the chief of adolescent and young adult medicine at Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, said, “The intensity of homophobic attitudes and acceptance of gay-related victimization, as well as the ongoing silence around adolescent sexuality, marginalizes a whole group of young people.”

And such marginalization, added Dr. Miller, who writes extensively about dating and sexual violence, “increases their vulnerability to exploitative and violent relationships.”

Dr. Miller also pointed out that the report implicitly underscores the fluidity of adolescent sexual identity. When asked to identify themselves sexually, 3.2 percent of students chose “not sure.” Among students who said they had “sexual contact” with only people of the same sex or with both sexes, 25 percent identified as heterosexual and 13.6 percent said they were not sure of their sexual identity. Among students who had sexual contact only with someone of the opposite sex, 2.8 percent nonetheless described themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual.

Dr. Miller, who is also a professor of pediatrics at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, said that self-acceptance can begin at home. “We have to start conversations early with young people about healthy sexuality, attraction, relationships, intimacy and how to explore those feelings in as safe and respectful a way as possible,” she said.

Any survey has limitations. In this one, the respondents were students in school and so the research would not have captured dropouts or others who were not attending, a disproportionate percentage of whom are lesbian, gay and bisexual.

How students interpreted “sexual contact” or why some defined themselves as “not sure” could also be open to interpretation.
Diversity
The Best of the Best

By Cpl. Alvin Pujols, 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit

Defense Video Imagery Distribution System (DVIDS), August 6, 2016

U.S. 7th FLEET AREA OF OPERATIONS (August 06, 2016) -- U.S. Marine Corporal Tori C. Best, a combat engineer with the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit, is the current female pull up record holder aboard the USS Boxer, August 2016. Best is one of the few female Marines to graduate from one of the two Infantry Training Battalions. The 13th MEU, embarked on the Boxer Amphibious Ready Group, is operating in the 7th Fleet area of operations in support of security and stability in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Alvin Pujols/RELEASED)

A woman walks up to a pull up bar. She takes a deep breath, leaps up and grabs hold … one, two, three, four. She cranked out pull up after pull up … eighteen, nineteen, twenty …, when she couldn’t do any more, she dropped down and her Marine Corps issued boots seemingly puffed up smoke … twenty-six. Her name, now in bold black letters, holds her place as the female pull up record holder aboard the USS Boxer.

Corporal Tori C. Best, a combat engineer with the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit, holds the female record with 26 pull ups only seven behind the male record holder aboard the USS Boxer during Western Pacific Deployment 16-1.

Best’s upbringing gave her the tools to excel and overcome any challenge, whether physical and mental. She grew up in Anchorage, Alaska, where she led a very active lifestyle. She loved being outdoors and doing activities that challenged her physically, like running, climbing and hiking.

“I grew up really active,” said Best. “I did cross country running and I eventually got into rock and ice climbing. I remember every summer we’d be hiking and fishing. It was this really active lifestyle. So it was never a thought about going to the gym and being fit. It was something we needed to be to enjoy life.”

As Best continued to grow she came to a fork in the road, which challenged her beliefs.

“I was born in the states but my family is Canadian and it is my belief that if you enter a new country you should serve in its military,” said Best.

This decision caught Best’s parents by surprise, who believed she would continue down the path of academics.

“My parents were really surprised by my decision because I graduated high school early and was already enrolled in a college. They thought I would continue down whatever career path I chose,” Best said. “But I knew if I continued down that career path I would never get the opportunity to fulfill that dream of being in the military. I wanted to join first, before I went to college.”

So Best went to her local recruiter’s office and demonstrated her abilities. Even then, she was in top physical shape and the recruiter took note.

“Being an infantry Marine was something my recruiter brought up the first time I went to see him,” said Best. “He saw I could do pull ups and asked me if I was interested in going to Infantry Training Battalion and it really sparked my interest.”

After Marines go through boot camp, they are then given orders to the School of Infantry where they begin combat training either in Marine Combat Training or Infantry Training Battalion. Best would be one of the first female volunteers to go through the Infantry Training Battalion at School of Infantry East. It wasn’t until the Fall of 2013, that female Marines were given the opportunity to go through ITB.

“At the end of boot camp our drill instructors sat us all down and gave us a brief explaining going to ITB as a test subject. All those who didn’t want to do it got up and left,” she said. “And then there was a group of us left and we were excited because this is what we wanted to do from the beginning. We were all ready, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, to change history. And I think that’s how we all went into it.”
The Marine Corps’ two Infantry Training Battalions challenge Marines both physically and mentally. Marines who complete the course take their place at the tip of the spear for the Corps. The challenges push Marines to their limits and beyond with 20 mile hikes carrying a full combat load that can weigh up to 85 lbs. For Best it was no different, except for her gender because Best would soon face the stigma that women don’t belong in combat roles.

Best said the beginning of ITB was difficult because they had to overcome the stigma that came along with being females in the infantry. It never mattered who was to the left or to the right, she said, they had to prove that they were just as good as the males. Once that barrier was broken the class worked well together.

But even after two months of working with those Marines, there was something else that weighed heavy on Best’s mind, soon she would be graduating and not leaving with those Marines whom she’d grown so close to.

“I worked with these men for two months straight and that stigma fell apart,” she said. “We were just men and women going through ITB with all the same goals of passing. We completely forgot that we wouldn’t be going to the fleet with them. On graduation day we saw the same people we’ve worked day in and day out with graduating while all of us, just because we’re female, had to go off to our other [military occupational specialty] and that was difficult.”

At the time, the female Marine graduates were a part of a two-year research endeavor to help the Marine Corps continue its ongoing gender integration efforts. This meant even after graduating ITB, the female Marines weren’t allowed to go to infantry-based battalions, such as rifle companies and artillery batteries.

After graduating from the School of Infantry, Best went on to complete schooling as a combat engineer, which was the primary MOS she chose because she couldn’t be placed in an infantry battalion. She was stationed aboard Camp Pendleton, California with Combat Logistics Battalion 13, where she faced some of the same difficulties again.

“When I first joined the fleet, one of the biggest difficulties was once again dealing with that stigma,” said Best. “At the end of my combat engineer school, not only had I gone through ITB, but as a female I still wasn’t allowed to do a third of my job. I was not allowed to go to the combat engineer battalion because it was still reserved for males.”

Best even had a hard time finding mentors due to most of the senior engineers being from a combat engineer battalion, whom never had the opportunity to mentor females and therefore focused more on the male engineers.

“Instead of treating me like the guys, the more senior Marines always tried to mentor the guys more because that’s all they knew,” Best said.

Luckily for Best, a mentor presented himself; Sergeant Kaleb Bill, a combat engineer with the 13th MEU, was from an engineering support battalion and had the experience and expertise of mentoring both genders not only as engineers but as Marines.

“I remember we were all working and something didn’t go as planned,” she said. “He corrected us all, all of us, and it was great, and it sounds funny but we didn’t have much direction at the time and here was this person who was putting in his time and effort and actually teaching us our MOS. And he treated me the exact same as he did my male counterparts.”

Thanks to mentorship like this, Best kept growing as a Marine and a person. She continued to impress her leadership by taking charge and giving everything 100 percent. She left a lasting impression on her staff non-commissioned officer.

“My first impression of her was that she was very outgoing, mature and stood out as a sharp Marine,” said Master Sgt. Rafael Ortiz, the logistics combat element operations chief and Best’s SNCOIC. “We had a field operation at Fire Base Gloria. I heard a Marine barking orders to set up the command operations center, which is usually my job or one of my sergeants. At the time, she was a lance corporal, and she took the lead building up the COC! The way she was handling the situation looked like something I would do
Best has had many mentors through her struggles and experiences that have all helped shaped her to be the Marine she is now. Thanks to these experiences, Best was able to achieve one of her personal bests.

“It was the competition between me and my brother that sparked my ability to do pull ups,” Best said. “I was doing ten pull ups at a time before I enlisted and even before I went to boot camp I was able to do sixteen. Then, during ITB, we would do pyramid workouts where we did five pull ups all the way down to one and back up. I started including five pull ups after every work out and during the competition on the Boxer I was able to do 26 pull ups.”

As fitness standards change, Best will continue to adapt and stay at the top of her game in order to stay competitive.

“With the physical fitness standards changing you can’t have that mentality of ‘I can’t do a pull up because I’m a female.’ You can’t push aside physical fitness,” said Best.

As Best stays flexible with the changing standards, she has a few words of guidance for anyone looking to set new personal bests or overcoming a difficult challenge: “You just have to start and do it!”

Best will have to maintain her physical and mental excellence because combat roles will soon be open to qualified female Marines, to move into infantry-based jobs. But she has chosen to end her military career early to continue her academic career once her obligated service time expires.
Enlisted women train for duty on Kings Bay sub

By Gordon Jackson

The Brunswick News (Brunswick, Ga.), August 6, 2016

Crewmembers of the guided-missile submarine USS Florida (SSGN 728) handle a mooring line from a tug boat to be brought alongside submarine tender USS Emory S. Land (AS 39) in Diego Garcia. (US Navy/Zachary Kreitzer)

ST. MARYS — The Navy is currently training 38 women to be among the first enlisted women to serve aboard a submarine at Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay.

After they complete Basic Enlisted Submarine School at Naval Submarine Base New London in Groton, Conn., the women will be assigned to the two crews that alternate patrols aboard the Ohio-class submarine USS Florida.

Another group of female sailors at a base in Bangor, Wash., has already completed training and they are preparing to be part of the crew of the ballistic missile submarine USS Michigan.

Lt. Lily Hinz, a public affairs officer for Submarine Group 10, said a female chief petty officer has already completed her training and is currently at Kings Bay.

“The chiefs will get there first to set the groundwork,” she said.

Most of the enlisted women with ranks of petty officer 1st class and below will arrive at Kings Bay early next year, Hinz said.

Besides completing submarine school, the women will be required to take training specific to submarines if they plan to continue with the same military occupation. Some of the women may not have held jobs that can be used on a boat and will require additional training for other positions. Hinz said the enlisted women are eligible to perform any job on the boat, including machinist mate and missile technician.

“They would have to convert to something that would apply to a submarine,” Hinz said.

The Florida is one of four Ohio-class submarines converted from a ballistic missile submarine to a platform capable of launching Tomahawk cruise missiles. The boat is currently undergoing renovations at Kings Bay to accommodate female enlisted sailors, including berthing and bathroom facilities.

Work aboard the vessel includes modifications for separate nine-person bunk rooms and a bathroom for women ranked E-6 and below, as well as quarters and bathrooms for female chief petty officers.

The space sacrificed on the boat for the new facilities is a little-used “study” area. Hinz said the room was chosen because it will have minimal impact on the crew.

Female officers began serving aboard Ohio-class submarines in 2012 and are already serving aboard the USS Florida.

“This is a very exciting time for the submarine force and the Navy,” said Rear Adm. Randy B. Crites, the Enlisted Women in Submarines Task Force Commander. “We are reaching milestones that allow us to be more capable than ever by growing and diversifying our force as these exceptional women make their way through the training pipeline.”

Reporter Gordon Jackson writes about Camden County and other local topics. Contact him at gjackson@thebrunswicknews.com, on Facebook or at 464-7655.

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Female Sailor Recognized for Bravery During Iranian Detention Incident

By Hope Hodge Seck
Military.com, August 10, 2016

In the fallout from an embarrassing international incident in which two Navy riverine boats strayed into Iranian waters during a transit to Bahrain and were briefly captured, some half-dozen sailors have faced punishments, but one was recognized with a prestigious award for quick actions in the face of danger, Military.com has learned.

A Navy petty officer second class, the only female sailor among the 10 who were detained, received the Navy Commendation Medal on Aug. 3 in recognition of her efforts to summon help under the noses of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard members who captured the crews.

The number two gunner aboard the second riverine boat, she managed to activate an emergency position-indicating radio beacon, used to signal distress at sea, while in a position of surrender and at gunpoint.

A Navy spokesman, Lt. Loren Terry, said the sailor had asked not to be identified and had declined interviews. Service commendation medals are presented for heroic service or meritorious achievement. In a recommendation within the riverine command investigation released to reporters at the end of June, investigating officers found the riverine gunner should be recognized for "her extraordinary courage in activating an emergency beacon while kneeling, bound, and guarded at Iranian gunpoint, at risk to her own safety."

While one of the guards ultimately noticed the beacon and turned it off, help was not far off. The Coast Guard Cutter Monomoy, which had been monitoring the journey of the riverine boats, notified Task Force 56.7, the parent unit in Bahrain, when the boats appeared to enter Iranian waters. The investigation found the crews of the Monomoy and the guided-missile cruiser USS Anzio should also receive recognition for their efforts to track the captured boat crews and provide assistance for their safe return.

None of the riverine crew members involved in the incident has spoken publicly about the experience. They were returned to U.S. custody following a 15-hour period of detention, during which their captors filmed them and took photographs later used for propaganda purposes by the Iranian media. Photos indicate the female gunner was made to wear a headscarf while detained.

A military source with knowledge of planning said the Navy's administrative personnel actions regarding the Jan. 12 riverine incident were nearing completion.

In all, three officers were removed from their posts and four officers were sent to admiral's mast, with two receiving letters of reprimand for disobeying a superior officer and dereliction of duty, according to a statement this week from Navy Expeditionary Combat Command and first reported by Navy Times.

One of the officers was found not guilty of dereliction of duty, and a fourth officer still awaits completion of "accountability actions." Two enlisted sailors received letters of reprimand for dereliction of duty, according to the statement.

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson said in June the Navy plans to implement better predeployment training and training on rules of engagement for sailors, as well as enhanced equipment checks and unit oversight.

Hope Hodge Seck can be reached at hope.seck@military.com. Follow her on Twitter @HopeSeck.
First black female lieutenant general credits predecessors for paving way in speech at Fort Eustis

By Courtney Campbell

Lt. Gen. Nadja West's was the guest speaker during the 597th Transportation Brigade's Women's Equality Observance held at the Transportation Museum on Fort Eustis Thursday, Aug. 4, 2016. (Sabrina Schaeffer)

"Why are you here today," Lt. Gen. Nadja Y. West asked an audience of military members at the Transportation Museum at Fort Eustis on Thursday, speaking for the 597th Transportation Brigade's Women's Equality Day observance.

West is considered a trailblazer in the armed forces as the first African-American female lieutenant general and is the highest-ranking woman to graduate from the U.S. Military Academy. She currently is the surgeon general of the Army and commanding general of the Army Medical Command.

West commanded the McDonald Army Community Hospital at Fort Eustis from May 2003 to March 2005. Her resume made her an obvious choice for the Women's Equality Day speaker, said Zachary Shelby, 597th Transportation Brigade Public Affairs Officer.

"I would suggest that observances like this allow us time to take pause and think about something that is outside our regular area," West said. "We don't take the time to observe what has happened in our society to allow someone like me to distinguishly stand here."

In 1971, Congress designated Aug. 26 as Women's Equality Day by order of Rep. Bella Abzug (D-NY) as a commemoration for the 19th Amendment, which granted women the right to vote. Though the designated day is later this month, Thursday was the only available time West was available.

West said during her speech that successful leaders have learned that a group of diverse humans are better problem solvers than completely like-minded individuals, allowing for more opportunities for growth.

She paid homage to Abzug, who spent her lifetime focused on public service and activism on behalf of the oppressed and ignored as well as the women who had the "crazy idea" to amend the constitution.

West spoke of the women before her who began setting the pace for women in the armed forces, such as the first 62 women who received their diplomas from West Point in 1980 and Janet Wolfenbarger, the first woman to have a four-star general rank in the Air Force.

"I would not be here today if I did not understand and appreciate and also benefit from these women and the men that supported them," West said. "I appreciated your kudos to me and my cohort, but these are the women who really made a difference."

Originally only two percent of women were allowed to join the military with limited roles, according to West. Today, 14 percent serve in uniform.

"There are many small contributions every day, many well out of sight of stories, all helping set conditions for women and to set opportunities that are increasingly becoming available," West said.

At the end of her speech, West asked the audience to reflect on how far America has come in its short history in regards to equality as well as to challenge themselves to make a difference.
"Truly I thought her speech was epic," said Maj. Corinne F. Bell, 689th Rapid Port Opening Element commander. "A lot of people inspire you, but when you see that someone is the first to do something, you want to know how they do it and when you meet a trailblazer you're all inspired."

Though women have come a long way in terms of gender equality in the armed forces, West said she wants to see more of them in all occupations, but understands there will be challenges along the way.

"I envision women in the Army to do whatever job they are qualified to do," West said in an interview after the speech. "Then we don't need determining is this a job for a woman or a man, just is this a job for a qualified soldier. I think we're really close to getting there."
Military moms join mass breast-feeding event on Okinawa

By Jessica Bidwell
Stars and Stripes, August 9, 2016

Organizers of a World Breast-feeding Week event on Okinawa hope getting women to breast-feed together will help foster a sense of community and peer support for a practice that they say is important for babies’ health. (Jessica Bidwell/Stars And Stripes)

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Women on Okinawa, including U.S. military moms, brought their babies beachside for a mass public breast-feeding event aimed at raising awareness for the practice. The Global Big Latch On, part of World Breast-feeding Week, takes place worldwide the first week of August to promote breast-feeding and women and children’s health.

The event’s organizers hope getting women to breast-feed together will foster a sense of community and peer support.

“The breast-feeding community has helped me through all my doubts about the lactation process,” said Hollie Mcelmurray, a military mom who attended Saturday’s gathering at Sunabe Baba Beach near Kadena Air Base.

It’s important for women to be successful at breast-feeding, said Melanie Scherer, another participant.

Pressure from people who don’t like public breast-feeding can make some mothers feel like quitting, she said.

“That’s not how it should be,” Scherer said. “You’re feeding your baby; you’re doing what nature intended, and I think it’s important to spread the awareness and show people that it’s OK to feed your baby when and where, however you have to do it.”

Breast-feeding is the ideal source of sustenance for infants, providing the complete nutritional and hydration requirements that a child needs, the World Health Organization says. The agency recommends breast-feeding exclusively for the first six months of a baby’s life and continuing to breast-feed for two years, or as long as the mother and child prefer.

Last year, the Army became the last service to formally adopt a breast-feeding policy, setting up rules and private areas where mothers can express milk and giving them time off work to do it.

Since July of last year, Tricare has covered all costs associated with breast-feeding. This includes a breast pump, supplies and lactation counseling — things mothers need if they want to breast-feed their babies and work outside the home.

But it wasn’t always this way. Scherer said breast-feeding her first baby without such coverage was challenging, expensive and stressful.

“When I had my first child, Tricare did not cover any type of breast-feeding supplies, and I failed at breast-feeding my baby,” she said. “I feel guilty about that; I only made it five weeks because I didn’t have the supplies or support that I needed … I am now at seven months exclusively breast-feeding my second child because of Tricare’s help.”

The U.S. Naval Hospital Okinawa lactation consultant said Saturday’s event was not affiliated with the hospital or the U.S. military.
Poll: Young Americans overwhelmingly favor LGBT rights

By Sarah Grace Taylor and Emily Swanson
The Associated Press, August 9, 2016

WASHINGTON (AP) — Young people in America overwhelmingly support LGBT rights when it comes to policies on employment, health care and adoption, according to a new survey.

The GenForward survey of Americans ages 18-30 found that support for those policies has increased over the past two years, especially among young whites. But relatively few of these young adults consider rights for people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender to be among the top issues facing the United States.

According to the findings, 92 percent of young adults support HIV and AIDS prevention, 90 percent support equal employment, and 80 percent support LGBT adoption. Across racial and ethnic groups, broad majorities support training police on transgender issues, government support for organizations for LGBT youth and insurance coverage for transgender health issues.

GenForward is a survey by the Black Youth Project at the University of Chicago with The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. The first-of-its-kind poll pays special attention to the voices of young adults of color, highlighting how race and ethnicity shape the opinions of the country's most diverse generation.

In the past two years, support has increased from 69 percent to 84 percent among young whites for policies such as allowing gays and lesbians to legally adopt children. Support among this group for employment equality for LGBT individuals rose from 84 percent to 92 percent. The poll also

Younger Americans back LGBT rights

Americans ages 18 to 30 are largely supportive of policies that benefit the LGBT community, according to a new GenForward poll.

Percentage saying they favor the following policies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>African-Americans</th>
<th>Asian-Americans</th>
<th>Hispanics</th>
<th>Whites</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More efforts aimed at HIV and AIDS prevention and treatment</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>92%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Equal employment rights for LGBT individuals</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>92%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allowing gays and lesbians to legally adopt children</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity training of police around the issues of transgender individuals</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government support for organizations that provide services to LGBT youth</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>68%</td>
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</tbody>
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Results based on survey of 1,940 U.S. adults ages 18-30 conducted July 9-20. Margin of error is ±3.8 percentage points.

SOURCE: GenForward poll
suggests support for allowing adoption by gays and lesbians has increased among Hispanics over the past two years, from 65 percent to 75 percent.

Christie Cocklin, 27, a self-identified multiracial American from Providence, Rhode Island, says that LGBT rights are just common sense.

"People who don't identify as heterosexual are human like we are, and should be entitled to the same kind of rights," she said. "I have friends who are LGBT and I feel that it's discrimination to not allow them adoption or employment or whatever."

Young Asian-Americans, African-Americans and Latinos are more likely to support insurance coverage for transgender health issues in general than when certain specifics are mentioned.

Eighty-three percent of Asian-Americans support insurance coverage for transgender health issues, but only 63 percent say so when gender reassignment surgery and hormone treatments are specifically mentioned. Similarly, support for insurance coverage drops from 69 percent to 57 percent among African-Americans, and from 74 percent to 57 percent among Latinos. Sixty-two percent of young whites favored insurance coverage of transgender health issues regardless of whether that specifically included gender reassignment surgery and hormone treatments.

While young Americans favored LGBT rights on every issue in the poll, only 6 percent, including fewer than 1 in 10 across racial and ethnic backgrounds, consider the LGBT rights one of the top issues facing the country. Among those who self-identified as LGBT, 17 percent said it is one of the country's top issues.

The poll of 1,940 adults age 18-30 was conducted July 9-20 using a sample drawn from the probability-based GenForward panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. young adult population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 3.8 percentage points.

The survey was paid for by the Black Youth Project at the University of Chicago using grants from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the Ford Foundation.

Respondents were first selected randomly using address-based sampling methods, and later interviewed online or by phone.
Sailors, Marines will be able to declare transgender status this fall

By Meghann Myers
Navy Times, August 8, 2016

Military members run in a Pride Month 5K on Scott Air Force Base, Ill. Starting this fall, sailors and Marines who are transitioning will be able to petition to have their gender markers changed in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System. (Photo: Tech. Sgt. Jonathan Fowler/Air Force)

Following the Defense Department's lifting of the ban on transgender service members in June, the Navy Department is preparing to provide medical and administrative support for transitioning sailors and Marines, train personnel on the particulars of serving in a transgender-inclusive force and, by next summer, accept transgender recruits into boot camp.

For the department's purposes, a transgender service member is defined as someone who has been diagnosed by a military medical professional who determines that a transition is medically necessary, according to ALNAV 053/16.

Starting this fall, sailors and Marines with a diagnosis who are beginning, in the process of, or have completed transitioning will be able to petition to have their gender markers changed in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System.

And next summer, boot camps will begin accepting transgender prospects at boot camp, officer candidate schools, ROTC and the Naval Academy.

"These policies and procedures are premised on the conclusion that open service by transgender Sailors and Marines, while being subject to the same standards and procedures as other members with regard to their medical fitness for duty, physical fitness, uniform and grooming, deployability, and retention, is consistent with military readiness," Navy Secretary Ray Mabus wrote in the message.

As of the message's Aug. 5 release, transgender sailors and Marines may serve openly and cannot be involuntarily separated or denied re-enlistment for their gender identity.

By Oct. 1, the Defense Department will have training handbooks for commanding officers, transgender troops and the rest of the force, as well as guidance for medical professionals overseeing transitions.

At that point, the Military Health System will also be required to provide medical care for transitions, including hormone therapy and counseling.

Sailors will develop and execute a transition plan in coordination with their health care providers and commands, according to a chief of naval personnel spokeswoman. Once that is completed, they can change their genders in DEERS.

"When they're in transition, they're in the initial gender," Lt. Jessica Anderson told Navy Times.

Transition plans will be tailored to the individual, but a completed transition will require at least a legal identity change, such as a passport or birth certificate, Anderson said.

Surgery, she added, will not be required.
During transition, sailors will be recognized as their birth gender. For instance, a male sailor transitioning to life as a woman will continue to stay in male berthings, be subject to male fitness standards and observe male grooming rules.

"There could be exceptions but as of right now, that's not where we're going," Anderson said.

The guidance transition plans will be firmed up by Oct. 1, she added. And starting in November, there will be fleetwide training on the integration of transgender troops.

That training must be completed by July 1, 2017, according to the ALNAV, when the Navy and Marine Corps begin accepting transgender troops.

DOD will also revise its anti-discrimination guidelines to include gender identity, the message said.

While the Navy Department puts together its guidelines for completing a gender change in DEERS, sailors and Marines are required to submit requests to have their transgender status recognized through the first general or flag officer in their chain of command, and it will be fed up to the assistant secretary of the Navy for manpower and reserve affairs for a final decision.

SEE ALSO:
Navy, Marines to Accept Transgender Recruits by July 2017 [Military.com, 2016-08-08]
Transgender on the Force

By Rick Rojas

Officer Aiden Budd began his gender transition in the year before he started at the Police Academy in 2015. ‘I remember asking God a couple of times as a child why I wasn’t born a boy,’ he said. Credit: Sam Hodgson for The New York Times

After years of focused preparation, Aiden Budd was well on his way to fulfilling his lifelong dream of becoming an officer in the New York Police Department. He had served in the United States Army and had worked for years as an agent in the department’s School Safety division. He studied for the exam to be promoted and he passed.

He was set to start at the Police Academy on July 7, 2015.

But first, there was something else he felt he had to accomplish. When he became a recruit, he wanted to be recognized officially as Aiden Budd, male police officer — settling, at least legally, a question of identity he had struggled with since he was a child.

He had grown up as a girl in the Wakefield neighborhood in the Bronx, the oldest of three children in a West Indian family. He could tell early on that something did not feel right. It went beyond being a tomboy, the one student in his all-girls Catholic high school who refused to wear a skirt, even though it meant detention almost every day. Even after he came out to his family as a lesbian in high school, he felt an overwhelming discontent that continued into adulthood, poisoning his personal relationships.

“I couldn’t find happiness with myself,” Officer Budd, now 33, said. “There was something missing.”

He had to come out again. He was transgender, and about a year before he started at the academy, a time of exams and interviews and extensive digging into his background, he began his transition to physically becoming a man. “I’ll put it like this,” he said. “It was a rebirth.”

He knew his decision had the potential to jeopardize his relationship with his family, one that had been strained since he came out the first time. And as he followed his uncle, a father figure, into law enforcement, Officer Budd feared that his identity would keep him from being accepted into the fraternity of police officers.

“I didn’t want to be judged before they got to know me as a person,” he said. “I didn’t want to be a science project.”

Still, he pushed ahead.

These days, the New York Police Department embraces “Out and Proud” as a motto. Officials boast of the hundreds of gay officers who help make up the department’s ranks. And inside Police Headquarters, on the monitors that serve as electronic bulletin boards with fliers for retirement parties and charity golf tournaments, among the rotating messages is one reminding officers of their rights to use the bathroom or locker room aligning with their gender identity.

The public support by police officials in New York has come at a time when the nation is grappling with transgender issues — when lawmakers in some states have pursued so-called “bathroom bills” limiting restroom access for transgender people, but also when such legislation has met with fierce resistance. In June, the United States military lifted its ban on enlisting transgender people; the secretary of defense, Ashton B. Carter, called the move the “right thing to do.”

In New York, activists said the progress had not erased the Police Department’s turbulent history with gay people, where tensions remain today. But police leaders described their institution as one that, with each new class of recruits, has increasingly reflected the city’s diversity. And it has made strides, they added, not only in hiring a more diverse group of officers but also in welcoming them into the fold.
“We look at the individual for who they are,” said Deputy Inspector Joseph Simonetti, the commanding officer of the Sixth Precinct, which covers Greenwich Village. “We’re all cops,” he said. “We’re all police officers.”

But officers coming to terms with their gender identity said they faced a dilemma. Those who delay making the transition while on the force face the corrosive toll of living what feels like a fraudulent life; those who do make it risk being rejected from the tight-knit fellowship of law enforcement that was also central to their identity.

Denise Dragos, who had been a detective in the Police Department investigating computer crimes, put off transitioning to female from male until after she retired two years ago. She worried how colleagues would react. “It was going to be difficult,” Ms. Dragos, 43, said. “Things are changing in leaps and bounds over the last several years, but even four or five years ago, it didn’t seem in the scope of possibility.”

Now, after she wore a No. 2 buzz cut for two decades, her hair reaches to her shoulders. A judge signed off on her name change in June. And she came out last year to a group of her former colleagues, though not in a way she had anticipated.

Ms. Dragos had maintained dual lives on social media. On Facebook, she kept her old “boy” page, as she called it, and one for her new life as a woman. Then, she said, her “girl” page showed up on the list of suggested friends of a police colleague, who took a screen shot and posted it in a group message, noting a resemblance.

Denise Dragos was a detective who waited until she retired from the Police Department before she began her transition two years ago. “Things are changing in leaps and bounds over the last several years, but even four or five years ago, it didn’t seem in the scope of possibility,” she said. Credit: Alex Wroblewski/The New York Times

Some thought it was a joke.

One person asked if Ms. Dragos was “pulling a Bruce Jenner,” a reference to the decathlete who in 2015 became Caitlyn Jenner.

Ms. Dragos was traveling and received a text message from someone in the thread, asking if she had seen it. She recalled feeling a range of emotions: anger, fear, nervousness. But also relief.

She decided she had to tell them.

“So … Yes, that’s me,” she wrote in a group message. “I have known this about myself for many years now, and kept it hidden deep down inside. I am now at a point in my life where I have thought about all of my options. I’m going forward and have decided to take the step so you know this isn’t a decision that was made overnight.

“I’m happy, and that’s what it is.”

The initial surprise and confusion gave way to support. People who had made the earlier remarks apologized. Others encouraged her. And then, the conversation in the thread turned to baseball. She came out to other friends and acquaintances this summer, changing her name on social media to Denise and posting a picture of herself from a pride event.

“That was a very stressful experience, coming out that way,” Ms. Dragos said. “But it turned around and was one of the best things that happened for me.”

Tcops International, or the Transgender Community of Police and Sheriffs, started in the late 1990s as a support group for a small network of officers to share their experiences online. For many of them, fears about coming out or transitioning were rooted in a harsh reality.
Among its members from around the United States, there are stories of co-workers responding awkwardly or with outright hostility. Transgender officers have said they have been referred to by the wrong gender or the wrong pronouns. They have lost their jobs or have seen careers that once seemed to be on an upward trajectory suddenly change course, their reputations appearing to vanish along with their old identities. And access to bathrooms and locker rooms has been a recurring issue.

But some have expressed optimism, believing that a broader cultural shift in the acceptance of transgender people was finding its way into policing. “Officers hired in the past five to 10 years have a better understanding of who we are,” said Julie Callahan, a founder of Tcops International, who retired after 30 years as a police officer in San Jose, Calif.

“More and more people will understand that we’re not villains,” she said, noting that the exposure many veteran officers had to transgender people was limited to interactions on the job, negatively shading their impressions. “They see sex workers, they see drug abusers, they see people stealing to support their habit or to survive,” she added. “They translate their experiences with those people to all transgender people.”

Officer Brooke Bukowski of the New York Police Department got her start in what police officers call an “A-House,” one of the precincts in New York where crime and violence persists, the kind of place where young officers can earn their stripes. After the academy, she was assigned to the 75th Precinct, which covers the East New York section of Brooklyn and has consistently had one of the highest murder rates in the city.

Officer Bukowski, a United States Coast Guard veteran who was raised in rural Illinois, had started taking a low dose of hormones to transition before she joined the Police Department five years ago. She stopped when she entered the academy. But once she graduated, she resumed taking the hormones. When she moved to the 70th Precinct, in Flatbush, her transition became more apparent. Her hair grew longer, and her body changed. While she was on patrol, people on the street would refer to her as Miss, and she remembered overhearing two men in custody discussing her. “They literally start arguing over what gender I am,” she said.

She reached a point where she was “male failing,” as she put it, a term in the transgender community meaning one could no longer pass as male. And after speaking with her superiors, she addressed roll call, explaining her transition.

“Listen guys, I still have the same work ethic,” Officer Bukowski, 33, recalled telling them. “I’m still going to back you up. It’s just a few physical changes here and there.”

Her colleagues have mostly been supportive and encouraging. But there have been obstacles, mostly bureaucratic encounters within the department. For instance, she had a hard time getting a new identification card. She was told she was not due for one yet, though her appearance had drastically changed. (She eventually got a new card.) And around the time that Ms. Jenner appeared on the cover of Vanity Fair, Officer Bukowski was working on a detail with an older officer who made disparaging remarks about transgender people, unaware that Officer Bukowski was herself transgender. She opted to quietly finish the shift without saying anything. “I had an hour left with the guy,” she said.

Because of her experiences, Officer Bukowski felt a pull to be open in the department and to help train other officers, even if it went against a competing urge to keep quiet, working as a woman and going home to her boyfriend. “You go through a lot all your life, so when you finally get there and you’re lucky enough to pass,” she said, a large part of her wanted just to embrace it.

“They just see me as any other female,” she said.
For most of the past three years, Officer Bukowski has helped to train recruits at the Police Academy on transgender issues, replacing the video that had been shown when she was there.

She is now assigned to the Sixth Precinct, and Inspector Simonetti praised the energy she has brought to her work, and her instincts as an officer. He added that the department also benefited by having officers with life experiences like hers, who can establish a dialogue with a group of New Yorkers who have viewed the police with suspicion. “It opens up avenues or lines of communication that in years past may not have been there,” he said.

Still, in a department with 36,000 uniformed police officers, Officer Bukowski is part of subset that is virtually microscopic. She said she had met a few other transgender officers; only one of them is out. “As far as the open community,” Officer Bukowski said, “it’s Aiden and I, as far as we know.”

Aiden chose his name because it did not strike him as overly masculine. He figured it would help soften the impact for his family.

As the academy approached, Officer Budd said he was in a mad dash — changing his name and gender on official records and almost everywhere else that had his former identity on file.

He pulled it off: On July 7, he was Aiden Budd, male recruit. He fit in well and became the company sergeant, a position of leadership among fellow recruits. “They took to him pretty quick,” said Officer Ayesha Marty, an instructor in the academy. “They respected him.”

But in his push to transition, he made an ambitious move: Two weeks in, he scheduled his “top surgery,” a procedure in which breasts are removed and the chest is recontoured. He told fellow recruits he needed to have a growth removed.

After he returned, he pulled his company aside and told them he was transgender. “I thought it was important for them to know that part of myself,” he said. They responded positively and without much of a fuss, he said.

Officer Budd has an easygoing manner with a broad smile. He looks young for 33, so much so that fellow officers have given him the nickname “Benjamin Button,” after the character who ages in reverse. His fiancée, Idalia Sumpter, said he was genuine and had a self-assurance that made people feel comfortable around him. But Officer Budd’s transition has been transformative in more ways than physical, Ms. Sumpter said. He wasn’t always so confident. “He has come a long, long way,” she said, laughing.

His struggles with identity had been a source of pain and confusion. As a teenager, he was outed as a lesbian when his mother found notes from a high school crush. After high school, he enlisted in the Army as a woman, but that was in the era of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” a policy that allowed gay and lesbian soldiers to serve, but not openly, and he said he was discharged after almost a year because of his sexual orientation. (After the policy was rescinded, he re-enlisted as a reservist, still as a woman.)

“I remember asking God a couple of times as a child why I wasn’t born a boy,” Officer Budd said. “If he knew how I felt, why didn’t he just make it happen that way, to avoid all these issues with me liking women and me wanting to be in men’s apparel and doing boy things?”

“I never really got that answer as a kid,” he continued. “I kept those feelings to myself.”

His transition has not been without hurdles. Some family members had a hard time. His sister, with whom he is very close, looked at it at first as if she were losing a sister. His uncle, whom Officer Budd considers his role model, did not attend his graduation.

But that unsettled feeling that had rankled for most of his life has faded. He has been surprised by the people who stuck by him, including his great-grandmother. He and Ms. Sumpter, who met while working as school safety agents, plan to marry next year. On Dec. 29, 2015, he graduated from the academy, accomplishing that lifelong goal. He aspires to someday make detective.

And in July, he said, he went on his first training exercise as an Army reservist since his transition, staying in the male barracks without issue.
Even as more women have joined the police force, many officers still talk of their profession as a brotherhood, and it is one that Officer Budd wants to be part of. Anxieties over acceptance still linger as more of his colleagues learn of his background. “I think I’m only worried about not being man enough,” he said. “Once somebody finds out the truth, they may think, like, ‘Oh, this guy’s not really man enough — what does he know about being a man?’”

He added that he was learning that “a lot of it is my own fear.”

Since his graduation from the academy, Officer Budd has been assigned to the 20th Precinct in Manhattan, spending most of his time on the streets of the Upper West Side. One officer heard a rumor that he was transgender and gently asked about it. Officer Budd was certain others knew as well. But as he starts his career, his focus has been on building a good reputation, earning the trust of other officers. “Like any other rookie, you want the guys to know you as a good cop,” he said. “Nothing else.”

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What the U.S. Is Learning From How Israel Treats Transgender Soldiers

On June 30, the U.S. military announced it would accept transgender soldiers and it has been looking at the experience of other armies for guidance

By Yardena Schwartz

On June 30, the U.S. military announced it would accept transgender soldiers and it has been looking at the experience of other armies for guidance

Amy, a transgender IDF soldier, in Tel Aviv, Israel, in July. Instead of enlisting in the air force, she chose a co-ed unit that patrols the border with Egypt. (Oded Balilty/AP)

Amy always knew she was a girl in a boy’s body, as she always knew she would serve in the army. She grew up in a religious family in Israel and attended a school that prepared students to enter the air force. But after coming out to her family, whose reactions ranged from fear to denial and rejection, she wasn’t sure if and how the military would accept her.

Amy, who preferred not to use her real name for this story, decided not to go into the air force, which she felt might be too “macho” and less welcoming to a transgender woman. Instead she enlisted in Caracal, a co-ed combat unit, which is tasked with patrolling Israel’s border with Egypt. To Amy’s surprise, the army was more than just accepting.

“They were empowering,” she says of her fellow soldiers and commanders. “The girls and guys in my platoon were so sweet and supportive, and all the staff tried to make it as smooth as possible. I didn’t even notice.”

From the start, they treated her as female, addressing her in female pronouns, giving her a female uniform, and allowing her to keep her long wavy hair (male soldiers must keep their hair short). Amy was permitted to sleep in the women’s sleeping quarters, and received permission to shower separately. The army also pays for her hormone treatments, just as they cover the medical needs of any soldier.

On June 30, the U.S. Department of Defense announced that it was lifting its ban on transgender soldiers, five years after repealing the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy which barred gay and lesbian troops from serving openly. The U.S. military’s new transgender policy took effect immediately, but for now, it only applies to trans men and women who are already serving. For the first time, they will be able to do so openly, without fear of being discharged on the grounds of being transgender.

There are no precise figures on the number of transgender people in the U.S. military, but RAND Corporation researchers estimate there are 1,300 to 6,600 transgender service members in active duty – out of 1.3 million total – and between 800 to 4,000 in the selected reserves. The Department of Defense worked with RAND, a public policy research organization, to evaluate the implications of integrating trans soldiers. Its studies of foreign militaries found that such integration had no negative impact on battle readiness or unit cohesion. In fact, the report found, “the policies had benefits for all service members by creating a more inclusive and diverse force.”

Although the policy change took effect this month, it will take about a year for the military to implement it fully, said Department of Defense spokesman Eric Pahon.

As America begins to put its new policy into practice, it is taking notes from the 18 other countries that already allow transgender men and women to serve their country. Israel is one of them, says Pahon.
The two forces face different challenges; Israel has a conscript army, in which every man and woman is expected to serve a period of time in the military, while the U.S. has a volunteer army. But many of the issues are similar.

These include, “How to handle some of the shower situations, and what to do about sleeping arrangements,” says Pahon. “We’ve got a lot of training to do for troops already in the military.”

While the Israeli army has never explicitly forbidden trans men and women from serving, any conscript who said they were transgender would normally be exempted from service on health or mental health grounds. In recent years, the Israeli army has been more keen to encourage more people to serve, regardless of their orientation.

This change has not been smooth for everyone. The day Guy Tiram joined the army was one of the worst days of his life. Raised as a girl named Sahar, Guy came out as a lesbian at the age of 14, and then as transgender right after high school. When his mother found out, she told him not to come home. At one point, Guy tried to commit suicide. After swallowing more than 100 pills, his younger brother called an ambulance, and Guy woke up in a hospital several hours later.

Like Amy, Guy also knew he wanted to be a combat soldier. When Guy entered the enlistment office on his drafting day, the officers saw a man, so they shaved his head and handed him a male uniform. He found an area to the side where he could change in private, but soon a commander came in and took him out of the men’s changing area. She gave him a female uniform and shoved him into the girls’ changing area.

“She was laughing hysterically,” recalls Guy, now 22. “I was crying. All the girls started screaming at me to get out of their changing room. I went outside, sat on a bench and cried. So the army did what seemed right to them. They sent an officer to come yell at me.”

For the rest of his service, Guy experienced similar degrading treatment. Like Amy, he served in the co-ed Caracal unit, but was forced to sleep in the female dorms, and to shower with the girls. His morale was so low that he kept getting into trouble with his commanders. He lasted six months before he gave up on the army, rather than serving the full two years required of women or the three years required of men. Quitting the Israeli army can be extremely difficult, if not impossible. For Guy, it took weeks.

After he left, all Guy could think was, “‘What have I done? I wanted to be here,’” he says. “‘But I’m glad I got out because if I hadn’t, they would say, ‘OK, we have a transgender person here. We’re probably doing everything OK.’”

Apart from not being able to stand the army anymore, Guy also wanted his departure to show the army their treatment of trans soldiers was unacceptable. Although he didn’t realize it, Guy’s experience was a turning point for the army.

Several months after he left the army and started working with underprivileged members of society as an alternative to army service, Guy met Liam Rubin. Liam was also a transgender man, and was at the time serving in Caracal. When Liam realized who he was speaking to, he said, “You’re Guy Tiram!” as if he was meeting a star.

“Guy left a very big impact in what he did,” says Liam, who just completed his army service in March. After he left, I was accepted much better.”
Liam, who came out during his army service, represents a kind of middle ground between the experiences of Amy and Guy.

In Feb. 2016, the army changed its Women’s Affairs Department – created in 2000- into the Gender Affairs Department. Soldiers and commanders now have people they can turn to at any hour with any question, whether it’s concerning themselves, a fellow soldier, or a soldier under their command.

“If you’re a commander in the field, you’re not necessarily going to know how to treat a transgender soldier,” says Lt. Col. Limor Shabtai, the IDF’s Deputy Head of Gender Affairs. “Most of the commanders are just afraid of the issue because they know nothing about it. Once we give them educational tools to help them integrate them, things are going much better.”

Guidance for commanders, Shabtai explains, includes helping them decide where a transgender soldier should sleep and shower, whether to address him as male or female, what uniform to give him, and what kind of medical assistance he’ll be receiving for his transition.

“All of this has given the commanders a sense of how to deal with the issue,” says Shabtai, adding that troops serving alongside a transgender soldier also receive sensitivity training.

Lt. Shachar, a transgender IDF officer, holds a picture of himself as a young girl in Tel Aviv, Israel, in July. (Oded Balilty/AP)

Lieutenant Shachar, who can’t divulge his full name nor his role in the army due to the sensitivity of his job, came out as transgender when he was 16. His friends and family were extremely supportive, but in the army, he only came out to his fellow soldiers at the end of his commander’s course, two years after beginning his army service. Until then, he was addressed as a woman, slept in the female sleeping quarters, and refrained from taking hormones. He was the first transgender person to become an officer. Shachar often assists the Gender Affairs office, which refers transgender recruits to talk to him about their concerns surrounding their army service.

While the army is happy to fund hormone treatment for its soldiers, it is reluctant to allow surgery. When Liam decided to go through hormone therapy, his commander told him that he wouldn’t be able to continue onto the commanders course he was supposed to begin. He chose hormone therapy over becoming a commander. While the army provided his hormone treatments, they did not cover the surgery to remove his breasts, which cost around $7,000. Liam now runs a transgender awareness organization with Guy, whose terrible experience in the army prompted much of the progress that’s been made. Transgender soldiers who desire surgery must go through a sex change commission, and could wait a year or two.

“Most of the time the people who had a harder time, it was that their commanders or doctors just didn’t know how to address the issue, so they didn’t get their rights or the right treatments,” says Lt. Shachar. He said this is a problem they are actively addressing. “We can already see the fruits of that labor,” he says, but, “not everything is perfect.”

The Israeli army’s transgender soldiers are now helping new transgender recruits fit in. In November 2015, Liam was asked to go to the base where he had done basic training. New soldiers were coming to Caracal, and they wanted his help to make sure she was integrated into the army properly.

“There was a trans girl on the bus, and they treated her from the start as a woman. I was shocked,” he says. “I saw her name on the list, and noticed that they’d written her preferred female name next to her original name.” The girl he had been called to help was Amy.

“She’s the only one to start as openly trans and end as openly trans,” says Liam. “It’s like a revolution.”
Human Relations
A look inside the training the White House thinks could stop the police shooting/protest/damning DOJ report cycle

By Janell Ross
The Washington Post, August 10, 2016

Demonstrators confront police during a protest over the death of Laquan McDonald on Nov. 25, 2015, in Chicago. (Scott Olson/Getty Images)

There are beliefs and stereotypes inside all of our minds — yes, all of them — that we won't acknowledge or don't realize are there. That's called implicit bias.

Now, implicit bias is one of those terms that slipped out of the Ivory Tower a few years ago. But the science here is solid. Implicit bias is very real and universal. As a matter of fact, you can take a series of online tests to gauge your own implicit biases here.

For police officers, remaining unaware of their implicit biases can be a dangerous thing, according to Bryant Marks, a social psychologist at Morehouse College tapped by the Obama administration to provide voluntary implicit bias recognition training to the nation's police chiefs this year.

Implicit biases played at least some role in creating the kind of policing in Baltimore which the U.S. Justice Department described as unconstitutional and disproportionately applied to the city's black residents, juveniles and people with mental health disabilities. The same can be said about the shooting death of an unarmed black man in Compton, Calif., in late July: Sheriff's deputies claimed for weeks that the man must have been involved in a carjacking that had brought deputies to the area. Sheriff’s department officials have just admitted that deputies were totally wrong.

In Chicago, a police chief appointed to resolve the many controversies swirling around one fatal police shooting involving a black man, decided July 30 to strip three officers involved in yet another fatal shooting of their powers. This time, police officers killed an unarmed 18-year-old black man fleeing, on foot, from a stolen car. The conversation between the officers involved in the shooting was recorded. It includes a series of assumptions and statements that border on a shared hallucination. The officers talk about the fleeing man firing shots when, in fact, he had no gun at all.

The ongoing cycle of fatal police shootings for suspected involvement in non-capital crimes, ending the lives of young people of color, followed by protests and damming Department of Justice findings prompted the agency to mandate implicit bias training for all 33,000 federal law enforcement agents and prosecutors in June.

The Fix talked with Marks about his implicit bias training. Marks, who is also part of the Obama administration's 21st Century Policing Task Force, has offered implicit bias training to about 300 police chiefs so far. Here’s a Q&A with Marks, conducted by phone and edited for clarity and length.

THE QUESTIONS

THE FIX: Okay. let's start with something basic but important. What is implicit bias?

MARKS: Implicit bias is the collection of stereotypes, prejudices, and discriminatory ideas that often turn into actions or guide them to varying degrees in all of our lives. This all happens below the level of conscious awareness.
Just to be clear, stereotypes are associations between a group and a trait or action. For example, there's a stereotype that all New Yorkers are rude. Those who believe this at an explicit or implicit level may not realize that this idea shapes their related feelings and actions.

Let's use this example. If the stereotype is New Yorkers are rude, prejudice is the feeling of like or dislike based on the stereotype, as in I value courtesy so I don't like New Yorkers. Discrimination is the action that often follows stereotypes and prejudices, which can result in a New Yorker not being hired for a customer service job or welcomed as a neighbor.

Sometimes we're aware of the thoughts and feelings that lead us to discriminate. Sometimes we aren't.

**THE FIX: What is the key thing that you are trying to help police chiefs to understand?**

MARKS: If you talk to most people, particularly many white Americans about discrimination, they will likely acknowledge that sometimes people are treated unfairly because of who they are. The thing that many people fail to understand is that most biases, [against] ethnic minorities, function within an ecosystem, an interconnected or interdependent set of biases that lead to multiple types of mistreatment.

When blacks apply for loans [home, auto and business] studies have shown that when you control for financial history and other characteristics blacks who do receive loans get them on worse terms than whites with the same financial profile. If you ask loan officers are you racist you can believe that the answer you will get is, 'No. Of course not.' Yet the pattern stands. The data is there.

The same thing happens with teachers and lower expectations or principals with suspensions. In the medical field, all other characteristics being equal, [health insurance coverage, level of illness, availability of a remedy] studies show that African American patients are more often prescribed less aggressive treatment or pain management. African Americans in the criminal justice system are more likely to be arrested, to be charged with the most serious violations, receive longer sentences or the death penalty than others who have done the same things.

In fact, these ideas are so ingrained that there is research showing that black defendants with more Afrocentric features — dark skin, kinky hair, a wide nose — receive longer sentences than other black defendants. But if you ask the judge, 'Are you biased?' he will say no.

When it comes to employment, whites with a criminal record are more likely to be interviewed for a job than blacks without a criminal record, all other things being equal. That means the white applicant is more likely to be hired.

You see the patterns again and again when you look at data. The issue is that in each of these situations, the key decision maker may not know in their conscious mind they are biased, have made decisions based on prejudice and then taken discriminatory action.

That's what I mean by ecosystem. People will try to evade this. They will openly deny that this sort of thing is pervasive. Almost everyone denies that they directly play any role in this. But police officers, just like the rest of us, are part of that ecosystem. The difference is the consequences, what can happen to other human beings, as a result of police officer's unconscious biases. So, law enforcement officers must work a bit harder to address their biases.

**THE FIX: What is it that you do in these training sessions? How do you even get started with a topic this sprawling?**

MARKS: What I have found is that the framing really matters.
So, I usually start by saying we are all biased. We treat family better than friends and friends better than strangers. That's differential treatment and we see that as normal and functional.

I say clearly, we are all biased. It's what we do with those biases that we are there to understand.

As a professor, my biases may lead me to call on one student rather than another. When a bus driver is biased he may not wait for the person running for the bus. But with the police are biased, particularly when they are biased in ways they may not realize, and that bias plays out with a gun in their hand, the results can be fatal.

The goal is to convey, quickly and clearly, that bias is a universal experience. But law enforcement officers need to recognize that when the consequences of their biases are such that someone can die they have a greater responsibility to examine their biases, try to recognize them and then disrupt the link between their biases and their actions.

I start this way because these are Americans and 90 percent of police chiefs are white. So, they need some assurance that they are good people, that biases do not definitively make them bad or mean.

From there we usually talk about ecosystems of bias. All that usually helps to build some trust, to lower the anxiety in the room and creates a basis to move towards really understanding racial bias in policing.

There is almost always someone in the room that by then wants to tell a story about something they have done or one of their officers have done or a story they've heard in which an officer treated a member of another racial group fairly. And, that's great. But those are anecdotes. The existence of bias is clear in all sorts of data. And you cannot refute widespread bias and the evidence we have all seen of it recently by using anecdotes.

**THE FIX: Okay, where do you go next? It sounds like there would be some tension in that room.**

MARKS: The combination of bias as a universal human tendency with an understanding that actions resulting from police bias can have unique and fatal consequences usually gets people to be a bit more open to what follows.

Some are still defensive, some are resistant, but it gets people talking. Once that happens we can begin to unpack what they think and why.

Then we get down to police practices.

**Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, left, announces that he is appointing Eddie Johnson, center, as the interim superintendent of the Chicago Police Department during a news conference in Chicago on March 28. (Kamil Krzaczynski/Reuters)**

**THE FIX: There are a lot of people who will object to the idea that we all move through the world in the company of biases. What do those people need to know?**

MARKS: Okay. Some people will be familiar with this story. But I'll try to explain it this way.

A father and son are driving at night on a road that is wet; they skid across the road and crash into a tree. The father is killed. The son is critically injured. He's rushed to the hospital and brought into the operating room. The surgeon comes in, looks down at the patient and says, I can't operate on this boy, he's my son.
Now, most people will hear this story and become confused for at least a few seconds. That's true for everyone, male and female. The simple explanation for that confusion is implicit bias.

Implicit bias still leads most of us to assume that the surgeon is also a man. Today we should know that there are a number of possibilities. The most obvious is that the surgeon is the boy's mother. But if you think surgeon equals male or had to force yourself to sort that story out, you now know what implicit bias is.

Surgeon equals man in many minds, even today, because that is what we most often see or see depicted in movies, television, books and so on. Or, at least, that's part of the reason. When you consider that the average American is exposed to more than 1,000 associations between black man and criminal or black man and danger in the things they read, see, consume as entertainment throughout their lives and maybe 20 incidences of black man and PhD or black man and CEO, you see part of the reason that certain biases are so widespread.

You start to see why the image of a criminal is likely to come to mind for some people when they see or hear of a black man, even if they are not aware of the association. But those assumptions guide our thoughts and feelings just like they did your understanding of the surgeon story.

The question is what you do once you know that this kind of thing exists inside your mind. Police officers have to engage in this work in the interest of public safety.

Of course, if an organization is serious about changing biases, I need more than a few hours or a day. You can't undo 1,000 associations of black male equals criminal or black male equals unintelligent in a day. My trainings that last a day or less are designed to educate, raise awareness and challenge departments to engage in follow up activities that will reduce the likelihood of biased attitudes leading to biased behavior.

Unfortunately, there are a lot of consultants out there making a lot of money claiming they can eliminate implicit bias. Don't trust that. That's not how the human mind works.

**THE FIX: Wait are you saying the work you do has no effect?**

MARKS: The research shows that you can reduce it [implicit bias] for a few hours or a few days but there isn't high quality research that has collected data over the long-term, which shows lasting reductions in implicit bias. Most people experience short term gains in awareness then return to baseline [where they began] unless they consistently challenge their biases over time.

Police can be as biased as you want to be. But when you pull me over, I need to be treated like everyone else. [They] need to break the link between biased thinking and biased action.

To help officers do this or commit to doing this, the police chiefs I train, can go home and take steps to make sure that department policies do not reward bias [i.e. arrest quotas pegged to a certain neighborhood or demographic group] and that they are gathering data that will independently reveal patterns in the way that individual officers work.

They can commit to making that data available, publicly, on their websites, broken down to the individual officer level. They need data depicting large windows of time, years. But you can imagine what something like that might reveal.

Bias is more widespread than expected. [Seeing that in the data] may help officers to think more carefully about every day interactions with citizens.
Servicemembers' pushups raise awareness of veteran suicide, PTSD

By Seth Robson
Stars and Stripes, August 8, 2016

Maj. Kendall Langston, 47, a New Zealand Army reservist and veteran of missions to Bosnia and Angola, started the 22 pushups challenge to raise awareness of veteran suicide and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder after seeing American friends posting about it on social media.

COURTESY OF KENDALL LANGSTON

Servicemembers worldwide are cranking out millions of pushups and posting videos of their efforts online to raise awareness about military suicide and post-traumatic stress disorder, a campaign that has crossed over into the civilian community.

Texas-based veterans organization 22Kill is asking people to video themselves doing 22 pushups a day for 22 days and nominate others to do the same. The goal is to reach 22 million pushups in honor of the 22 U.S. veterans who commit suicide each day, says the organization’s website.

22Kill Director Jacob Schick, a Marine who suffered from PTSD after losing a leg to an improvised explosive device in Iraq in 2004, said the challenge started as a fundraising effort in 2013 and went viral after a video was posted by country music star Brantley Gilbert.

Other celebrities and civilians have jumped onboard, and the challenge has spread overseas, where veterans of foreign militaries are grappling with some of the same issues as their American allies.

“It’s been picking up steam, and it has turned into a huge movement that’s really helping to raise awareness of this epidemic that’s plaguing our warrior community,” Schick said.

In America, the pushups are helping bridge a gap between the military and civilian communities, he said.

“The fact that we are losing these warriors to this epidemic comes down to one thing: mental health,” he said. “And it’s not just a warrior issue. A lot of people are walking around with PTSD from being in a car crash or watching a loved one die and probably don’t even know it.”

The only thing worse than suffering is suffering alone, Schick said.

“There are people and entities out there who can help you get better, and you can get better,” he said.

Among those taking on the challenge is Air Force Col. Clarence Lukes, 47, who recently returned to Colorado Springs, Colo., after a yearlong deployment to the Middle East.

Lukes, who was nominated by an Air Force Academy classmate along with several other officers, recently completed the challenge. The pushups weren’t a big deal for the avid runner and rugby player, but they focused his attention on the problems of suicide and PTSD, he said.

“The pushups are really a vehicle for awareness,” Lukes said. “One suicide or one person suffering from PTSD is one too many.”

Education can help solve the problems, said the 20-year Air Force veteran. The pushup challenge is an opportunity for people to learn about issues that servicemembers and veterans live with every day, he said.

“As you are doing the pushups you are more inspired to learn about these things, and you may be more sensitive to those folks and be able to educate people,” said Lukes, who added that people don’t have to experience combat to be affected by PTSD and suicidal tendencies.
“You can be affected just through seeing someone else going through something traumatic,” he said. “We call it a disorder, but feeling helpless or depressed is a natural reaction” to traumatic events. “If it wasn’t for this challenge, we may not even be talking about it.”

Maj. Kendall Langston, 47, a New Zealand Army reservist and veteran of missions to Bosnia and Angola, took the challenge after seeing American friends posting about it on social media.

“A few of my close mates are doing it, and I got nominated,” he said.

The New Zealand Defence Force has deployed troops to Iraq and Afghanistan alongside U.S. forces in recent years.

“There’s a shocking suicide rate in the veteran community,” Langston said. “The ones you see the most about are in the U.S., but there have been incidents in New Zealand as well.”

Kiwi Vietnam and World War II veterans have suffered from PTSD, but the problem was swept under the carpet, Langston said.

“There’s been more awareness about it in recent years, maybe because there are so many young veterans (of Iraq and Afghanistan) and more media coverage,” he said.

Langston recently finished his 22 days of pushups, and the results have been showing in the mirror.

“The wife asked if I could keep doing it,” he said.

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Miscellaneous
Calling all millennials: Fight for your reputation

[OPINION]

By Senior Airman Charles Pons Abascal

Defense Video & Imagery Distribution System, August 9, 2016

As the debate over a massive generational gap within the military becomes more prevalent, members within different generational groups should pause and consider what each contributes to mission success, rather than what makes one better than the other.

Yes, I am technically a millennial; however, I am so much more than that and I do not take pride in being associated with the negative stigmas of my youth. I am a husband, son and friend. I have faced obstacles and set-backs unique to only me. I have loved, grieved, failed and succeeded.

But first and foremost, I am an American Airman - a wingman, leader and warrior.

As the next generation of the Air Force, millennials need to fully embrace the legacy and heritage that comes with wearing the uniform. Regardless of age, customs and courtesies go a long way, as do professionalism, mutual respect and integrity.

Instead of labeling us, teach us. Find ways to use our strengths to the advantage of the new Air Force.

Multiple generations of Airmen currently make up the United States Air Force, and much like our varying backgrounds, religious preferences, sexual orientations and races, our generational gap should be seen as an asset, not a hindrance.

There have been articles by several publications during the past few years criticizing millennials. A recent article in Military Times stated, “Are younger service members - so called ‘millennials,’ born in 1980 or later – soft? Are they too reliant on technology? Are they buried so deep in social media that face-to-face communication becomes impossible? Are they too busy questioning orders to follow them?” While this excerpt was used to highlight the plethora of complaints regarding my generation, as a millennial, it’s one of many that I’ve seen and I take offense to this thought. I am proud to be competent with, but never reliant upon technology.

As a photojournalist, I thrive on having the newest technologies at my fingertips. The quality of my job performance hinges on it, and as our world races toward more technological advancements, it is imperative that I stay up-to-date so that I can continue to evolve with them.

I know the difference between indulging in social media and using it to my advantage.

The way we use the internet is changing. Statistics can be drawn from following certain hashtags, trends and posts. Why wouldn’t we, as the world’s greatest air, space and cyber space force utilize various social media platforms to share the Air Force story?

Last year, Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force James A. Cody spoke at the Air Force Association Air and Space Conference and Technology Exposition, and stated that senior leaders must learn about the younger generation as people, what they bring to the table and leverage it as though there were no tomorrow.
“Whatever that next generation is, they’re going to be better than the generation before them,” Cody said. “We’re going to give them better tools; they’re going to come out better – and if they don’t, then we have failed.”

Growing up, my family instilled in me the idea that each generation stands upon the shoulders of those before them. We work as hard as we do and strive for excellence in all we do so that future generations of Airmen can serve in a better Air Force.

This work ethic has been passed down to me by various mentors throughout my career, and it is something that I, as a millennial, urge my peers to take seriously.

Only we are responsible for the reputation that we currently hold. As the Air Force continues to get smaller as each year passes and recent changes to the promotion system take effect, showing that we are more than a stigma is as important as ever. Acknowledge that there is much to be learned from seasoned generations of Airmen and use their mentorship to excel your career to the next level.

While our natural inclination may be to do things “our” way, recognize that we have an opportunity, on both sides of the spectrum, to learn from one another. In doing so, the strength of our Airmen and our Air Force will be tested and challenged, but we will walk away stronger than ever.
Emails: North Dakota faced complaints over Sioux image signs

By James MacPherson
The Associated Press, August 9, 2016

This May 2016 file photo provided by the North Dakota Department of Transportation shows a road sign with the rectangular outline of the state of North Dakota. North Dakota's Transportation Department was threatened with a civil rights complaint before it dropped its nearly century-old image of Sioux warrior Marcellus Red Tomahawk in favor of the outline of North Dakota on thousands of highway signs. Transportation Director Grant Levi said Tuesday, Aug. 9, 2016, the threat played no part in switching the signs. (North Dakota Transportation Department photo via AP)

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — North Dakota's Transportation Department was threatened with a civil rights complaint in the months before it decided to drop its nearly century-old image of a famous Sioux warrior from thousands of highway signs.

Department officials said the possible complaint played no part in their decision, but emails released to The Associated Press in response to a public records request showed that top officials closely monitored the progress of the complaint as well as a talk radio show where callers offered opinions on the image.

The Transportation Department this summer began replacing more than 4,400 state highways signs with the silhouette of Marcellus Red Tomahawk in favor of an outline of North Dakota. The effort will take up to a decade to fully phase out under the agency's sign replacement program that's funded at about $500,000 annually.

Transportation Director Grant Levi said Tuesday the threats and potential legal action had nothing to do with changing the signs.

"It was not the basis of our decision," Levi said.

He said the change was done to pay tribute to the agency's 100th birthday next year and get in step with other states' signage. He said the agency had internal discussions about the change months before it received any criticism about them.

Marcellus Red Tomahawk became the first elected chairman of the Standing Rock reservation, which straddles the North Dakota-South Dakota border, in 1914. He is best known outside the tribe as a government policeman involved in the killing of Sitting Bull a quarter-century earlier during an attempt to arrest the Sioux chief, who defeated Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer at the battle of Little Bighorn.

His profile was featured on state road signs starting in 1923, and word of its removal dismayed some descendants and tribal members.

"The reason why Red Tomahawk is on those signs was to honor that tribal relationship," Standing Rock Sioux Chairman Dave Archambault II said. "All of the sudden, they want to take that honoring away. We're not happy."

Documents obtained by the AP through the state's open record laws show the agency took complaints from Deborah Gaudet of Taos, New Mexico in 2015. Gaudet, a former North Dakota resident who is not Native American, began a letter-writing campaign in June of that year, calling for the Red Tomahawk signs to be replaced.
This May 2015 file photo provided by the North Dakota Department of Transportation shows a road sign in Devils Lake, N.D., depicting the image of Sioux warrior Marcellus Red Tomahawk. North Dakota's Transportation Department was threatened with a civil rights complaint before it dropped its nearly century-old image of a Sioux warrior from thousands of highway signs. Transportation Director Grant Levi said Tuesday, Aug. 9, 2016, the threat played no part in switching the silhouette of the Sioux warrior in favor of an outline of North Dakota. (Poppy Mills/North Dakota Transportation Department via AP)

Gaudet called Red Tomahawk "merely an agent of a genocidal federal policy" for his role as a government policeman involved in the killing of Sitting Bull.

"North Dakota should want to symbolize itself with something other than a symbol of Sitting Bull's killer," Gaudet said in an interview. "It's a romanticized idea of the past, while Native people in North Dakota are still living in extreme poverty and without the buffalo."

Emails indicate Levi and troopers corresponded about criticism from Gaudet, who also called state officials several times.

"Did we get Civil Rights involved?" Levi asked in a June 2015 email. An official with the agency told him the Civil Rights department within the agency had "talked to her and documented her complaints."

Emails also show that top Highway Patrol officials made Levi aware of a Fargo-based radio talk show that aired shortly after Gaudet's letters appeared in some of the state's biggest newspapers, where callers were asked to give their opinions of the Red Tomahawk signs.

In September 2015, Ron Henke, DOT's deputy director of engineering, proposed changing the signs in a "decision document," to which Levi agreed.

Levi said three descendants of Red Tomahawk were notified of the sign swap in December.

Judith Red Tomahawk, of Mandan, Red Tomahawk's great-granddaughter, said there are dozens of descendants in the Dakotas and Montana who should have had the opportunity to comment on the move.

She said criticism of the signage has come from "Indian wannabes" and that her family and the tribe want to keep the imagery. She praised her great-grandfather, whom she said never spoke English but worked with non-Native farmers and ranchers to establish cattle and crops on the 2.3 million-acre reservation.

"It was an honor to have those signs," she said. "I don't know why people can't grasp that. People don't know how much it means to us."

Gaudet also criticized the North Dakota Highway Patrol, which has used Red Tomahawk's image on shoulder patches and trooper vehicles since the early 1950s. In a telephone interview, she told the AP that she will continue to push for troopers' patches and vehicle signage to be removed, and will likely file a formal complaint to do so.

Highway Patrol Lt. Tom Iverson said the troopers have no intention of removing the imagery, which has been used with permission from Red Tomahawk's descendants.

"We adopted this profile of Red Tomahawk — in a sense it was almost gifted to the agency," Iverson said. "We feel it is important to honor and continue using that image."
Mandatory writing test for NCOs to launch Oct. 1

By Michelle Tan
Army Times, August 6, 2016

Beginning Oct. 1, soldiers attending an NCO education course will have to take an English comprehension and writing assessment. Here, Staff Sgt. Timothy Hughes and Sgt. 1st Class Tannia Dillon review their notes during an exercise at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas.

(Photo: Martha C. Koester/Army)

Beginning Oct. 1, all soldiers and noncommissioned officers preparing to attend an NCO professional military education course will be required to take an English comprehension and writing assessment.

The move is part of the Army’s ongoing effort to sharpen its education courses and develop better leaders.

A pilot underway right now with Basic Leader Course students, most of whom are specialists seeking promotion to sergeant, showed that about 75 percent of those assessed need additional help or coaching. More than 12,000 BLC students have taken the assessment.

“What we’ve found was that they have writing skills, but they could improve to a level that would be comparable to a first-year college student,” said Liston Bailey, chief of learning initiatives and innovations for Training and Doctrine Command’s Institute of NCO Professional Development. “A lot of the young men and women come in, and their writing skills are not polished. They don’t necessarily have the skills to write about and defend their ideas, or how to support an argument, let’s say.”

The goal isn’t to make soldiers more like college students. Instead, it’s to gradually improve their writing abilities, Bailey said.

“Communication is a most vital aspect of leadership, and as an NCO matures, they need to be able to speak and write with authority, to counsel subordinates in writing, and to analyze and describe how to fix problems,” Bailey said.

The Army’s new NCO Evaluation Report also contains a narrative portion, requiring senior NCOs to have solid writing abilities so they can properly evaluate their subordinates, he said.

“That’s why we need good writing competencies and skills across the NCO cohort,” Bailey said.

For now, only soldiers attending the Basic Leader Course, formerly known as the Warrior Leader Course, are being required to take the writing assessment. Bailey anticipates more than 18,000 students will have taken the assessment by Sept. 30, the end of the fiscal year.

Beginning Oct. 1, all NCO academies, including the Sergeants Major Academy, will start offering the assessment. TRADOC last week sent a tasking to NCO academies across the Army, calling on them to start preparing to administer the assessment. About 97,000 soldiers attend NCO professional military education courses each year, Bailey said.

“It will be mandatory that the schools participate in this initiative,” Bailey said. “If a school hosts NCO professional military education, then it’s something they must do.”

The Army has learned enough from its ongoing Basic Leader Course pilot to decide to expand the assessment to all levels of NCO education, he said.

“We think now’s the time to expand it to all levels of NCO education,” Bailey said, adding that at 69 cents per assessment, the program is not expensive.

Taking the assessment will help NCOs become more aware of their writing abilities, he said.
It promotes self-awareness and understanding of their level of communication skills as far as English composition, writing and the expression of ideas.”

The English comprehension and writing assessment began in 2015 with a 500-soldier pilot. The pilot, which also involved students attending the Basic Leader Course, ran last spring at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, Fort Hood, Texas, Camp Williams, Utah, and Parks Reserve Forces Training Area, California.

On the first day of class, students were asked to write an essay. In that case, soldiers were given about 45 minutes to write an essay about peer pressure.

Best and worst from real soldier writing tests

The pilot was then expanded to the current test, which targets all Basic Leader Course students.

Of the roughly 75 percent of soldiers who were found to need additional help or coaching, most of the shortfalls had to do with grammar, spelling and punctuation, Bailey said. Many also struggled with organization.

“That’s what we really want to get after,” he said. “Can you organize your thoughts?”

The goal is for junior NCOs to be able to write at the first-year college level. Mid-grade NCOs’ writing should be comparable to second- or third-year college students, while senior NCOs should be writing at a post-baccalaureate level, said Bailey, who holds a doctorate and graduate degrees in the fields of education, organizational development and public administration.

The assessment uses the Educational Testing Service’s Criterion Online Writing Evaluation Service, an established, off-the-shelf program that automatically scores essays on a scale of one to six. The software also gives an overall assessment of the soldier’s writing based on the complexity of the writing, grammar, spelling, syntax, organization and other facets.

Once the assessment goes to all the NCO academies, the Army is going to ask the individual schools to determine how and when to administer the test, Bailey said.

“The commandants will make their own logistical arrangements to make this all come to fruition,” he said. “The main goal is the student brings their results with them to school, and it becomes a discussion point or discussion topic in a lesson or a counseling with an instructor.”

The Army also is ensuring writing is part of every level of NCO education, Bailey said.

“In the future, when an NCO goes to school, it doesn’t matter at what level, they’ll be expected to produce writing products,” he said. “It doesn’t matter if it’s an E-5 or an E-9.”

Soldiers’ writing scores also will be uploaded to the Army Career Tracker, a career management site that helps enlisted soldiers, officers and Army civilians map out their careers based on their specialties. This will enable soldiers’ supervisors to see their scores and create a record of a soldier’s scores throughout his career.

“That way we can aggregate the data, track the progress of the initiative over time and see if it’s yielding the results we want for the Army and NCO corps,” Bailey said.

The Army also is uploading free resources on the Army Learning Management System so soldiers can brush up on grammar, spelling, punctuation, formatting and other aspects of writing, Bailey said.

“It’s on the NCO to self-develop, but we’ll also have some of this embedded in some of the writing support courses and products embedded in the Structured Self-Development [courses],” he said.

Initial feedback from soldiers has been a mix of positive feedback and anxiety, Bailey said.

“There’s a little bit of apprehension, [including] ‘Is this going to be pass or fail?’ ‘Am I going to suffer career-wise?’” he said. “The answer I give most of the time is this is about development and self-awareness and creating opportunities for people to improve. It’s not about a high-stakes writing test as much as developing competencies and confidence as far as their ability to brief and write with clarity and precision.”
Ships to be named after John Basilone and Harvey Milk

By Jeff Schogol
Military Times, August 11, 2016

The Navy plans to name a ship for gay rights activist Harvey Milk, who was assassinated in 1978. Milk grew up in a Navy family, served as a Navy diver. (Photo: AP)

The Navy is naming ships after World War II legend Marine Gunnery Sgt. John Basilone and gay rights icon Lt.j.g. Harvey Milk in separate ceremonies next week.

Navy Secretary Ray Mabus announced on Tuesday that a destroyer will be named after “Manila John,” Basilone, who received the Medal of Honor for his heroism at Guadalcanal and was later posthumously awarded the Navy Cross for destroying an enemy blockhouse and helping to save a U.S. tank at Iwo Jima.

“It is a great honor to name this ship in recognition of John Basilone,” Mabus said in a statement. “I have no doubt that all who serve aboard her will carry on the legacy of service and commitment exemplified by this Marine Corps hero.”

This will be the second destroyer to be named after Basilone, a Navy news release says. The first USS Basilone was decommissioned in 1977.

Mabus also confirmed that a Military Sealift Command oiler will be named after Milk, who became the first openly gay public official in California in 1977 when he was elected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. Milk and then-San Francisco Mayor George Moscone were murdered by a fellow city official the following year.

“Naming this ship after Harvey Milk is a fitting tribute to a man who had been at the forefront of advocating for civil and human rights,” Mabus said Tuesday.

The naming ceremony for the USS John Basilone will be next Tuesday at Camp Pendleton, California. The USNS Harvey Milk’s naming ceremony will be later that day on Treasure Island, California.

Basilone is a revered figure in the Marine Corps. During Oct. 24 and Oct. 25, 1942, he held the line against a determined Japanese assault using his machine gun and then repairing another, his Medal of Honor citation says.

“A little later, with ammunition critically low and the supply lines cut off, Sergeant Basilone, at great risk of his life and in the face of continued enemy attack, battled his way through hostile lines with urgently needed shells for his gunners, thereby contributing in large measure to the virtual annihilation of a Japanese regiment,” the citation says.

After the battle, Basilone refused a commission and took part in an
effort to sell war bonds. He later requested to combat duty and was killed on Feb. 19, 1945 at Iwo Jima, where he single-handedly destroyed an enemy fortification that had pinned down his company, his Navy Cross citation says.

He then guided a U.S. tank out of a minefield while under intense mortar and artillery fire before being killed by a mortar shell, the citation says.

“Stouthearted and indomitable, Gunnery Sergeant Basilone, by his intrepid initiative, outstanding skill, and valiant spirit of self-sacrifice in the face of fanatic opposition, contributed materially to the advance of his company during the early critical period of the assault, and his unwavering devotion to duty throughout the bitter conflict was an inspiration to his comrades and reflects the highest credit upon Gunnery Sergeant Basilone and the United States Naval Service,” the citation says. “He gallantly gave his life in the service of his country.”

Milk, whose parents were both Navy veterans, enlisted in the Navy in 1951 and was commissioned after completing Officer Candidate School, according to his official biography. Milk served as a diving instructor in San Diego until he was honorably discharged in 1955 as a lieutenant junior grade.

Former Rep. Bob Filner, a Democrat who represented the San Diego area from 2003 to 2012, led efforts to name a ship after Milk. In October 2012, Filner asked Mabus and then-Defense Secretary Leon Panetta to name a submarine, aircraft carrier or other vessel after Milk.

On Tuesday, Mabus said that naming an oiler after Milk “is a visible legacy of Harvey Milk’s committed service to his nation, both as a sailor and as an activist.”

“By adorning one of our ships with his name, his example will live on in the steel of that ship and in all those who will serve aboard her,” Mabus added.
Spooked by obesity trends, the U.S. military is redefining its basic fitness standards

By Andrew Tilghman
Military Times, August 7, 2016

The Pentagon is finalizing a new policy that will redefine basic fitness standards for military personnel and how person's overall health and wellness is assessed.

(Photo: Lance Cpl. Jodson Graves/Marine Corps)

For the first time in 14 years, the military is rewriting its body composition standards and the methods used to determine whether troops are too fat to serve.

Pentagon officials intend to publish a new policy later this year, a document expected to have sweeping effects on how the military defines and measures health and fitness. The review comes amid rising concern about obesity. Among civilians, it is shrinking the pool of qualified prospective recruits. And in the active-duty force, a rising number of overweight troops poses risks to readiness and health care costs.

“You can look around and see all the soldiers that are pushing that belly,” said Dr. David Levitsky, a professor of nutritional science and human ecology at Cornell University who has studied military nutrition and obesity. “They have to do something about it.”

Report: Nearly 1 in 3 young adults too fat for military

The current policy requires service members to maintain body fat levels below a key threshold — 26 percent for men and 36 percent for women. And for years the Pentagon has required the services to enforce that using a notoriously low-tech “tape test.”

Those standards are at the core of long-simmering controversies that pit questions of fairness against those of military readiness. Troops who fail to pass the test are enrolled in remedial fitness programs that can stigmatize or even end a military career. Yet many others believe rigid fitness standards are a vital component of the military profession, rules that stress the importance of military bearing and ultimately save lives on the battlefield.

Today, new research and technology is available, enabling the military's health experts to reassess the value, practicality and fairness of those rules. The objective now is to identify and leverage the best, most financially feasible way to distinguish between troops who are truly unhealthy and those who have nontraditional body types but are otherwise fit.

Army Sgt. Jonathon Bailey shouts instructions while performing push-ups aboard the joint high speed vessel USNS Millinocket. (Photo: Sgt. James Gulliver/Navy)

“The question is: Is that the best way for us to assess body composition?” said one defense official familiar with the review. The official requested anonymity because the internal review is controversial and senior officials have not yet made any final decisions. “What was good in 2002 might not be the best we can do in 2016.”

The pending changes may be far reaching. For the first time the matter will be addressed primarily by military health professionals — many of them trained physicians and scientists. Previously the issue was handled by the Pentagon’s personnel division.
“We are taking a slightly different perspective on this, focusing on the health: What determinants can we identify that would relate to predispositions for injury or illness?” the defense official said.

'BMI is absolutely useless'

One fundamental question is whether the military should revise its longstanding reliance on the height-weight screening that determines a person's body-mass index, or BMI. The official assessment of body composition starts with the BMI test to determine if their height and weight align sufficiently to suggest they are fit. The troops who fail that test must then undergo a more complete a tape test to estimate their body fat percentage.

Medical experts say the BMI is flawed at each end of the spectrum. It unfairly penalizes weight lifters and other athletic people who are healthy but have a lot of muscle mass that increases their weight. And the BMI test can fail to catch unfit troops who are naturally tall and thin.

“When you have groups of individuals who are fit and highly trained, then BMI is absolutely useless,” said Dr. Dympna Gallagher, the director of the body composition unit at the New York Obesity Nutrition Research Center.

Sailors exercise in the seaside gym aboard the aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower. (Photo: Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Apprentice Casey S. Trietsch/Navy)

Military health officials are looking for a new way to determine the specific location of body fat.

“Is it visceral fat around the abdominal organs? Or is it total body fat?” the defense official said. “So the goal is to try to determine, based on the science, how do you test — in hundreds of thousands of individuals — the type of fat they have, in a manner that is quick and attainable and is relevant to health?”

That's why the tape test is facing such scrutiny. It uses a cloth tape to measure neck and waist circumference and from that, a tester calculates estimated body fat. Critics say the results are wildly inaccurate compared to more sophisticated and costly tools, such as underwater immersion or full-body X-rays.

In fact, in 2013, Military Times challenged the tape test by assessing 10 active-duty troops and then putting them in a hydrostatic “dunk tank,” considered one of the most accurate methods for determining an individual's body fat composition. The results showed that the tape test was wrong — every time. And in nine of the 10 cases, the tape test measured troops’ body fat percentages far higher than the dunk tank. The worst exposed a 66 percent difference between scores.

Experts: Tape test has huge margin of error

The challenge is that the military must test more than a million people every year, sometimes in austere conditions like on a ship at sea or within an infantry unit deployed to a war zone.

“Time is an issue, resources are an issue — you can’t do an MRI or a CAT scan on every service member to look at their body fat. … That is very labor intensive and resource intensive and difficult to do,” the defense official said.

While Defense Department officials examine potential changes, their proposals will have to be coordinated with leaders of the individual services before a final policy emerges. Internally, however, there is “disagreement on what right looks like,” the defense official said.

Promoting healthy lifestyles
Some leaders worry that focusing on BMI scores and body fat percentages can obscure the broader goal of promoting healthy lifestyles. That involves eating right, exercising daily, getting sufficient sleep and not drinking too much.

“I don’t want someone just to meet the body screening I want them to live a healthy lifestyle,” said Command Sgt. Maj. John Troxell, the senior enlisted adviser to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. “That means: Don’t go for two weeks and lose a bunch of weight and use methods that are not smart or prescribed to get your body weight down or your body fat down to meet a certain standard.”

Nevertheless, Troxell said, the force needs strong fitness requirements. “Any change to our policy has to take into account, first and foremost, that we’ve got to have men and women who can perform their duties … under the worst conditions on their worst day of their life, whether it’s in combat, whether it’s a fire on a ship, whether its on the flight line where there’s an emergency.”

Diet face-off: How 7 nutrition trends stack up

Troxell acknowledged concerns about rising obesity rates limiting the military’s recruiting pool. He pointed to recent studies that show 75 percent of young Americans are ineligible for military service, many of whom are simply too fat to meet basic standards.

But lowering standards to expand that recruiting pool is flawed logic, he said. “If we do that, we have a potential liability on the battlefield. The minute we lose that competitive advantage in combat because our enemies are training harder than we are, we’ll have more problems than we have right now.”

One study of combat troops in Afghanistan found that overweight soldiers were 40 percent more likely to suffer an injury during deployment.

Levitsky, the Cornell professor, said health care costs, which consume about 10 percent of the Pentagon's budget, are a key consideration, too. Obesity is related to conditions that are expensive to treat, such as heart disease, diabetes and hypertension.

“If they can somehow weed out those individuals, they would save a lot of money,” he said. “What they are realizing is that even after people come into the military and they pass all the health standards, that the risk of becoming obese is still very high.

“The major concern is, what are the health costs going to be later on in life? Not right now, but five years — 10 years — 20 years down the line? There are significant health costs. I’m sure their economists are looking at this right now very carefully.”

Data is hard to come by

Obesity in the active-duty force has soared during the past several decades. In 2001, 1.6 percent of the force received an outpatient diagnosis of obesity, according to Defense Department health data. That more than tripled to 5.3 percent in 2010.

It's unclear where those numbers stand now, though. The Defense Health Agency refused to fulfill Military Times request for more recent obesity data.

Seeing cause for concern, the individual services have responded by implementing remedial fitness programs — comprehensive health and wellness plans designed to get wayward personnel back into fighting shape. They are mandatory for troops who fail fitness and body composition tests. But finding data on those programs is difficult as well.

The Navy, for instance, was unable to provide Military Times with its Fitness Enhancement Program enrollment numbers, a spokesman said, due to computer software updates and ongoing system maintenance. The Air Force also was unable to provide forcewide enrollment data on its Fitness Improvement Program.
Electronics Technician 2nd Class Joseph Rogers measures a sailor's height during a body composition assessment aboard the aircraft carrier Ronald Reagan (Photo: Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Kevin Hastings/Navy)

“We do not have the current enrollment for FIP since this program is managed at the individual base level,” said Maj. Bryan Lewis, a spokesman for Air Force headquarters at the Pentagon. Instead, Lewis provided the percentage of airmen who pass the service's annual fitness test. That rate, he said, has ticked up from 92.4 percent in 2011 to 95.9 in 2015.

Marines who fail to meet standards are assigned to the Body Composition Program. Annual enrollment in the BCP has ranged between 1.1 percent and 1.4 percent of the total force during the past several years, according to data provided by the Marine Corps Force Fitness Department. The program appears to work, too. Since 2011, in a single year no more than 185 Marines have been thrown out of the service for being too fat.

The Army did not respond to Military Times' request for data about its remedial fitness programs.

'I wasn't blessed with good genes'

Those remedial programs have saved plenty of military careers over the years. But many troops who've been assigned to one of them decry the tape test as inaccurate and unfair, rightly dubious of its reliance on specific body measurements rather than overall physical fitness.

Senior Airman Jaclyn Barile, a health administration technician at Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri, suffered an injury last year that disrupted her fitness routine. Consequently, she began to fear what the tape test would reveal once her waist was measured.

"I wasn't blessed with good genes," she told Military Times. “I've been working out consistently and losing weight, but there's one problem: my waist. My waist has always run a little bigger no matter what my fitness level, and it's the only part of the fitness test that stresses me out."

The Air Force puts greater emphasis on troops' abdominal circumference as part of its fitness standards. Here, testing is conducted at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas. (Photo: Military Times staff file)

Troops cite a variety of reasons for why the tape test does not treat everyone equal.

“How about a female that has had a child versus one that has not? Their body does undergo changes, ... but the Air Force doesn't take that into account,” said Senior Master Sgt. Lonney “CJ” Johnson, who is assigned to Tyndall Air Force Base in Florida.

Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Christopher Ward criticized the tape test, too, calling it a blunt tool. “The measurements we use are unbelievably unreliable, and some people's careers are determined by these measurements,” he said. With that being said, it's their own fault for letting it get that bad, just as much as it is the system's fault for doing bi-annual checks as opposed to something random.”

Ward opposes the idea of easing standards. “It's not like the [military's] tattoo policy; a tattoo doesn't really reflect on someone's work ethic or ability to serve, but being overweight or obese is a liability to the person and the people around them in an emergency situation,” he said.

Plenty of other troops share that sentiment. Marine Pvt. Richard Faler is one of them. A defense message system specialist, he once was considered unfit to serve. At 305 pounds, Faler fell far outside the Marine Corps’ weight standard for his 5-foot-10-inch frame.
Marines deployed to the Horn of Africa perform tire flips during a physical-training competition. (Photo: Sgt. Jamean Berry/Marine Corps)

It was only after dropping 90 pounds that he was finally cleared to attend boot camp. Faler, who now weighs in at about 150 pounds, said he thinks the Defense Department should hold Americans to even tougher standards if they wish to serve. “The standards are fine, if not a little too low,” he told Military Times. “Even though I, with the help of family and my recruiters, made the height-weight and [fitness] standards to ship to boot camp, I wish that I reached the fitness level of where I was midway through boot camp.

“Starting at the minimum Marine Corps standard was difficult,” he added. "I know it is designed to be as hard as you make it, but if the fitness standards were a little higher, I believe I would have been even better off."

Changes in the individual services

The new forcewide body composition rules are intended to set a baseline, minimum standard. The individual services would still be free to impose more rigorous requirements or additional metrics if they desire, officials said.

The Marine Corps, for example, evaluates its troops' general appearance and requires personnel to include a full-body photograph of themselves in uniform as part of each promotion packet. Traditionally, the service also has been more strict when it comes to measuring body fat.

That has changed though. Marine officials recently eased those standards. Under new rules that took effect in July, Marines who score extremely well on their fitness tests will be exempt from static body fat requirements. The service's policy is now on par with minimum forcewide standards for older personnel. Women in their late 30s are permitted to pack on a few extra pounds as the maximum body fat allowed for their age group was raised from 27 to 28 percent. And men over 36 can have a max of 20 percent body fat, an exemption previously limited to men over 40.

The Marine Corps also has halted use of the traditional tape test, moving to “self-tensioning” devices that experts call more accurate. And the service is considering creating a new job specialty for fitness instructors.

The Navy also has eased rules. For years, it had just two age categories: under 40 and over 40. Now they Navy has four, each with its own standards. The youngest personnel must maintain the lowest body fat levels while older sailors are allowed to carry some extra weight and still meet requirements.

The Air Force was granted a waiver in 2009 that allows it to use an alternative tape-test method, one that measures the circumference of the abdomen rather than the neck and waist. Some health experts believe abdominal measurements are a better indicator of body fat that poses the most significant health risk.

The Army, meanwhile, has begun a review of its body composition policies but officials are waiting to implement any changes until after the Pentagon releases its revised policy later this year.

Staff writers Oriana Pawlyk, Charlsy Panzino, Meghann Myers, Lance Bacon and Kevin Lilley contributed to this report.
Racism
America’s Mayors: ‘We’re Afraid for Our Police’

Two years after the unrest in Ferguson, America’s mayors have a newfound fear for their cities’ police officers.

By Taylor Gee and Ben Wofford

Politico, August 8, 2016

A year after America’s mayors declared their concern that “Ferguson could happen to us,” a more multifaceted anxiety over the relationship between police and minority communities has taken hold in the country’s city halls, a new Politico Magazine survey finds.

During one of the most tumultuous summers in urban politics, ignited by the murder of eight police officers after more controversial police shootings of black men, more than half of mayors say they are very worried about the safety of their black citizens but nearly three-quarters of mayors say they now fear for their officers’ lives as well.

The questions come on the one-year anniversary of Politico’s first race and policing survey, which found deep anxieties that the unrest in Ferguson could spread to their city. Today, two years after the death of Michael Brown, many of those same mayors have achieved a perspective that comes with having had time to address some of the underlying problems that contributed to the volatile relationship between citizens and cops in cities. New programs like diversity initiatives and unconscious bias training have come at the behest of a greater public awareness since the events in Ferguson and elsewhere, which Urban Institute expert Jesse Jannetta described as having "supercharged efforts around policing across the country." While the effectiveness of those programs has yet to be measured, they may be the reason why nearly 90 percent of mayors say their police have good or excellent relations with communities of color, and in an interesting change from 2015, no mayors rated their department’s relationship with those communities as poor.

The findings arrived as part of Politico Magazine’s sixth quarterly national Mayors’ Survey, conducted over the course of July as part of the magazine’s award-winning “What Works” series. The anonymous survey heard from a record 71 mayors—dotting the country from Philadelphia to Tampa, Providence to Denver, Chattanooga to Maui. While not a scientific poll—the vast majority of respondents were Democrats (over 80 percent, reflecting the leftward-tilt of city politics)—the survey represented a diverse range of cities and political cultures, including two cities that in recent years have grappled with the fallout of law enforcement shootings and death—Dallas and Minneapolis.

Mayors appeared conflicted about their support for their police—emphatic that their departments were well-trained, yet still dissatisfied with the structural chasm that separates white officers from communities of color. When asked whether their departments accurately reflect the racial makeup of their communities—a measure that reformers say is crucial to building trust with police—65 percent said no. That critical self-assessment has increased since 2015 by 11 percent since 2015. Mayors are not imagining this problem. Alan Berube, a Brookings Institution fellow who recently authored a report on police department demographics, told Politico that, "On average people of color in major local law enforcement agencies are underrepresented by an average of 24 percent compared to their share of the local population.” But on the positive side, an indication perhaps of the mayors’ clearer understanding of the situation in their cities and work they have undertaken to improve things, the number of mayors decreased
who say their police demographics are an extremely inaccurate depiction of their cities’ makeup. Asked about whether race and policing is a concern in their city, an overwhelming 81 percent said yes, with nearly a quarter calling it a “deep” concern.

**Police and Race: The Mayors Speak**

In 2015, a year after the Michael Brown shooting in Ferguson that begat the Black Lives Matter movement, POLITICO asked America’s mayors about the state of relations between their police and their communities of color. Thirty-one mayors responded. Now, after a year that has seen more controversial fatal encounters between police and black citizens and the tragic murders of eight police officers in Dallas by a lone black gunman, we went back to the mayors to ask those same questions again. Seventy-one responded this time, a signal of how important this issue is to them and the country at large.

Looking back on the past year, how concerned are you about race and police relations in your city?

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How can mayors describe their officers’ interactions with people of color as good, then express grave concern at the issue? The dichotomy, two mayors told Politico during in-depth interviews, was suggestive of the difficult political line mayors must now walk. While the mayors recognize an obligation to stand with victims of police practices, the recent killings of police are reminder of the need to be everybody’s leader.

“My advice for mayors is, you better be a mayor for all of your city,” Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti told Politico. “You better be a mayor for those who still feel there’s a gulf between them and their police department. And you better have the backs of your police officers who are your city employees, who are the face of your city and who we depend on for safety in our communities.” Addressing the issue of police demographics, Garcetti described the psychic legacy of the Rodney King riots in 1992 that permanently transformed L.A.—punctilious efforts he said are beginning to pay off more than 20 years later.

Garcetti recounted a police academy graduation he attended on the morning after the Dallas shootings that claimed the lives of five officers on duty at a Black Lives Matter protest march. During the graduation ceremony, a group of protesters arrived on the scene. “They probably had one idea of who police officers were,” said Garcetti. But the class that graduated that day included a man from a public housing program,
Latina women from the east side of LA and an Indian immigrant who was class president. All told, the newly minted police officers included eight white, 22 Hispanic, one black, one Filipino, and five Asian men and women. In a moment that shocked Garcetti and onlookers, the protesters paused their march to join the mayor at a news conference outside the graduation.

“IT showed the seeds we’ve been planting for years are beginning to flower and blossom,” Garcetti added, who says new estimates this year indicate LA’s police demographics mirror the city’s “almost exactly.”

Perhaps the one mayor in America no one wants to be right now—Mike Rawlings of Dallas—explained a political mood in his city that made sense of some data: Since the Brown shooting on Aug. 9, 2014, the department has been building up social capital, which it needed at just at the moment when the city was tested most. “I think that we were very fortunate,” Rawlings said. “If there is any fortune in this terrible tragedy, it’s that it came when it did.”

Rawlings, who came into office in 2011, suggested community policing reforms in his department had made strides with the community; he reminded Politico that many of the officers at the march were posing with marchers and joining in chants, just moments before shots rang out. “Because of the work that has taken place over the last three or four years in regards to police strategies, a focus on de-escalation, the money we’ve spent on community policing,” said Rawlings, “we were able to fall back on those.” While the Dallas Police Department is not particularly aligned demographically with it’s citizens, it is markedly closer than the suburban departments of Dallas County. As recently as 2014, four Dallas suburbs had more than twice the percentage of white police officers as they had white citizens.

The overwhelmingly Democratic mayors could hardly be said to have put race and policing on the back burner—a slim majority, 50.7 percent, told Politico that they were at least “worried” about the safety of people of color in officer interactions. But in a striking finding,
that number paled in comparison when the question was reversed: Eighty-six percent of mayors suggested they were “worried” or “very worried” for their officers’ safety.

“It’s a hard job. It’s a job I don’t think I could do,” Rawlings said. Dallas is said to have one of the lowest-morale departments in the country; in a survey of Dallas police officers last year, 72 percent of respondents reported that morale is “low” or the “lowest its ever been. Added Garcetti: “You can’t help but be affected by these killings, whether it is unjustified shootings by police officers or the cold-blooded assassinations of police officers.”

Tellingly, mayors resisted “Blue Lives Matter” and “Black Lives Matter” dichotomies—of the 36 mayors who expressed concern for the safety of people of color when they interact with the police, 35 did so, too, for the safety of their police. Only a minority of respondents indicated that they believe only one group—either the police or people of color—faces worrisome dangers while the other does not.

Rawlings agreed. “I am an ex-marketer so I appreciate catchy slogans,” said Rawlings. “But I think it does a disservice to everyone to simplify these things in such terms. The African-American struggle is much more complex than just Black Lives Matter, and blue lives.” He added, “These things just have a tendency to create separatism. And that’s what worries me.”

The remarks mirrored those of President Barack Obama, who attended the Dallas memorial service of the five slain officers and spoke movingly of “family and community, rights and responsibilities, law and self-government that is the hallmark of this nation.” The Democratic mayors, unsurprisingly, are supportive; 73 percent responded he’s handled the issue “well” or “very well.” But mayors, in an interesting development, seemed to be cooling to Obama’s leadership on the issue—perhaps as they look more to local leaders and solutions than the bully pulpit in a time of crisis. From last year, the number of respondents who reported that Obama has handled the issue of race and policing “neither well nor poorly” jumped from 3 to 18 percent, and his approval numbers among mayors fell 13 percentage points, from 86 percent last year.

Mayors also seemed less inclined to indict their police officers, even in the aftermath of two controversial shootings of black men, Philando Castile and Alton Sterling. Asked to rank on a scale of 1 to 10 how well their police officers are trained to handle use-of-force situations, mayors gave an average ranking of 7.5—and just shy of 60 percent gave their officers an “8” or higher.

The issue of training, once a flash point in the police wars, has seemed to lose some of its crusading zeal—but Mayors Rawlings and Garcetti suggested their cities are in step with new training regimens. “You’ve got to train, you’ve got to constantly go back and retrain,” Rawlings said. “That’s what you need. That’s what any great operations company does. I don’t believe across the country the passion around training is there the way it should be.” Garcetti added that far-off tech breakthroughs—like the much-discussed body cameras for police—are coming soon to LA, where by the end of next calendar year, all patrol divisions will wear them. “I think the cameras are a big enabler. But I’ve always said they’re not the end all be all, just as radios were really important to take policing to the next step.”

The mayors’ answers and remarks reflect a sense that this generation of mayors will be assessed by how well they responded to this challenging historical moment, perhaps not unlike the mayors of the late ’60s. It seems unlikely to be a coincidence that in Politico Magazine’s concurrent survey, the top three mayors ranked as best qualified for president—Garcetti, Rawlings and Stephanie Rawlings-Blake of Baltimore—preside in cities that have become hot spots for tumultuous political and policy debates around race and policing.
“In these rough times, I’ve seen more connections in the last few weeks, and more bright lights in the midst of this tragedy than I’ve felt in a long time,” Garcetti said.

For mayors expressing disgust at the problem but optimism with urban leadership, it was Obama’s words in Dallas, standing next to Rawlings, that best summed up the survey’s results.

“I strongly believe that there is no contradiction, between us protecting our officers and honoring our officers and making sure that they have all the tools that they need to do their job,” said Obama, “and building trust between police officers and departments and the communities that they serve.”

PARTICIPATING MAYORS (71): Steven S. Choi, Irvine, CA; Noam Bramson, New Rochelle, NY; Nan Whaley, Dayton, OH; Betsy Hodges, Minneapolis, MN; Steve Hogan, Aurora, CO; Stephanie Miner, Syracuse, NY; Rick Kriseman, St. Petersburg, FL; Sly James, Kansas City, MO; John Marchione, Redmond, WA; Madeline Rogero, Knoxville, TN; Dan Horrigan, Akron, OH; Mick Cornett, Oklahoma City, OK; Lovely Warren, Rochester, NY; Steve Adler, Austin, TX; Nina Jonas, Ketchum, ID; Buddy Dyer, Orlando, FL; Jeri Muoio, West Palm Beach, FL; Larry Wolgast, Topeka, KS; John Sawyer, Santa Rosa, CA; Chin Ho Liao, San Gabriel, CA; Andrew Gillum, Tallahassee, FL; Gregory J. Oravec, Port St. Lucie, FL; Hardie Davis, Augusta, GA; John Giles, Mesa, AZ; Jon Mitchell, New Bedford, MA; Jennifer Roberts, Charlotte, NC; Mike Huether, Sioux Falls, SD; Helene Schneider, Santa Barbara, CA; Jonathan Rothschild, Tucson, AZ; Paul Dyster, Niagara Falls, NY; Edwin M. Lee, San Francisco, CA; Adrian O. Mapp, Plainfield, NJ; Mark Stodola, Little Rock, AR; Robert Stephens, Springfield, MO; Miro Weinberger, Burlington, VT; Kitty Pierch, Eugene, OR; Kathy Sheehan, Albany, NY; Jim Kenney, Philadelphia, PA; Betsy Price, Fort Worth, TX; Bao Nguyen, Garden Grove, CA; Marilyn Strickland, Tacoma, WA; Ras J. Baraka, Newark, NJ; Pete Buttigieg, South Bend, IN; Robert Garcia, Long Beach, CA; Ethan Strimling, Portland, ME; Frank Ortis, Pembroke Pines, FL; Andy Berke, Chattanooga, TN; Alan Arakawa, Maui County, HI; Suzanne Jones, Boulder, CO; Mike Spano, Yonkers, NY; Charlie Hales, Portland, OR; Mary Casillas Salas, Chula Vista, CA; Karen Freeman-Wilson, Gary, IN; Acquanetta Warren, Fontana, CA; Marni Retzer, Cape Coral, FL; Domenic J. Sarno, Springfield, MA; Dewey F. Bartlett Jr., Tulsa, OK; Denny Doyle, Beaverton, OR; Michael S. Rawlings, Dallas, TX; Jorge O. Elorza, Providence, RI; Carolyn Goodman, Las Vegas, NV; Toni H. Harp, New Haven, CT; Mitch Landrieu, New Orleans, LA; William Capote, Palm Bay, FL; Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, Baltimore, MD; Pauline Russo Cutter, San Leandro, CA; Javier M. Gonzales, Santa Fe, NM; Bob Buckhorn, Tampa, FL; Joseph M. Petty, Worcester, MA; Byron W. Brown, Buffalo, NY; Michael Hancock, Denver, CO
Debate flares after black college students seek a non-white roommate

By Nick Anderson and Susan Svrluga
The Washington Post, August 11, 2016

In most respects, the roommate-wanted notice seemed routine. Three students at the Claremont colleges in Southern California were looking for a fourth this summer to join them in an off-campus house. They added a caveat in parentheses: “POC only,” they said, using a common abbreviation for people of color.

Pitzer student Karé Ureña. (Photo courtesy of Karé Ureña)

When a classmate challenged that condition, the Pitzer College student who posted the notice on Facebook pushed back. “It’s exclusive [because] I don’t want to live with any white folks,” wrote Karé Ureña, who is black.

The online comments touched off a debate this week over race at Pitzer and neighboring colleges, one that flared into national headlines after the Claremont Independent student magazine wrote about it.

To some, Ureña’s request was completely understandable following a racially charged year when many students of color had demanded more support from the administration. To others, it was simple racism to exclude potential roommates based on skin color.

The thread fit into the heated discussions about race, identity, culture, freedom of speech and campus “safe spaces” that have played out at colleges across the country, from Yale to Missouri and beyond.

[A historic number of college freshmen expect to protest this year]

Pitzer President Melvin Oliver — a sociologist who is an expert on racial inequality — sent a message to the campus community Wednesday about the housing ad and the debate it sparked. It read, in part:

While Pitzer is a community of individuals passionately engaged in establishing intracultural safe spaces for marginalized groups, the Facebook post and several subsequent comments are inconsistent with our Mission and values. …

This is but another example to us that social media is not an effective platform to engage in complex dialog on seemingly intractable critical issues that have varied histories and contested understandings. They create more heat than light and invite extreme viewpoints that intentionally obfuscate the nuanced context that surrounds these issues. Pitzer offers its new 2-course Intercultural Understanding requirement and dedicates new curricular and extracurricular programming to address difficult issues of racism, diversity, community discourse and national and international political conflict.

The five Claremont colleges — Pitzer, Pomona, Claremont McKenna, Harvey Mudd and Scripps — are a community of highly regarded schools east of Los Angeles.

As of last fall, 48 percent of the 1,067 undergraduates at Pitzer were identified as white. Fifteen percent were Hispanic, 9 percent Asian American, 9 percent multiracial and 5 percent African American. The rest were either foreign students or of unknown race or ethnicity. The demographic profiles of the other Claremont colleges are fairly similar.

Claremont McKenna was swept up last fall in the national debate over the racial climate on college campuses. Student protesters pushed for several measures focused on diversity in student affairs and academics.

Amid the protests, Claremont McKenna’s dean of students stepped down in November after writing a much-criticized email to a student about how the college could better serve “those who don’t fit our CMC mold.” But some on campus defended the dean and denounced the protests as uncivil and excessive.

[Mizzou’s impact is felt on campuses nationwide, as protests over race spread]
Now a roommate solicitation from three black students has become another flashpoint.

Ureña, 20, a junior at Pitzer, and one of her roommates, Sajo Jefferson, 19, a sophomore at Pomona, defended their query in a statement to The Washington Post. Ureña describes herself as Afro-Caribbean and Jefferson identifies as a multiracial black person. Minority communities on campus, they said, constantly must deal with issues that arise when they are surrounded by classmates who don’t understand where they are coming from and have little interest in finding out.

“When and if you understand this context, it becomes clear that students of color seeking a living space that is all-POC is not only reasonable, but can be necessary,” they wrote to The Post. “We live in a world where the living circumstances of POC are grounded in racist social structures that we can not opt out of. These conditions threaten the minds, bodies and souls of people of color both within and without the realms of higher education. We are fighting to exist.”

Asked if the debate that unfolded was a reflection of national events and a glimpse of what the mood on many campuses may be like this coming year, they responded: “Our people are being killed. Every which way, through every which angle. Our people are being killed. Our housing arrangements are not racist. They are not exclusive. We are simply fighting to exist and we are fighting to exist in whatever way we can.”

Ureña said Thursday she removed the query from the Pitzer College Class of 2018 Facebook page after the three students found a fourth roommate.

But several students who saw the original post described the conversation that unfolded there and shared screen shots of it; the discussion appeared civil and thoughtful, though it elicited strong emotions on both sides.

One person questioned the “POC only” condition, and wrote “housing segregation is illegal.”

A student who said she is supportive of Ureña’s preference to live with other people of color questioned the wording, wondering if it sounded restrictive to exclude other groups.

Another responded: “People of color are allowed to create safe POC only spaces. It is not reverse racism or discriminatory.” That student wrote that it comes down to self-preservation.

Later in the thread, a post read: “I think that a POC-only housing policy is about as clear-cut an example of prejudice as one could find. I completely understand the desire not to live with people who could be racist, but excluding all white people is an extremely blunt instrument to achieve that end and a harmful overgeneralization.”

Another wrote: “White people have cause[d] so much trauma on these campuses … why in the world would I want to bring that into my home? A place that is supposed to be safe for me?”

Dalia Zada, a Pitzer junior who is Kurdish Syrian, questioned an account of the debate that was published Tuesday by the Claremont Independent, calling just a report of a Facebook thread, without the context.

“If we really wanted to create something about racism and call it an ‘article,’ we could just copy and paste the comments on the Claremont Independent’s Facebook page of this article,” Zada said. “They’re horrific.”

Zada said she also was offended by the Independent’s choice of a photograph to accompany the article. It depicted a black man drinking from a fountain labeled, “FOR COLORED ONLY.”

“Their audacity to use that picture as a photo for their article is disgusting in itself.”

Elliot Dordick, who wrote the article for the Independent, stands by it. “There was absolutely no spin put into this piece,” he said. “It was made up almost entirely of my classmates’ quotes. … I can’t find a single word of the piece that was my own personal opinion.”
He said several people questioned how he, as a white person, could write objectively about racial issues. In a phone interview with The Post and subsequent email follow-up, he said that there were several resident assistants who said outright that they’re not interested in open dialogue about racial issues.

“The fact that RAs, who are selected as student leaders, admitted that they are not interested in discussion, that they want instead to simply spew their own opinions without facing any disagreement, is a disgrace to Pitzer College,” Dordick said.

Dordick said he wasn’t surprised at the debate because racial tensions have been heightened during the past year. He described last year’s protests on Claremont McKenna College: “Hundreds of students stormed through the center of Claremont McKenna College chanting ‘Black Lives Matter’ slogans. The president of the college came out to a central area of campus and was verbally attacked by many students of color whose emotions were out of control. They shrieked about their experiences on campus and demanded racially segregated ‘safe spaces.’ Two girls even went on a hunger strike.

“… The Claremont Colleges are radically liberal and ideologically monolithic.”

Paloma Aleman, who graduated this year and describes herself as Mexican-American, saw the online debate and said that with some distance from campus she can see that the community at Pitzer is a bit sheltered. She said last year there was lengthy debate about “safe spaces” on campus, with some saying they were necessary and some calling them exclusionary.

“We have a great community in terms of creating safe spaces,” she said, noting that it caught her off-guard that the housing request this week sparked such intense reaction. “I was surprised that people thought it was an extreme request, given certain incidents that happened on campus last year.”

[“College is the last space that should be a ‘safe space’”: A voice of protest against student protests]

The fatal shooting of a black man by a white police officer in Ferguson, Mo., happened while Aleman was studying abroad in Italy. When she returned to campus she noticed “a huge cleavage between students of color and students who aren’t of color — a dramatic change.”

“Once I was back in the U.S., I definitely felt there was a huge shift in the racial climate,” she said. “I felt that racial tensions had definitely increased. Students of color were definitely feeling unsafe.”

Josue Pasillas, a senior and president of the Pitzer College Student Senate, said he was aware of the debate before the student magazine story ran and that it wasn’t shocking.

“A student of color’s preference to live with students of color only is not racist, and to call this housing segregation is wrong,” he said. “Over time, people of color have been segregated by people with privilege, not vice versa. Students of color face systemic discrimination daily and have a right to live in solidarity with other students of color in spaces where they do not have to experience judgment and racism from others.”

He continued, in an email to The Post:

“This is no different than having student organizations, such as the Latinx Student Union, the Black Student Union, the Asian Pacific American Coalition, Mixed Identities Exchange and other ethnic support groups on campus. This is not racism.”

“Several students directly notified staff of The Claremont Independent their preference to not be quoted in an article and for the publication to still go ahead and use their statements is wrong. That is not right.”

Dordick, the article’s author, responded that it was entirely appropriate for him to cite Facebook posts that were visible to the school community: “Much in the same way that Donald Trump does not need to give consent to have his public Tweets quoted, I do not need to ask for students’ consent before quoting their public statements on social media.”
Chance Kawar, a senior and the acting secretary of the student senate, said that the college encourages students to live with people with whom they feel comfortable and safe. “For some students, this may mean seeking housing arrangements with those who share a similar racial or gender identity,” Kawar said.

“Coming to live and learn at a college is a challenging proposition for many individuals, so we should be doing everything we can to make them feel empowered as students,” Kawar said. “This is especially true for students of color, who continue to face overwhelming and discriminatory obstacles within institutions of higher education.”

Ureña said she has no regrets about the Facebook posting. She and Jefferson said they take issue with people who focus on “white people and their ‘exclusion’ in this housing ad.” They said they want to “reframe” the conversation.

“This is not about white people,” they wrote. “It never has been. The insistence that it should be only reaffirms [our] understanding of how deeply we are submerged in a white-centric world. Recentering this question so it is about the well being of POC is therefore an act of resistance.”

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Judge tests limits of free speech with Facebook jury remarks

By Bruce Schreiner
The Associated Press, August 6, 2016

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — A Louisville judge, incensed when a prosecutor questioned his authority to scrap a jury panel because it lacked minorities, did not turn to appeals courts, legal precedent or other avenues typical for aggrieved jurists. He took to Facebook.

In provocative posts that now threaten to end his judicial career, Judge Olu Stevens, who is black, railed against the white prosecutor, Commonwealth's Attorney Tom Wine.

He wrote that Wine's request that the state Supreme Court review Stevens' decision to dismiss the jurors amounted to an attempt "to protect the right to impanel all-white juries," a charge Wine vehemently denies. Stevens suggested there was "something much more sinister," and wrote that the prosecutor will "live in infamy."

The Kentucky Judicial Conduct Commission believes Stevens went so far in misleading the public about Wine's request and undermining his own impartiality that it charged him with multiple counts of misconduct. Stevens is scheduled for a hearing Monday that could usher him off the bench for good.

But his posts ignited a debate about racial fairness, judicial impartiality and free speech that seems far from finished.

Experts say his cause was worthy: Stevens shined a light on a racial imbalance that has dogged the criminal justice system for generations. But his attack on a prosecutor for requesting an appellate opinion could cross an ethical line and threaten to drown out the issue he attempted to highlight.

"I think people in the minority community are grateful that he had the courage to raise the issue," said Reginald Glass, a member of the Louisville Metro Human Relations Commission and chairman of its advocacy board. "There's not total agreement on whether it was the right way or the wrong way to do it."

The judicial conduct commission wrote in court filings that it believes Stevens' comments violated Kentucky laws that require judges display no bias in cases before them. The commission also said Stevens' posts amounted to publicly pressuring Wine not to legally challenge his decisions.

Stevens and his supporters, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, insist he was exercising free-speech rights.

His punishment could range from a reprimand to removal from the bench. Wine declined to discuss the case. Stevens' lawyers didn't respond to requests for comment.

In April, Stevens agreed to temporarily step down from the bench. He also filed a federal lawsuit against the disciplinary panel, saying any punishment would have a chilling effect on judges, but he withdrew it Thursday without explanation.

The case began in late 2014 during an African-American defendant's trial. In a city that is 23 percent black, 41 potential jurors arrived — only one African-American, according to court records. The defense asked Stevens to dismiss the panel. He declined, noting the lack of diversity was unusual but the panel had been appropriately selected at random.

Neither side struck the black juror. As jury selection neared its end, four jurors too many remained. The clerk drew names randomly to strike. One was the African-American.
Stevens then dismissed the panel because it didn't represent the community's racial diversity.

In January 2015, after the defendant was acquitted by another jury, Wine asked Kentucky's Supreme Court to review whether a judge could dismiss a random jury panel for racial imbalance absent any evidence that minorities were intentionally excluded.

The Supreme Court agreed to hear the case in late 2015, and Stevens launched his social media campaign against Wine, chastising him for "complaining he should have had an all-white jury panel after losing a trial" and trying to "deceive the people."

Activists rallied outside Wine's office. The prosecutor said he had no intent to exclude black jurors, was not to blame for the racial make-up of the randomly-selected panel and merely wanted clarification on the law so it could be applied evenly statewide.

Kentucky's Supreme Court heard arguments but hasn't ruled.

The U.S. Supreme Court case that set the standard for juries' racial makeup — Batson v. Kentucky, born in the same court system nearly three decades ago — doesn't guarantee that black defendants get black jurors, only that the process for eliminating them be fair and color-blind.

But "unless you are totally blind, no judge can help but realize that when 100 people come into a courtroom for jury selection and there are one or two or none, at times, who are visible minorities, it's a severe problem," said attorney Ashish Joshi, a member of the American Bar Association's diversity committee.

The problem has been known in Louisville at least since 2005, when the Courier-Journal reported that people from the lowest-income, predominantly-black neighborhoods were less likely to sit on juries.

Stevens' case reinforces the need to re-examine jury representation, said State Rep. Reginald Meeks, D-Louisville, but "the personalities in this instance have overshadowed the issue." Meeks has pushed for a comprehensive study on juries' racial makeup but said efforts have been stymied in the legislature.

Underrepresentation is a legitimate issue that should be debated, said Charles Gardner Geyh, an Indiana University law professor. But, he added, there are limits, and the accusations against Stevens hinge on the balance between judicial ethics and a judge's right to speak out.

"It's generally regarded as a bad idea for judges to weigh in outside of court on a matter that could well wind up back in the judge's court," Gardner said.

Stevens — appointed in 2009 by then-Democratic Gov. Steve Beshear and retained by voters in 2010 and 2014 — has never skirted the spotlight. He's a prodigious contributor to social media — one colleague dubbed him "Judge Selfie," the Courier-Journal reported. In one 2015 post, months before his feud with Wine, Stevens criticized home-invasion victims who said the crime left their 3-year-old afraid of black men. Stevens called their opinions "stereotyped and racist" — echoing his comments in court. The disciplinary commission accused him of misconduct in that incident in its recent batch of charges against him.

Judges must be mindful when speaking out, but Stevens raised legitimate concerns about jury diversity, said Dallas attorney John G. Browning, who writes about judges using social media.

"Do we want judges to be cloistered in their ivory towers, closed off from the very public that they serve and the issues that are of concern to the community?" Browning said. "Or do we allow them to speak publicly on some issues that may very well have some bearing?"

AP correspondent Claire Galofaro contributed to this report
Justice Department to Streamline Tracking of Police Killings

By Charlie Savage
The New York Times, August 9, 2016

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration is moving forward with a plan to better track killings by police officers, as heightened national scrutiny of such deaths has reinforced criticism of its reliance on self-reporting by state and local law enforcement agencies.

In a notice published in the Federal Register this week, the Justice Department said it would ask law enforcement agencies and medical examiner’s offices to fill out forms when there is a news report or another indication that a person died while in police custody.

Under the proposed system, which would cover 19,450 state and local law enforcement agencies and about 685 medical examiner’s or coroner’s offices, they would also be asked to fill out forms about the total number of such cases every three months. The department’s Bureau of Justice Statistics would then compile that information.

The proposal comes as police killings of African-Americans have fueled protests in recent years in places like Ferguson, Mo., and Baltimore, and led to the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement. The resulting scrutiny of the issue has focused attention on the lack of reliable and comprehensive data about how many people are killed by the police each year.

The government’s existing system is called the Arrest-Related Deaths program, which is intended to be a census of a variety of causes of such deaths, including suicides, accidents and deaths from natural causes. Critics say it does not provide accurate data about killings by police officers in part because it relies on self-reporting by law enforcement officials.

In 2014, for example, The Wall Street Journal gathered data on police shootings from 2007 to 2012 from 105 of the nation’s largest police agencies and compared it to the F.B.I.’s statistics. It found that more than 550 police shootings were not included in the national database or were not attributed to the agency involved.

The Guardian, which reported the Justice Department proposal on Monday, and The Washington Post are conducting projects that will try to fill the gaps by compiling data on arrest-related deaths across the country.

“Because of concerns about variations in data collection methodology and coverage,” the Justice Department notice said, the Bureau of Justice Statistics has “developed and tested new methodologies for collecting data” aimed at enabling “accurate and comprehensive accounting of deaths that occur during the process of arrest.”
Such information, it said, is critical for law enforcement agencies to “demonstrate responsiveness to the citizens and communities they serve, transparency related to law enforcement tactics and approaches, and accountability for the actions of officers.”

The F.B.I. director, James B. Comey, had previously foreshadowed that the government was trying to develop a better system to understand the scope and frequency of arrest-related deaths. The notice, which invited comments on the proposed system until Oct. 3, was a step toward that policy goal.

The notice did not make clear whether killings by federal law enforcement agents would be included in the new system. It proposed asking state and local agencies — not federal ones — to fill out forms about arrest-related deaths. However, the notice did not address how coroners were supposed to address killings by federal officers.

In 2013, The New York Times reported that the F.B.I. had deemed its agents faultless in all 150 cases, dating to at least 1993, in which agents had shot people, based on documents obtained through Freedom of Information Act litigation. The bureau later decided to fire one agent it had faulted over a shooting in Queens in 2012, although the person he shot — a man trying to burglarize his car — survived.

More recently, a bureau review panel proposed disciplining an agent who shot the tire of a suspected drug dealer’s car during an arrest attempt in Baltimore in 2014, finding that the agent violated the bureau’s policy on using lethal force. But it cleared other agents who shot and killed the suspect.
Poll: Young people's fear of white extremism varies by race

By Melinda Deslatte

The Associated Press, August 8, 2016

The threat of violence by people inspired by foreign extremists invokes fear in a majority of young Americans across racial groups. But for young people of color, particularly African Americans, that fear is matched or surpassed by worries about violence from white extremists.

A new GenForward poll of Americans age 18-30 shows widespread anxiety among young people about attacks from both inside and outside the United States.

Sixty-two percent of young African-Americans and 55 percent of Hispanics surveyed said they were very concerned about the threat of violence committed by white extremists, compared to one-third of whites and 41 percent of Asian-Americans.

GenForward is a survey by the Black Youth Project at the University of Chicago with the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. The poll is designed to pay special attention to the voices of young adults of color, highlighting how race and ethnicity shape the opinions of a new generation.

Gregg Higgins, 27, was one of the whites who said he was very worried about violence by extremists in his own race. In fact, he said he was more concerned about "the homegrown white extremists" than the threat of violence from people outside the United States or people inspired by foreign extremists.

A social worker in Pittsburgh, Higgins said the growing political tension during the current election cycle has "shown a really ugly part of our past coming through and being more heard." He described it as "white males who are angry and who aren't now afraid to show that anger."

"That fear of loss of control and loss of privilege is what's inspiring this vitriol and this hate," Higgins said.

Worry about attacks from people currently living in the U.S. who are motivated by foreign extremists spreads more evenly across racial groups, with at least half of whites, blacks, Asians and Hispanics describing themselves as very concerned about that threat.

Violence committed by people from outside the country also caused unease, especially among Hispanic young adults. Fifty-six percent of Hispanics polled said they were very concerned, compared to 49 percent of African-Americans, 40 percent of Asian-Americans and 41 percent of whites.

The angst comes after a spate of mass shootings. Nine black people were shot and killed last year at a church in Charleston, South Carolina, by a white man who officials say talked of starting a race war. In June, a gunman born in the U.S. to Afghan immigrants opened fire in a crowded gay dance club in Orlando, Florida, killing 49 people in the worst mass shooting in U.S. history. An autopsy report identified him as a white male.

Last month, five police officers in Dallas were killed by a black gunman during a protest against police shootings of black men, and three law enforcement officers in Baton Rouge were shot and killed by a black man who authorities said appeared to be targeting people wearing a badge.
Darsi Vazquez, a 25-year-old Hispanic college student from Huntsville, Alabama, described herself as very concerned about the threat of violence from foreign and domestic extremists alike, but she thinks the fear is exacerbated by news coverage of mass shootings around the country and the types of overt racism that appear in social media.

"A few years back technology wasn't where it's at it now, so you couldn't see things like this happening like you see it now," Vazquez said. "I don't know if it's necessarily getting worse, but we're seeing it more now. We don't just see what's happening outside our window, we also see what's going on outside other people's window."

Most young adults in the poll labeled as hate crimes both the shooting deaths at the Charleston church and the Orlando night club, against African-Americans and against LGBT people, respectively.

But the poll shows people view the Orlando shooting differently, depending on their race.

Among young whites, most also described the Orlando shooting as a terrorist attack. Fifty-eight percent of whites considered it that, compared to only 32 percent of African-Americans, 40 percent of Hispanics and 44 percent of Asian-Americans. Gunman Omar Mateen pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group during a call with police dispatchers during a standoff before he was shot and killed.

A third or less of young people of each racial and ethnic group called the Charleston attack terrorism.

Terrorism concerns have young Americans across racial groups largely in agreement that some rights and freedoms should be sacrificed in efforts to prevent an attack. Eleven percent of all young adults polled said they believe such sacrifices are always necessary, while 54 percent said they're at least sometimes necessary.

But most young people said Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump's calls to temporarily ban Muslims from coming to the U.S. goes too far.

More than two-thirds of those surveyed said they oppose a temporary prohibition on any Muslim who isn't a U.S. citizen from entering the country: 64 percent of whites, 66 percent of Hispanics and 79 percent of African-Americans and Asian-Americans.

The poll of 1,940 adults age 18-30 was conducted July 9-20 using a sample drawn from the probability-based GenForward panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. young adult population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 3.8 percentage points.

The survey was paid for by the Black Youth Project at the University of Chicago using grants from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the Ford Foundation.

Respondents were first selected randomly using address-based sampling methods, and later interviewed online or by phone.

Online:


Follow Melinda Deslatte at [http://twitter.com/melindadeslatte](http://twitter.com/melindadeslatte)
‘A terribly devastating event’: Black man killed by SWAT team was innocent, officials say

By Michael E. Miller
The Washington Post, August 10, 2016

Matrice Stanley, center, sister of Donnell Thompson, speaks to reporters about her brother’s death outside Los Angeles County Hall on Tuesday (Nick Ut/AP)

It was not yet dawn when the armored vehicles, black and hulking like Batmobiles, rumbled into the residential neighborhood in Compton, Calif. A carjacker had stolen a vehicle in Los Angeles, exchanged gunfire with sheriff’s deputies and then ditched his prize, disappearing on foot into a dense patchwork quilt of pink houses.

The armored vehicles — and the heavily armed deputies inside them — were there to find and capture the armed carjacker.

Instead, they found a different black man, Donnell Thompson.

As the carjacker hid in a house several blocks away, Thompson slept in a stranger’s yard. He was 27 years old but possessed the mental faculties of a much younger man. He loved Uno, Michael Jackson and the Lakers. He was so gentle and shy he went by the nickname Little Bo Peep, his family told the Los Angeles Times. He had a clean record and was unarmed.

From inside one of the armored vehicles, however, Los Angeles County Sheriff’s deputies knew none of this. When Thompson didn’t respond to commands, the deputies detonated flash-bangs. When he still didn’t move, they hit him with foam bullets.

And when he allegedly ran toward them, a deputy atop the armored vehicle opened fire with an assault rifle, striking Thompson twice in the torso.

Thompson died. At almost the same instant, the real carjacker was arrested.

That was July 28. For almost two weeks, the Sheriff’s Department insisted that Thompson was a second suspect in the carjacking.

On Tuesday, the department admitted it had killed an innocent man.

“No question this is a terribly devastating event,” Capt. Steve Katz said during a news conference. He said there was “no physical evidence” connecting Thompson to the carjacking or shootout and promised a “thorough” and “complete” investigation into the shooting, according to the Associated Press.

Thompson’s relatives said they wanted more than an investigation, however. They wanted charges for the deputy who killed Thompson.

“I wouldn’t treat an animal this bad,” his sister Matrice Stanley told the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, according to the AP. “How is this justifiable?”

The incident is the latest in a string of fatal officer-involved shootings of black men across America. As in the recent police killings of Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge and Philando Castile in Falcon Heights, Minn., the shooting in Compton has prompted accusations of racial profiling and excessive force.

Stanley said she thought her brother’s race played a role in the shooting.
The incident also raises questions about the militarization of law enforcement, as departments across the country increasingly use armored vehicles and assault rifles to fight crime.

“In a civilian neighborhood, they bring an urban assault vehicle,” Brian Dunn, an attorney representing the Thompson family, told the Huffington Post. “The BearCat, it’s like a tank. Their response to this situation was so aggressive. Their tactics were so aggressive.”

The tragedy began in the early hours of July 28 when Robert Alexander, 24, allegedly stole a Honda Civic in Los Angeles, taking the car at gunpoint from its owner.

Fifteen miles to the south, in Compton, a sheriff’s deputy later spotted the Civic traveling erratically and decided to pull it over, according to the Los Angeles Times. The license plate showed the car was stolen. As a second patrol car arrived, the Civic drove off, punching through an elementary school’s fence.

As the car sped through Compton, Alexander allegedly shot at deputies, causing them to return fire. After the Civic crashed into a parked car, Alexander escaped on foot.

As he ran along Slater Street, the carjacker threatened two people on a front porch, according to the Times. He then entered the house, threw his gun under a couch, took his clothes off and climbed into a bed where an elderly woman — a complete stranger — was sleeping.

Despite the ruse, deputies found him and arrested him at 4:59 a.m.

Seconds later, a man living a few blocks away called 911. He told dispatchers he was taking out his trash when he spotted a figure lying in his front yard, the Times reported.

Although authorities already had Alexander in custody, there was confusion over whether he was the carjacker. A deputy who responded to the 911 call, meanwhile, saw that the figure in the man’s front yard resembled the carjacking suspect: a black man between the ages of 20 and 30 wearing dark pants or shorts and a basketball jersey.

The deputy radioed that he had found the carjacker who had fired at police, and the armored vehicles quickly arrived.

Matrice Stanley, at left in black, and family members appear before Los Angeles County supervisors Tuesday to protest Donnell Thompson’s fatal shooting by a sheriff’s deputy. (Nick Ut/AP)

Thompson didn’t respond to commands, instead remaining motionless with one hand under his head and another concealed near his waist. An object that looked like a gun lay nearby, Katz said. When flash-bang explosives failed to wake Thompson, SWAT deputies shot him with foam bullets.

At that point, Thompson suddenly pushed himself to his feet and ran toward an armored vehicle, Katz said. An officer in the vehicle’s turret shot Thompson twice in the upper torso with an M4 assault rifle, the Times reported.

Stanley, Thompson’s sister, said she thought her brother didn’t respond to commands because he was afraid and confused, the AP reported. She called for the deputy to be fired, questioning why he opened fire when he was protected by the armored car.

Dunn, the family attorney, accused the Sheriff’s Department of “tactical blunders” and called the shooting a “mistake.”
“We’ve done our own investigation and have not heard anything to suggest that Donnell Thompson was in any way acting in an aggressive manner or in any way demonstrating that he posed a threat to anyone,” Dunn told the Huffington Post. Dunn also claimed: “He hadn’t committed a crime, he was not wanted, he had not done anything wrong, he was legally authorized to be where he was, he was legally authorized to be doing what he was doing, he wasn’t breaking the law and he wasn’t armed — when you take that backdrop of facts it’s just not only a tragedy, but it’s a homicide, in every sense of the word.”

The attorney said he had filed a federal civil rights claim against Los Angeles County and was preparing to file a lawsuit as well.

Experts cautioned, however, that just because the Sheriff’s Department had admitted Thompson was innocent doesn’t mean the shooting will be declared unjustified.

“The commands being ignored, they used less-lethal force that was ineffective, the guy was running away. … Those factors are very relevant in leading them to believe, ‘This guy has done something wrong. This is our guy,’” Ed Obayashi, a Plumas County sheriff’s deputy and attorney who advises several law enforcement agencies in the state, told the Times.

Adding to concerns over the incident, however, are two other shootings of unarmed men by the same department in the past two weeks. A homeless man was shot on Aug. 2 while running from deputies. And a man caught tagging a house with graffiti was shot while hiding in a shower. Those shootings are also under investigation, the Times reported.

But it is the death of Thompson that has stirred anger and spurred protests.

“His age was 27, but mentally … he was probably 16,” Stanley told the Times.

“He was soft-spoken. He was gentle. What was the threat?” said cousin Larmar Avila, according to the AP. “I’m upset, I’m angry, I’m passionate, I’m emotional. It’s so much. All in one. And how do you expect us to act, when we’re patient, and we’re waiting and we’re waiting. We’re not going crazy. We’re waiting. Patiently. Twiddling thumbs. I’m shaking. I’m scared. I’m scared for my brothers. Scared for my family members. And it shouldn’t be like that.”


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A White homeowner called 911 to report ‘hoodlums’ outside. Then he fatally shot a Black man. [The Washington Post, 2016-08-09]
Religion
Court rules Marine’s religious rights not violated

By Dianna Cahn
Stars and Stripes, August 11, 2016

WASHINGTON — The highest U.S. military court has upheld the bad conduct discharge of a Marine whose case had climbed to the top of the legal system over the question of whether her religious freedom had been violated.

In a 4-1 ruling, the U.S. Court of Appeals of the Armed Forces upheld lower court determinations that Lance Cpl. Monifa Sterling’s religious rights were not violated when a superior ordered her to take down signs containing a biblical passage that she’d posted around her desk at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. The judges upheld lower court conclusions that Sterling’s refusal, in the context of a contentious relationship with her bosses and the combative nature of the passage, was less an exercise of religion than an act of insubordination.

Sterling was ordered demoted and discharged in a 2014 court-martial and the case has been climbing through the courts since, with defenders of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act arguing on Sterling’s behalf.

The court found Sterling had failed to establish a RFRA case and determined that her superior’s orders to remove the signs was “lawful.”

“Without question, a junior Marine in a contentious relationship with her superiors posting combative signs in the workplace could undermine good order and discipline,” the ruling said.

“This is not the usual case where an individual or group sought accommodation for an exercise of religion and was denied,” wrote Judge Margaret Ryan on behalf of the majority. “Nor is this a case where the practice at issue was either patently religious, such as wearing a hijab, or one where it was not but a government actor somehow knew the practice was religious and prohibited it on that basis.”

The First Liberty Institute, which led Sterling’s defense, said it would file an appeal with the U.S. Supreme Court.

“This is absolutely outrageous,” Kelly Shackelford, president and CEO of First Liberty Institute, said in a statement. “This is shameful, it’s wrong and it sets a terrible precedent, jeopardizing the constitutional rights of every single man and woman in military service. This cannot be allowed to stand.”

Bradley Girard, a constitutional litigation fellow at the Americans United for Separation of Church and State, said the ruling served to protect religious freedom in the military by calling Sterling out for using it to justify her actions.

“It’s an important decision because disingenuous claims of religious liberty harm people who legitimately have claims of religious liberty and the institutions that seek to protect those,” Girard said.

Girard said due to the facts of the case, he was doubtful the Supreme Court would hear it.

As the first case of its kind to reach the Armed Forces appeals court, the case had held the potential to set precedent on questions about basic religious freedoms in a military environment. The appeals were based
on the question of whether lower courts had adequately examined the case in the context of the religious freedom act.

The judges found that Sterling’s actions focused more on her conflict with her bosses than her religion when she posted signs around her desk that read, “No weapon formed against me shall prosper” and repeatedly refused to take them down. They also noted that Sterling had disobeyed other orders and had been denied promotion due to her poor behavior.

In a dissenting opinion, Judge Kevin Ohlson wrote that although it was likely the outcome of the case would be the same, the lower court had failed to look at the question of whether Sterling’s religious beliefs were sincere. That failure, he said, merited the case be returned to the court to look at the issue.

Ohlson said it was likely that Sterling had “mixed motives for acting upon those beliefs such as invoking a biblical passage in order to engage in a passive-aggressive display of contempt for military leadership.”

“I readily concede that even if the (lower court) had applied the correct legal standard in this case, LCpl Sterling may not have prevailed on the merits,” Ohlson wrote.

But without the court properly examining the question, RFRA was not properly protected, Ohlson said.

“I conclude that the majority’s analysis of the underlying legal issues raises the prospect that other servicemembers in the future may be subjected to conviction at court-martial for merely engaging in religious exercise that is entitled to protection under the statute.”

That question could provide the basis for the Supreme Court to consider the case.

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By Victor Mather


Ibtihaj Muhammad became the first American Olympian to compete in a hijab Monday. (Credit: Lucy Nicholson/Reuters)

RIO DE JANEIRO — Drawn to fencing as a teenager because the athletes compete while fully covered, Ibtihaj Muhammad on Monday became the first United States Olympian in any sport to compete at a Games while wearing a hijab.

Muhammad, a first-time Olympian at age 30, came from behind to edge a Ukrainian fencer, Olena Kravatska, 15-13, in the round of 32 of the women’s saber competition, but she lost later Monday, to Cécilia Berder of France, 15-12, in the round of 16.

Saber is the quickest and most aggressive of the fencing disciplines. Fencers score quickly, slashing for points, without a lot of the fancy parrying of foil fencing. Milliseconds can separate a winning touch from one that is too slow.

Wearing a mask emblazoned with the American flag, Muhammad punctuated her scores with roars of delight and showed visible frustration when calls did not go her way.

“I always say that in a sport like fencing, you’re your own biggest opponent,” she said afterward. “If you can control yourself and your nerves and your emotions, and execute the actions that you want, you’ll always be successful, and I failed to do that today.

“This has been a beautiful experience for me. I know that this was written for me, the chips fell where they did, and I feel proud to represent Team U.S.A. even in defeat.”

Muhammad, of Maplewood, N.J., first tried fencing at age 13. When she competed in softball, tennis, track and volleyball, her mother, Denise, adjusted her uniforms in accordance with the family’s Muslim faith, adding stretch pants for track and sweatpants for volleyball.

“My parents were on a mission to find a sport without alteration,” Muhammad said in an interview in February.

Muhammad said of her hijab: “People ask Muslim women about it — not just athletes — all the time. Like, aren’t you hot? On a hot day, you’d still wear a shirt and pants. I would not leave the house without it.”

Muhammad’s accomplishments led to an invitation to join President Obama when he made his first visit as president to an American mosque in Baltimore in February. Muhammad was among the prominent American Muslims invited to a round-table discussion with Mr. Obama before his speech.

After losing on Monday, she said that many people in America, both Muslims and non-Muslims, did not believe Muslim women participated in sports.

“I want to break cultural norms and show girls that it’s important to be active; it’s important to be involved in sport,” she said.

The other American in the saber competition, Mariel Zagunis, the gold medalist in 2004 and 2008, also lost in the round of 16. The third American, Dagmara Wozniak, was eliminated in the round of 32.
Muslims sue Sterling Heights after city rejected mosque
By Niraj Warikoo
Detroit Free Press, August 11, 2016

U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Michigan and the Department of Justice are investigating whether a proposed mosque was treated fairly by Sterling Heights government.

The leaders of an Islamic center filed a lawsuit Wednesday against Sterling Heights after the city last year rejected their plans to build a mosque that was strongly opposed by many residents. And the U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan announced that her office and the Department of Justice are investigating whether the mosque was treated fairly.

In the federal lawsuit, the American Islamic Community Center accuses the city of being biased against Muslims, citing e-mails from city officials that talked about getting someone to investigate the possibility of the mosque's leaders being terrorists. In one e-mail, a police official asks whether the FBI can be contacted to see whether the mosque leaders are "on their radar."

Last year, the planning commission of Sterling Heights voted 9-0 to reject building a mosque on 15 Mile between Ryan and Mound roads. City officials and residents have said their rejection was not based on bigotry, noting that the city already has a mosque, but over concerns that the location was not suitable for such a large building and could cause traffic problems.

The case is one of several that have come up in recent years across metro Detroit involving mosques facing stiff opposition from nearby residents. The Department of Justice last year filed a lawsuit against Pittsfield Township after it denied an Islamic school permission to be built.

Reached by the Free Press on Wednesday, Sterling Heights Mayor Michael Taylor would not comment. Sterling Heights' Police Chief John Berg and City Planner Chris McLeod did not return messages seeking comment. Former Sterling Heights Police Chief Michael Reese did not comment.

Meanwhile, U.S. Attorney Barbara McQuade said Wednesday: "The Department of Justice and U.S. Attorney's Office have been conducting an independent investigation, and that investigation is ongoing."

The lawsuit alleges that the constitutional rights of the mosque members were violated in denying the mosque. Residents who opposed the Shi'ite mosque have said the building would be in a residential area that would cause congestion and wasn't suitable to the area around 15 Mile.

But the lawsuit said that some of the residential opposition was rooted in anti-Islam prejudice. At public meetings, some in Sterling Heights expressed concern about Islamic extremism; the tensions exposed strained relations between some in the Chaldean (Iraqi Catholic) community in Sterling Heights and metro Detroit Muslims.

"With a vociferous and racist member of the Planning Commission leading the charge, the Planning Commission voted to reject the site plan," said the lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court in Detroit. "With no
other choice, the American Islamic Community Center has filed this suit seeking equitable relief to build
the Mosque and seeks damages as the City of Sterling Heights’ conduct violates, among other things, the
Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act ... and the First and Fourteenth Amendments to the
United States Constitution."

The lead attorney filing the case on behalf of the mosque, currently based in Madison Heights, is Azzam
Elder, once the deputy to former Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano.

“We all know of a time in our history when sentiment in America were anti-Catholic, anti-Jewish, anti-
German, anti-Japanese, or anti-Black, and those times have forever stained on our history," Elder said in a
statement. "As defenders of the U.S. Constitution, we are confident that there will come a day when it will
also be inconceivable to be anti-Muslim. This is why we filed this lawsuit, in order to continue the struggle
of protecting the rights of all minority groups in America.”

Mayor Taylor has said previously that Sterling Heights respects diversity. About 23% of the residents of
the city are immigrants, one of the highest percentages among cities in southeastern Michigan. It has a
sizable Iraqi-American Christian community, some of whom escaped Islamic extremism in Iraq and had
voiced worries about the mosque.

On Sept. 2 last year, Taylor wrote on Facebook: "I completely and unequivocally denounce any anti-
Muslim bigotry."

He added: "I will work with the AICC (American Islamic Community Center) to ensure they have a place
to worship in our city."

Taylor told the Free Press last year: "I urge all residents to be respectful and tolerant of each other.
Regardless of the outcome, Sterling Heights must remain a place that is open and welcoming for people of
all races, faiths, ethnicities, and backgrounds."

Elder, though, said that "the City of Sterling Heights and its political leadership has had nearly one year to
make good on its wrong. They’ve failed to uphold the constitutional rights of its Muslim residents."

Mohammed Abd Rabboh, an attorney helping with the lawsuit, wrote on Twitter on Wednesday
that "Islamophobia (is) alive and well in Sterling Heights."

The lawsuit says that some mosque members have lived in Sterling Heights for decades and others
have served in the U.S. military.

“I am proud to have served in Desert Storm as a Senior Airman for the United States Air Force," said Khalil Abbas, who is a member of the Muslim Center. "My grandfather served in WWI and other
family members served in other wars to protect the rights of all Americans. All I want is for the City of
Sterling Heights to follow the U.S. Constitution, and protect my rights as a veteran and citizen.”

The lawsuit cites an e-mail sent Aug. 19 from a resident to city officials asking that the mosque leaders be
vetted for possible extremism and terrorism.

City Planner Donald Mende then forwarded that e-mail, along with the names of mosque leaders, including
its imam, to the police chief at the time, Reese. Reese then forwarded it to John Berg, then a captain and
now Sterling Heights police chief, asking him to ask a contact at the FBI whether the mosque leaders are
"on their radar."

A spokesman for the Detroit FBI could not be reached late Wednesday for comment.

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Sexual Assault / Harassment
Air Force Academy cadet accused in sex assault faced other assault charges

By Tom Roeder
The Gazette (Colorado Springs, Colo.), August 9, 2016

Prosecutors say an Air Force Academy cadet was facing charges in another sexual assault case when he allegedly crept into a sleeping classmate's dorm room and attempted to sexually assault her.

The new allegations were aired Monday during an evidence hearing for Cadet Mark Czerner, a junior from Virginia who is now on leave from the school. Czerner is charged with sexual assault, attempted sexual assault and conduct unbecoming an officer in the new case.

Czerner had been pulled out of his usual academy accommodations and moved into an "administrative flight" for troubled cadets when the new incidents took place, prosecutors say.

The woman involved was also living there and was later discharged for academic deficiencies, prosecutors said.

"She said Cadet Czerner made her feel uncomfortable multiple times," Office of Special Investigations agent Merida Hayes testified Monday. She did not name Czerner or point to him as the suspect during her testimony, leading Czerner's civilian attorney, John Carr, to ask for the case to be dismissed.

"There has been no identification of the accused today," he told hearing officer Maj. Terry Coulter.

Hayes was the sole witness called in a morning hearing that featured several objections by Carr, who practices military law in West Virginia.

"We don't believe this case should be referred at all, and certainly not to a general court-martial," he said.

During Monday's hearing, Czerner said little, but frequently cleared his throat and made odd sounds.

Attorneys for the cadet say he suffers from a transient tic disorder that leads to the noise.

Most of what Coulter will consider before rendering his opinion is documentary evidence, including police reports. Coulter will issue a recommendation on what should be done with the new charges against Czerner, which prosecutors want added to a planned October trial in Czerner's earlier case.

Czerner was charged in June 2015 with the alleged Valentine's Day sexual assault of a female classmate in a car on the campus. Czerner's lawyers have argued the incident was consensual. A conviction in that case could bring a life sentence.

Shortly after charges in that case were filed, prosecutors say, Czerner went after a female cadet in the "administrative flight" dorm rooms. "He came into her room without knocking, touched her bare leg and climbed into bed with her," said prosecutor Capt. Josh Tolin.

The new case was brought to light in Facebook conversations, prosecutors said, leading to an investigation that began in May. The new charges against Czerner were issued last month. Czerner's hearing was one of two high-profile Pikes Peak region Air Force cases that had been set for court Monday.

A Peterson Air Force Base spokesman said the start of a court-martial for Col. Eugene Marcus Caughey was postponed. Caughey, former vice commander of Schriever Air Force Base's 50th Space Wing, faces charges including sexual assault, six counts of adultery, and assault. A new date for Caughey's trial was not available Monday.