

■ Thirty-nine O-10s, only one of whom is African-American (Army Gen. William "Kip" Ward, chief of U.S. Africa Command).

■ One hundred and thirty-eight O-9s, six of them African-Americans and three of them women.

■ Two hundred and seventy-two O-8s, including 19 African-Americans, one Asian, three Hispanics and 12 women.

■ Four hundred and forty-seven O-7s, including 20 African-Americans, three Asians, four Hispanics and 29 women.

Complete racial integration at all levels is a military necessity as a prerequisite for a cohesive and effective fighting force. The racial

point where there was an inability to fight

It is possible to correct the imbalances in the senior officer ranks while maintaining the merit-based promotion system that has made our military the best in the world.

First, a need exists to increase preparation for minority and female officer candidates, particularly through Reserve Officers' Training Corps and Junior ROTC programs. Although the representation of African-Americans among new officers has increased, they have been underrepresented among officers commissioned through the military academies and ROTC scholarship programs. Women have been similarly underrepresented.

these more senior officers are among the people who have the subjective authority to decide who gets what assignment.

A conversation on this topic has begun between the Congressional Black Caucus and the men and women who lead the armed forces. The caucus also has requested the House Armed Services Committee to hold hearings on this issue.

Let us keep all options on the table in thinking of effective and creative strategies to rectify this imbalance — for if we fail, the disparity that exists today will persist long into the future. □

Standing by policy, beliefs, Pace set example for all to follow

Just before his Oct. 1 retirement, Gen. Peter Pace, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs, faced a last question on his views about the Defense Department policy on gays in the military.

Back in March, Pace was widely criticized for comments he made about the "don't ask, don't tell" policy during a wide-ranging interview with the Chicago Tribune. He said, "I do not believe the United States is well-served by a policy that says it is OK to be immoral in any way."

Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, chose the September Appropriations Committee hearing on the war-funding request to ask the general if he'd like to "amend his re-

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marks in light of his retirement."

In the crowded hearing room, with jeering anti-war protesters egged on by Harkin's questioning, Pace stood firm.

He said his personal beliefs will not excuse "what I believe to be conduct — either heterosexual or

homosexual — that in my upbringing is not right." Yet, he was similarly unequivocal that as chairman, he not only upheld current Defense Department policy, but would also support change to the current policy that would better enable gays to serve in the military. Additionally, he praised their service, and, by all accounts, no one has challenged his commitment during his career or his tenure as chairman to uphold and administer the official policy.

Then why did his responses in both episodes cause such a stir? Did someone really expect the general to renounce his personal belief — which is not an isolated, off-the-wall view of the world?

The world's major religions do not condone homosexual behavior. Isn't Pace's response the standard by which all public servants — even high-ranking military officers — should be judged?

Although his personal, strongly held beliefs don't overlap official Defense Department policy, Pace did exactly what he was supposed to do. He upheld the controversial Pentagon policy, did nothing to undermine it, and was quoted as being open to changes in the policy to better allow gays to serve.

What more can we expect from an officer with personal beliefs differing from official policy, even if he does occupy high rank?

So, this is what is at stake in

these exchanges — the right to maintain one's own opinion and beliefs while serving in the armed forces and obligated to uphold official public policy that may be at odds with those personal beliefs.

Harkin seemed perplexed by Pace's reaffirmation of his earlier statements. "I didn't want to see a career like yours end on a note like that," he said. "It's a matter of leadership, and we have to be careful what we say."

Yes, it is a matter of leadership, and Pace led by example. He did not compromise his beliefs nor did he compromise the law. He did what was expected of him: his duty. Now, if we all could just do the same. □