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CONTACT

Voleine Amilcar, ITVS

415-356-8383 x 244

voleine_amilcar@itvs.org

Mary Lugo

770-623-8190

lugo@negia.net

Cara White

843-881-1480

cara.white@mac.com

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For the program companion website, visit pbs.org/independentlens/asknot

**JOHNNY SYMONS'S ACCLAIMED *ASK NOT*, ABOUT THE
U.S. MILITARY'S CONTROVERSIAL DON'T' ASK, DON'T TELL POLICY,
TO AIR NATIONALLY ON THE EMMY® AWARD-WINNING PBS SERIES *INDEPENDENT LENS*
ON TUESDAY, JUNE 16, 2009, AT 10 PM**

"One of the primary reasons behind the intelligence failures leading to 9/11 was that the Department of Defense's National Security Agency did not have enough Arabic linguists to translate the backlog of intelligence from Arabic into English before 9/11. And one of the ones that really struck me was a small phrase in Arabic which means, 'Tomorrow is Zero Hour.' Any one of the 54 Arabic linguists discharged under Don't Ask, Don't Tell could have easily translated that phrase. So the question we need to ask ourselves is: Do we really care anymore if the person who translates the next piece of crucial intelligence is gay or straight as long as he or she gets the job done quickly and accurately and helps save American lives in the process?"

—Army veteran Alex Nicholson, discharged by Don't Ask, Don't Tell

(San Francisco, CA)—**ASK NOT** explores the effects of the U.S. military's Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy on gay and lesbian soldiers and service members as well as its effects on the military and national security. Since the implementation of the policy, more than 12,000 gay and lesbian service members have been discharged, including more than 300 gay service members with mission-critical language skills. **ASK NOT** exposes the tangled political and cultural battles that led to the discriminatory law and examines the societal shifts that have occurred since its passage in 1993. When the law was initially passed, only 16 percent of service members believed gays should openly serve as compared to more than 70 percent who, in a recent poll, said they were comfortable with the idea. Through interviews with current and veteran gay soldiers, we learn how Don't Ask, Don't Tell affects them during their tours of duty as they struggle to maintain a double life, uncertain of whom they can trust. **ASK NOT** also follows gay veterans and youth organizers who are turning to forms of personal activism to overturn the policy. From a national speaking tour of conservative universities to protests at military recruitment offices, these public events question how the U.S. military can claim to represent democracy and freedom while denying one segment of the population the right to serve. A film by Johnny Symons (whose film *DADDY & PAPA* aired on *Independent Lens* in 2003), **ASK NOT** will air nationally on the PBS series *Independent Lens* on Tuesday, June 16, 2009, at 10 PM (check local listings).

To learn more about the film, visit the **ASK NOT** interactive companion website (pbs.org/asknot), which features detailed information on the film, including an interview with the filmmakers and links and resources pertaining to the film's subject matter. The site also features a Talkback section for viewers to share their ideas and opinions, preview clips of the film, and more.

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On-Air Participants

Aaron Belkin – Currently an associate professor of political science and director of the Michael D. Palm Center at the University of California at Santa Barbara, Aaron has been a visiting member of the political science faculty at Stanford University, a MacArthur Foundation postdoctoral fellow at UC Berkeley, and a predoctoral fellow at the Center for International Security and Arms Control at Stanford.

Jarrod Chlapowski – From Lawrenceville, Georgia, Jarrod enlisted in the Army in 2000 and trained as a Korean linguist at the Defense Language Institute and Goodfellow Air Force Base, finishing second in his class. While in the Army, he was awarded both the Army Achievement Medal and the Army Commendation Medal; however, Jarrod chose not to reenlist because of the burden of the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy. Jarrod was co-director of the Call to Duty Tour. He continues to actively fight the policy as part of Servicemembers United.

Haven Herrin – Born and raised in Dallas, Texas, Haven is now based in Minneapolis, where she serves as co-director of the Right to Serve campaign. She graduated valedictorian from the University of Richmond in Virginia, where she studied fine art.

Alex Nicholson – After an untimely discharge pursuant to the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy, Alex recruited other recent veterans and founded the Call to Duty nationwide speaking tour to ignite renewed debate about the policy. He speaks five languages, including Arabic, holds a master's degree in public administration and is currently completing a Ph.D. in political science. Alex has been featured on the cover of *The Advocate* and now serves as executive director of Servicemembers United, a progressive "DADT 2.0-style" advocacy organization for Iraq- and Afghanistan-era veterans that was formed directly out of the work featured in **ASK NOT**.

Jacob Reitan – After founding the Soulforce Equality Ride, a journey by bus to initiate discussion about faith and sexuality at Christian colleges, Jacob orchestrated the Right to Serve campaign and trained activists to challenge Don't Ask, Don't Tell at military recruitment centers across the country. A Minnesota native, Jacob graduated magna cum laude from Northwestern University and is currently a presidential scholar pursuing a master's degree at the Harvard Divinity School.

Rear Admiral Alan Steinman – Alan served in the U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. Public Health Service for 25 years before retiring in 1997 as the Coast Guard's director of Health and Safety (equivalent to the Surgeon General). In 2003, on the 10th anniversary of Don't Ask, Don't Tell, he came out publicly, becoming the most senior military officer to self-identify as gay. Alan also co-founded the Puget Sound chapter of American Veterans for Equal Rights, serves on the Military Advisory Board of Directors for the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network and most recently served as the military advisor for the highly successful Call to Duty Tour.

"Perry" is the alias of a gay serviceman who served in Iraq. He continues to serve and has not come out to his superiors because of his desire to remain in the military.

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About the Filmmakers

Johnny Symons (producer/director) is an award-winning Bay Area–based documentary filmmaker. His film *DADDY & PAPA* (2002), about the personal, cultural and political impact of gay men raising kids, premiered at Sundance, won more than 15 major festival awards, aired nationally on PBS’s *Independent Lens* and received a national Emmy® nomination for Best Documentary. *Beyond Conception* (2006), his feature documentary about the relationship between a lesbian surrogate and a gay male couple as they conceive and bear a child, premiered at the Florida Film Festival and aired on Discovery Health Channel. Symons is the co-producer of the Academy Award–nominated *Long Night’s Journey Into Day* (2000), which won the Grand Jury Prize for Best Documentary at the Sundance Film Festival. A documentary filmmaker since 1991, Symons graduated with honors from Brown [University](#) and holds a Master’s [degree](#) in documentary production from Stanford University. He currently teaches documentary film at both Stanford and the Art Institute of California–San Francisco.

Leah Wolchok (co-producer) is an award-winning filmmaker who got her start in the documentary world at the Oxygen network. Her short films have screened at festivals worldwide, including the HBO Frame-by-Frame Documentary Film Series and Silverdocs. She earned a B.A. in English from Yale and an M.A. in documentary production from Stanford.

Featured Organizations and Partners

Palm Center palmcenter.org

Servicemembers United servicemembersunited.org

Soulforce soulforce.org

Nathaniel Frank’s UNFRIENDLY FIRE unfriendlyfire.org

About *Independent Lens*

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award–winning weekly series airing Tuesday nights at 10 PM on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement and unflinching visions of their independent producers. *Independent Lens* features unforgettable stories about unique individuals, communities and moments in history. Presented by ITVS, the series is supported by interactive companion websites and national publicity and community engagement campaigns. Further information about the series is available at pbs.org/independentlens. *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts. The series producer is Lois Vossen.

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