

Obama hails end of US military restrictions on gays
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WASHINGTON, Sept 20 – President Barack Obama hailed the end of the policy banning gays from serving openly in the US military, saying its official demise today marked a key step toward fulfilling America’s founding ideals.

“Today, the discriminatory law known as ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ is finally and formally repealed,” Obama said in a statement released by the White House. “As of today, patriotic Americans in uniform will no longer have to lie about who they are in order to serve the country they love.”

The repeal went into effect today, ushering in a new era in the US armed forces. The law had allowed gay men and women to serve in the military only if they kept their sexual orientation a secret. They faced the threat of being kicked out of the military under the law if they were open about their homosexuality.

Obama last December signed legislation to repeal the policy known as “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” which had been passed by Congress and signed into law in 1993 under then-President Bill Clinton.

“Our armed forces have been both a mirror and a catalyst of that progress, and our troops, including gays and lesbians, have given their lives to defend the freedoms and liberties that we cherish as Americans,” Obama said.

“Today, every American can be proud that we have taken another great step toward keeping our military the finest in the world and toward fulfilling our nation’s founding ideals,” the president added.

Under the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, more than 14,500 US service members were thrown out of the military since it went into effect in 1993, according to the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network.

Gays rights groups for years denounced the law and called its end a important milestone in the fight against anti-homosexual discrimination. Some have compared its demise to the integration of the US armed forces.

The Pentagon sent out a memo noting that the Defense Department already has certified that ending the policy would not harm military readiness, unit cohesion or recruiting and retention of service members.

“Effective today, statements about sexual orientation or lawful acts of homosexual conduct will not be considered as a bar to military service,” or admission to the military academies and other programs, Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Clifford Stanley wrote in the memo. – Reuters

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