How Do The Candidates Stand On Military Policy?

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One would think that the next President's plans to address the dramatic falloff in military recruitment, and the decline in military morale and readiness due to controversial personnel policies, would be important topics for the televised presidential debates to cover. But somehow, these matters haven't made it onto the media's agenda.

To fill this gap in public knowledge, the Center for Military Readiness (CMR), an independent public policy organization specializing in military personnel issues, sent questions on eight issues to the presidential candidates. All responded except Republican frontrunner George W. Bush, Orrin Hatch, and Democrats Al Gore and Bill Bradley.

It's easy to see why Gore and Bradley ducked the survey because all the questions strike directly at Administration policies. They could have taken this opportunity to distance themselves from the Clinton policies by coming out for rebuilding the military that Clinton said he "loathed," but they didn't.

CMR president Elaine Donnelly said she was encouraged that all the responding candidates said they oppose Clinton-era social engineering that has hurt military readiness, recruiting and morale. That was a no-brainer; it's the specific questions that get to the nub of the controversies.

"If you are opposed to coed basic training, will you act to terminate it in the Army, Navy and Air Force, with or without a mandate from Congress?" Steve Forbes, Gary Bauer, Alan Keyes, Pat Buchanan and Howard Phillips all said yes; John McCain said no, but he would ask Congress to reevaluate this issue.

"If you are opposed [to permitting open homosexuality in the military], will you exercise the option to restore the question regarding homosexuality that used to be on recruiting forms, an option that is fully authorized under the 1993 statute that continues to ban homosexuals from the military?" Forbes, Bauer, Keyes and Phillips said yes, McCain said no, and Buchanan didn't answer.

The responses were the same to the follow-up question: "If opposed, will you replace Clinton's Don't Ask, Don't Tell regulation with Defense Department instructions that faithfully reflect the exclusion law passed by Congress in 1993?" Contrary to popular belief, the 1993 exclusion law, which was passed by bipartisan majorities, remains the law of the land and Clinton's Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy was never enacted by Congress.

"Will you order the assignment of women to currently-closed positions that operate in close coordination with land combat units and involve direct engagement with the enemy with a high risk of capture; i.e., multiple launch rocket (field artillery) systems (MLRS) and special operations helicopters?" All responding candidates said no.

Part B of this question refined the issue: "In view of negative consequences already observed from the recent assignment of women in or near previously closed combat units on land, sea and in the air, will you act to restore women's combat exemptions to improve military efficiency and readiness?" Forbes, Bauer, Keyes, Buchanan and Phillips said yes; McCain said no.

"Do you support the New Strategic Concept as adopted and affirmed by the previously-defensive NATO alliance, which was cited as authorization to bomb Serbia without congressional approval and to conduct the air war under the direction of a NATO committee of 19 nations?" Forbes, Bauer, Keyes, Buchanan and Phillips said no; McCain ducked a direct answer.

McCain said he supports "a vital role" for NATO in maintaining European peace and stability. He favors shifting more of the burdens for European security to our allies.

"Do you agree with recent statements made by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to the effect that sovereign borders should not be a barrier to the deployment of peacemaking troops between warring factions and that a standing UN force should be established for this purpose?" All respondents said no.

"Will you disband the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) and similar tax-funded advisory committees that continue to promote a feminist agenda for the military such as affirmative action quotas, gender norming and careerism for women as a higher priority than military efficiency and readiness?" Forbes, Bauer, Keyes, Buchanan and Phillips said yes.

McCain said no, defending DACOWITS as having made "significant contributions" and as having had "a positive impact on military policy." Veterans and members of the armed services should be shocked by McCain's willingness to continue tax subsidies for this little-known but powerful special-interest group that aggressively supports the radical feminist agenda for the military.

All the responding candidates answered no to the question "Will you order the assignment of female sailors to submarines?" All answered no to the question "Will you support or order the registration of women for Selective Service military obligations on an equal basis with men?"

All the responding candidates opposed relaxing enforcement procedures and penalties for adultery and sexual misconduct in the military.

The voters are not going to be satisfied with George W. Bush declining to say what he would do about Clinton's social engineering in the military.