

The American Legion strongly opposes lifting of ban on photography of flag-draped caskets

WASHINGTON, DC (Feb. 17, 2008) – The American Legion opposes a proposed lifting of the long-standing ban on the photography of flag-draped caskets arriving home from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates indicated recently that he is not opposed to a review of the 18-year old policy that generally restricts media coverage of the military caskets offloaded at Dover Air Force Base, Delaware. Secretary Gates also says he is “pretty open to...whatever the results of this review may be.”

The National Commander of The American Legion has reacted strongly. “From our point of view,” said David K. Rehbein, “there is nothing to discuss. Photographing the caskets containing the remains of men and women who have made the supreme sacrifice on behalf of our country and its freedoms is little short of sacrilege. The practice would be intrusive and hurtful to the warriors’ families. The return of fallen heroes is also a sacred moment for our armed forces, and should be respected.

“In our opinion, our fallen warriors deserve to be honored without compromise and not made the object of a media event or be made vulnerable to exploitation for propagandistic purposes,” said Commander Rehbein. ““Unless a warrior’s family expressly wishes media coverage of the return of their son or daughter in this fashion, and respectful accommodations can be made, we can see no good reason to allow it.”

Secretary Gates ordered a review of the controversial policy after President Barack Obama said during a February 9th news conference that the White House is “in the process of reviewing those policies.”

Media coverage of military remains arriving at ports of entry was once permitted but was banned by Pentagon decree during the 1991 Gulf War. “That policy should be upheld,” concluded Commander Rehbein.