

Fairbanks Daily News Miner

Alaska delegation responds to proposed repeal of ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’

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FAIRBANKS — The three members of Alaska’s congressional delegation have staked out three different positions on a proposed reversal of the military’s long-standing ban on gays serving openly.

The U.S. House of Representatives could vote as soon as today on an amendment to the 2011 defense authorization bill that would overturn the 1993 “don’t ask, don’t tell law.” Under the terms of a compromise announced earlier this week, it would be up to the military to determine when and how to implement the new policy.

Rep. Don Young, R-Alaska, opposes the amendment.

“The congressman does not support the repeal, and we have received an overwhelming number of letters and phone calls from Alaskans who have asked him not to support repeal,” Young spokeswoman Merideth Kenny stated Wednesday in an e-mail.

“The congressman does not believe that the military is a place for promoting social change, which is why he supports the current policy, as it focuses on the performance of an individual, not their sexual orientation.”

President Barack Obama has vowed to end the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy instituted by former President Bill Clinton. Currently, military officials are prohibited from asking service members if they are gay, while gays are not allowed to discuss their orientation. Homosexual activity is banned under the policy.

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, have publicly said they support an end to

“don’t ask, don’t tell” but do not want to remove the policy until the results of a study are available later this year.

Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, also advocated waiting for the study.

“We should respect the request from the Secretary of Defense regarding the study and wait until the report is done, consider its conclusions and render an informed vote,” Murkowski said in a statement released Wednesday. “We’ve received several hundred constituent letters in recent weeks, with the vast majority saying don’t repeal the law.”

During the past two years, the senator said, she has met with organizations on both sides of the issue.

Today, the Senate Armed Services Committee is expected to consider whether to add the amendment to its version of the bill.

Julie Hasquet, spokeswoman for Sen. Mark Begich, D-Alaska, said Begich supports repealing “don’t ask, don’t tell” under the compromise reached this week, as the Department of Defense “will have time to certify repeal can be achieved consistent with the military’s standards of readiness, effectiveness, unit cohesion, and recruiting and retention.”