



# Hagel: Opening Combat Jobs To Women the 'Right Thing' To Do

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**D**efense Secretary Chuck Hagel told soldiers last week at U.S. Strategic Command at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb., that opening more jobs in the military to women is the right thing to do.

Hagel spoke Thursday during a visit to the base south of Omaha to discuss StratCom's role in dealing with threats facing the country.

His comments regarding women in the military was in response to a question about whether the policy change, including the lifting of combat exclusions, could affect mission success. Senior defense and military officials announced the services' respective plans for lifting the combat exclusion for women June 18.

"I think everyone understands it's the right thing," he said. "It's not a matter of lowering standards to assist women to get into combat positions." Hagel added that part of the process will be finding "the right balance of implementation."

The plan to remove gender-based standards was announced by former Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta in January. The branches have a deadline of January 2016 to follow through – including ending the ban on women serving in the Navy SEALs and the Army Rangers— with any exceptions requiring the approval of the defense secretary and the Joint Chiefs chairman.

"Why shouldn't [women] have the same opportunities as men?" Hagel said.

Hagel also touched on the issue of sexual assault, saying increases in cases of sexual assault in the military are a "scourge and a very, very dark mark on all of the success of this institution."

"There is no higher priority than to make everybody accountable all the time, up and down the line," Hagel said.

Nick Simeone of American Forces Press Service contributed to this report ■

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