

[KRISTEN SCHUMACHER] Faculty and students take on discrimination in the ROTC. As told by Joe Elder, and Jim Steakley.

[JOE ELDER] The place I connected on campus was hearing about the ROTC unit and the fact that it is now under fire because they refuse to admit gays and lesbians. As soon as I found out that they did was being discriminated on the ground, It was too hypocritical. We have a state that does not discriminate, we have a city that doesn't discriminate, we have a campus that does not discriminate. And then we have these three federally funded organizations with all the stature and reputation that they have that do.

[SCOTT SEYFORTH] Two students at UW-Milwaukee Eric Jourenburg and Leon Rouse asked their school to adhere to the spirit of the new law by suspending participation in the ROTC program if that program continued to violate the terms of the statute. And they got the Milwaukee faculty senate to consider a motion but it was not passed

[JIM STEAKLEY] We created an organization called UW Faculty against discrimination in University programs. There was, the main person that we behind all of this was of course the undergraduate was Rick Villasenor. And Joe Elder in the sociology department was heading it up, and it was extremely useful because of his Quaker background he had always had a kind of pronounced position on the military, and also had a social activism that came from his background and the church background and everything. So he was a highly respected professor here on campus, well-known, who was a perfect person to head up our UW-Faculty against discrimination. And so we started off by getting a petition, we looked at the UW rules, Rick Villasenor looked at the rules and found out it is possible to call a meeting of the faculty to deliberate on an issue by getting the signatures of, don't hold me to this I would have to read the old newspaper clippings in The Cardinal on this, 10 percent of the faculty, or something like that, a certain percentage of the faculty has to sign a petition to do that. So we drafted a petition and took it around and networked as best we could through our Gay symposium group and through the different departments and everything, and got together all of our needed signatures

[JOE ELDER] So beginning in essentially the spring of '89 we got together the necessary votes and the decision was that there would be an all faculty meeting the next fall which was indeed held on December 4th 1989 and the vote had to be whether the faculty would press the Board of Regents to terminate the University contract with the Army and Air Force ROTC programs if those programs did not end discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation by May of 1993

[JIM STEAKLEY] On December 4, 1989 we had the first meeting of the full faculty since the Vietnam war era. It took place at the Stock Pavillion, right over there. That was a building that I had not been in up to that time. We needed a big space to put all those people together. It was wow, it was like amazing, because you had the ROTC supporters that wanted to keep the gay people out, people in uniform like crazy speaking, and the officers from ROTC, and the university lawyers, and then they got the Student group represented by David, well anyway, our campus group the 10 percent society, they wanted to have a student representative speak, the president of that. So they had all these presenters, all these speakers, well it was historical you know, you can look it up online, by a vote of 386 to 248 the meeting of the faculty asked the board of regents to dismantle its contract with the ROTC.

[SCOTT SEYFORTH] And at a meeting of the Board of Regents on February 1990 Donna Shalala who was then our Chancellor, and Assistant President Kenneth Shaw recommended keep ROTC on campus. And the Regents voted to do that 13 to 3. But they agreed to lobby the Wisconsin Congressional Delegation to demand that the policy be changed at the federal level, and the

University actually appointed a task force with other colleagues and universities to put pressure in Washington to change the policy.

[KRISTEN SCHUMACHER] Chapter 9: Madison starts the movement

[JIM STEAKLEY] Well, you know we made national news with that and also these petitions and demonstrations and so on were getting to be on the national news and the UW Madison was kind of the first one out of the gate on this thing but it spread sort of in a wildfire fashion to certain campuses where there were similar protests going on including at Harvard so it was beginning to be discussed apropos of this nominee Keagan for the Supreme Court who took a position on that committee with Joe Elder as Chair also met with Wisconsin Congressman Les Aspin.

[SCOTT SEYFORTH] Students on campus were so upset at the Regents decision that continued to try to force the issue. In April 1990 they occupied Bascom for five days demanding that the Chancellor and the Assistant President sign a disclaimer to be put on all University Orientation materials noting the contradiction between U.S. System Policy State Law and the ROTC policy. And after 4 days with little positive response from the administration, they decided to ramp up their message and they also occupied the Board of Regents Room at the top of Van Hise, on the 18th floor of Van Hise. Well, that was the final straw for campus administration and they broke up the Van Hise sit-in after 10 hours and the police came in and they arrested 40 students while a crowd of 300 chanted outside of Van Hise while these students were taken away.

[SCOTT SEYFORTH] It was national news, and the student activism that followed was national news. It touched off an explosion of media coverage, and it created subsequent activism on other campuses around country throughout 1990.

[KRISTEN SCHUMACHER] Now we have arrived at the 1992 presidential election. For the first time candidates have to take a stand on the issue of gays in the military George Herbert Walker Bush supported current policies and Clinton said that one of the first things he would do in office was sign an executive order overturning the policy.

[JIM STEAKLEY] Both Shalala and Aspin left Wisconsin in '93 to join the Clinton Cabinet. And she was the Secretary of Health and Human Services and he was the Secretary of Defense. So Aspin was the person who basically worked out together with Clinton who worked out the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy. So this was also forged out of this, it was kind of a concession to the grass roots movement, about the status of gays in the military.

[KRISTEN SCHUMACHER] Clinton's campaign promise never comes to full fruition with Don't Ask Don't Tell being touted as a compromise. After twenty-something years of activism, the policy is finally overturned on September 20th, 2011