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Sen. Murkowski decries sexual misconduct in Alaska National Guard

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WASHINGTON -- Sen. Lisa Murkowski on Wednesday cited sexual misconduct problems in the Alaska National Guard for her support of a proposal to take decisions on prosecuting sex crimes away from military commanders.

"The recent experiences that I have had as a senator from Alaska with the transparency of decisions made within the chain of command, I believe, leave much to be desired," the Republican said in a speech on the floor of the Senate.

Murkowski said she is learning of problems from the news media, rather than from commanders. She cited a [McClatchy Newspapers/Anchorage Daily News story](#) from last month in which senior chaplains in the Alaska National Guard alleged that a sexual assault and harassment problem has festered for years without adequate response.

The newspaper report also described how the Alaska guard is investigating recruiters accused of rape.

Murkowski said that, following the story, she asked senior leaders of the Washington, D.C.,- based National Guard Bureau what they knew about the allegations.

"You know what the answer was?" Murkowski said. "They read it about it in the news clippings."

Murkowski said there's a "broken link in the chain" if senior leaders are unaware of such serious allegations. She said they can't act if the facts are buried.

She also cited media reports of sexual affairs at the Army National Guard's 49th Missile Defense Battalion at Fort Greely in Alaska. The commander of the battalion ended up being suspended for the misconduct.

Murkowski said there are suggestions of other problems as well. She said a guardsman at Fort Greely alleged he was unlawfully detained for days in an electrical closet on the base when his chain of command intervened in a child custody dispute that he was having with another member of the Guard. Murkowski said she asked for an investigation, but that the military is refusing to tell her the result of the probe.

"Are we supposed to call this military justice?" she said.

Murkowski also said on the Senate floor that an Alaskan whom she nominated for a military service academy was sexually assaulted at the academy, and that she spoke with a woman who alleged she was repeatedly drugged, raped and then dumped in the Bering Sea by superior officers when she was serving in the Navy 20 years ago at the remote post of Adak.

Murkowski's comments came as the Senate debated an amendment by Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., to remove sexual assault and other serious crimes from the normal military chain of command, called the

Uniform Code of Military Justice, or UCMJ. Gillibrand's proposal would turn court-martial decisions on such crimes over to a cadre of legal professionals.

The proposal is opposed by military officials, with their sentiment expressed by the three service associations representing former members of the Air Force, Army and Navy.

"The key to stopping sexual assault in the military is holding commanders at all levels accountable for their command climate," wrote retired Air Force Lt. Gen. George K. Muellner, chairman of the board of the Air Force Association. "Stripping away UCMJ authority from commanders would deprive them of the necessary leadership role that accountability demands of leaders."

The Senate did not vote on the proposal Wednesday.

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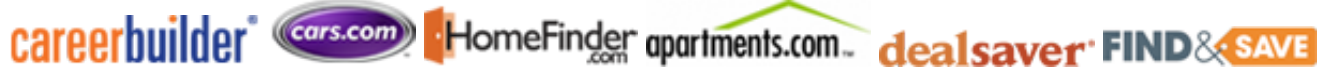
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