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Sue McConnell sits at her desk while volunteering at the Tucson VA.

Randi Lynn Beach

# 'Fantastic!' Transgender Vet, Advocates Cheer After Military Ban Lifted

**MOLLY LONGMAN** | OCTOBER 31, 2017 | 7:00AM

Sue McConnell was having a blah Monday sitting at her desk in the Southern Arizona Veterans Affairs Health Care System in Tucson.

The **transgender Vietnam Navy veteran** was going about her typical morning of mailing envelopes when a VA employee excitedly approached her after receiving a news notification on her phone.

NEWS REACTION ON HER PHONE.

She told McConnell a federal judge in the District of Columbia struck down part of President Donald Trump's transgender military ban.

"I was in awe," McConnell said. "I was smiling. I was happy."

U.S. District Court Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly issued a preliminary injunction on Monday blocking the ban, court records show.

The injunction was in response to a Trump administration directive that could have banned transgender people from enlisting in the military while forcing out current gender-nonconforming service members.

Kollar-Kotelly's injunction will be in effect until the lawsuit's resolution. The injunctions virtually reverts the military's policy on transgender service members back to guidelines set forth by the Obama administration in 2016 allowing gender-nonconforming individuals to serve openly.

The portion of the ban still in place doesn't allow military funding to be spent on sexual reassignment surgery.

Phoenix Pride called the ban "ill-conceived, ill-advised, and hatefully-born" in a statement rejoicing over the judge's opinion. Trump's directive was an "aggressive attempt to further malign and marginalize the transgender community," the LGBTQ advocacy organization wrote.

The original suit was filed by GLBTQ Legal Advocates and Defenders and the National Center for Lesbian Rights on behalf of five active duty transgender service members who'd come out to their superiors. Their suit was filed in August and claimed the ban was unconstitutional.

McConnell said she was thrilled about the news, but her reaction was not as visceral as when she initially heard Trump was proposing a ban in July.

After the president tweeted that the government would "not accept or allow Transgender individuals to serve in any capacity in the U.S. Military," she broke down.

"I started having trouble breathing," McConnell said in a [previous interview](#) with *Phoenix New Times*. "I ended up in the emergency room because of that. My blood pressure went crazy."

McConnell said it's hard for most people to understand the kind of emotional toll directives like Trump's can have on transgender service members and vets. McConnell served her country as a man and began living as a female later in life, and says bravery and valor have nothing to do with gender.

So, when she heard Monday's news, she said it made her day.

"I thought it was fantastic," McConnell said. "For me and for us all."

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