

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1304

February 9, 2025

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Hegseth:

I write to express my concern that President Trump's personal agenda is counter to defending against our country's serious national security threats. Since the President's inauguration less than one month ago, the Trump Administration has pursued several dubious executive actions that threaten our military's long-standing ethos to remain nonpartisan and promote merit, both of which you spoke to the importance of during your hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) prior to your confirmation. I am deeply alarmed that these actions may not only erode trust in our military as an institution, but also dangerously distract from where our focus ought to be on foreign adversaries and their capabilities. With China rapidly building its nuclear and naval forces, Russia fighting a war of aggression on the border of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and North Korea and Iran pursuing nuclear weapons and destabilizing actions, these erratic pursuits distract from the real threats to our nation.

The Trump Administration's troubling actions have included, but are not limited to:

- Targeting military officers such as Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Linda Fagan and former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley, as well as civilian federal government employees within the Department of Defense (DoD), such as the Senate-confirmed Inspector General, as part of an effort to go after individuals unceremoniously deemed unfit or considered political adversaries;
- Diverting DoD resources and critical warfighting personnel for contentious immigration enforcement, compromising our military assets and distracting from national security threats;
- Unconstitutionally impounding congressionally approved DoD funding from a myriad of programs that protect and support our service members, including projects that boost defense medical research, reduce civilian casualties, provide infrastructure grants to municipalities near military installations, and promote investments in critical technologies, sowing mass confusion and chaos; and

- Undermining force strength and readiness—in the midst of unprecedented recruitment and retention challenges—by arbitrarily weaponizing programs and policies designed to remove barriers and enhance benefits and opportunities for qualified recruits.

As you know, DoD is the largest federal government agency in the United States. Your responsibilities include overseeing a nearly \$900 billion budget, more than 3.5 million service members and civilian employees, and 750 military installations around the world. America's national security depends on the Department of Defense functioning as a stable institution that supports its personnel rather than being thrown into disarray. Further, increasing politicization of our military risks diminishing the role of the United States on the international stage, sending a dangerous signal to our allies and adversaries alike.

In the spirit of your promise before SASC to be a faithful partner to Congress, I urge you to defend the principles of the Department of Defense.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator