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United States Senate

COMMITTEES:
ARMED SERVICES

AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION,
AND FORESTRY

HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS

VETERANS' AFFAIRS

April 5, 2021

The Honorable Lloyd Austin
U.S. Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Austin,

Your directive to purge the department of extremism follows in the long tradition of the United States military protecting the rights and liberties of all Americans. Like you, we want to see good order and discipline in the ranks as well as for our military to remain the non-partisan institution that Americans trust more than any other.

Yet your tempered, thoughtful approach lost its way in translation to the services. An examination of the stand-down training materials reveals a disappointing partisan slant and poorly-defined First Amendment rights for military members.

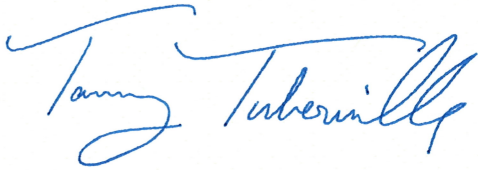
Inherent among the advantages of our nation's diverse population is *diversity of thought*. Yet some of the training materials imply only certain political thoughts are welcome. For example, the Navy's training deck includes as an example of "permissible political activity" membership in the Young Democrats of America. No examples of groups affiliated with other political parties are included. Additionally, a scenario on religious beliefs pertaining to marriage, abortion, and LGBTQ matters states that conservative views on these issues are not considered "mainstream." Finally, the Navy's slides suggest that workplace discussions of Black Lives Matter are not "politically partisan in nature."

The training cautioned members of the military from espousing "purely personal opinions," yet was clearly biased in and of itself. Since your announcement of a stand down, multiple senior military leaders have publicly criticized individual members of the press using official DOD platforms and social media. We hope you agree how inappropriate and ill-advised it is to use the National Guard to march on an elected representative's office. From official social media accounts, in uniform, on defense.gov, and even from the Pentagon podium, the DOD loudly and with one voice took up a partisan viewpoint and went so far as to equate a U.S. citizen with China's People Liberation Army.

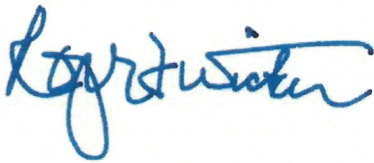
We cannot allow our military to be politicized.

By May 7, please provide a report on what steps your office has taken to reprimand those officers, enlisted, and other DOD personnel who have inappropriately engaged in partisan behavior while representing our military within the last year. Include what steps your office will take to ensure such behavior ceases under your watch. In your response, we ask that you personally review the stand-down training material disseminated by the services and other subordinate headquarters in order to ensure that these materials comply with the guidance issued by your office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tommy Tuberville". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Tommy Tuberville
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Roger Wicker". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized, with the first name being the most prominent part.

Roger Wicker
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kevin Cramer". The signature is cursive and flows smoothly, with the first name being the most prominent part.

Kevin Cramer
United States Senator