

April 6, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Austin:

I am writing regarding my concerns that the holds on the confirmation of 158 active-duty military officials who have been nominated to key command positions could put our national security at risk, and ask the Department of Defense (DoD) to provide a full accounting of which positions will go unfilled and the risks these vacancies pose to our military readiness.

I am concerned that the broad use of holds on the nominations of civilian and military officials at DoD – which delay nominations indefinitely – threatens to undercut the national security of the United States. Since February 2023, Senator Tuberville has placed blanket holds on nearly 160 DoD military nominees, including critical positions relating to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the United States’ ability to quickly respond to a variety of threats from international actors.¹ These holds have held up the nominations of several three-star commanders, including the command of the U.S. 5th Fleet in the Middle East and 7th Fleet in the Pacific and the U.S. military representative to NATO’s Military Committee.²

According to your statements before the Senate Armed Services Committee, these holds have already caused a “ripple effect through the force that makes us far less ready than we need to be.”³ The National Security Council’s Coordinator for Strategic Communications stated that these unjustified holds have already impacted the United States’ military response to potential threats from China and North Korea, and warned that if the holds continue, “it could absolutely have an effect on U.S. military readiness around the world.”⁴ In coming months, the

¹ NBC News, “Republican senator draws blowback for blocking military promotions over abortion policy,” Frank Thorp V, Sahil Kapur, and Mosheh Gains, March 28, 2023, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/congress/republican-senator-draws-blowback-blocking-military-promotions-abortion-rcna76837>.

² Military.com, “Senator’s Delay of Officer Promotions over DoD Abortion Policy Is Hurting Military Families, Austin Says,” Rebecca Kheel, March 28, 2023, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2023/03/28/senators-delay-of-officer-promotions-over-dod-abortion-policy-hurting-military-families-austin-says.html>.

³ U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, “Hearing to Receive Testimony on the Department of Defense Budget Request for Fiscal Year 2024 and the Future Years Defense Program,” March 28, 2023, <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/hearings/to-receive-testimony-on-the-department-of-defense-budget-request-for-fiscal-year-2024-and-the-future-years-defense-program>.

⁴ Alabama Today, “Tommy Tuberville criticized over hold on Defense Nominees,” Brandon Moseley, March 30, 2023, <https://altoday.com/archives/50718-tommy-tuberville-criticized-over-hold-on-defense-nominees>.

consequences could escalate, with a “plethora of senior military leaders” set to retire or leave their posts from the Marine Corps, Navy, and Army, including seventy three- and four- star generals and admirals.⁵ This includes the president’s principal military advisor, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as well as the heads of U.S. Northern Command, Space Command, and Cyber Command that are set to rotate out of their posts this year.⁶

The American people deserve to know the impacts of these holds. In my role as Chair of the Subcommittee on Personnel for the Committee on Armed Services, I am committed to conducting vigorous oversight of military policy and decision-making, and I am concerned that these indiscriminate holds could impact military personnel around the world. In order to further understand the threat these holds pose to the United States’ national security and military readiness, I am requesting answers to the following questions no later than April 21, 2023. Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to working together to keep our military strong and effective.


1. Please provide a list of all military positions impacted by Senator Tuberville’s holds.
 - a. To what extent do the current holds impact national defense strategy in the following areas:
 - i. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine
 - ii. China’s actions in the Indo-Pacific region
 - iii. Targeting of U.S. troops by Iran-backed militias in the Middle East
 - iv. Defending the United States
 - b. What are the impacts of the current holds on the continuity of U.S. military operations?
 - c. What are the impacts of the current holds on oversight of the U.S. military?
 - d. What are the impacts of the current holds on military families and facilities?
2. Please provide a list of high-level military positions that will be impacted by these holds in the upcoming months.
 - a. What is the projected impact of these future holds on national defense strategy in the following areas:

⁵ Washington Post, “Pentagon chief warns Senate amid abortion-policy showdown,” Dan Lamothe, March 28, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/03/28/military-abortion-tommy-tuberville/>; Politico, “‘It’s a powerful effect’: Austin fires back at GOP senator’s blockade of military promotions,” Connor O’Brien, March 28, 2023, <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/03/28/lloyd-austin-military-promotions-blockade-00089183>.

⁶ Politico, “‘It’s a powerful effect’: Austin fires back at GOP senator’s blockade of military promotions,” Connor O’Brien, March 28, 2023, <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/03/28/lloyd-austin-military-promotions-blockade-00089183>.

- i. Russia's invasion of Ukraine
 - ii. China's actions in the Indo-Pacific region
 - iii. Targeting of U.S. troops by Iran-backed militias in the Middle East
 - iv. Defending the United States
 - b. What are the projected impacts of the holds on the continuity of U.S. military operations?
 - c. What are the projected impacts of these holds on oversight of the U.S. military?
 - d. What are the projected impacts of these holds on military families and facilities?
3. What other impacts do these holds have on implementing the national defense strategy?
 4. Will any of these holds impact the military's medical readiness?
 5. Will any of these holds damage our cyber security?
 6. Will any of these holds send a damaging message to our allies?
 7. What message does DoD think these holds sends to China and Russia?

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator