

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 27, 2025

Dr. Troy Meink  
Secretary of the Air Force-Designate, U.S. Department of Defense  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Dr. Meink,

We write regarding reports that Elon Musk “pushed for” and “recommended” your nomination to serve as Secretary of the Air Force in what may have been a troubling quid quo pro.<sup>1</sup> The allegation that Mr. Musk was involved in Trump Administration personnel policy raises concerns because of a recent report that Mr. Musk’s aerospace company, SpaceX, benefitted from your intervention in contracting decisions during your term as the Principal Deputy Director at the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO). You reportedly helped Mr. Musk secure \$2.5 billion in federal contracts and squashed SpaceX’s competitors, engaging in conduct that resulted in an Inspector General review.<sup>2</sup> These reports raise concerns about your ability, if confirmed as Secretary, to treat contractors fairly and prioritize the Air Force’s mission over Elon Musk’s business interests.

A recent report from Reuters alleges that you engaged in behavior that favored SpaceX at the NRO. For example, you allegedly “arranged a multibillion-dollar contract solicitation in a way that favored Elon Musk’s SpaceX.”<sup>3</sup> According to this report, you made a last-minute alteration to the contract that effectively boxed out bids from other companies and “made SpaceX the company best suited to fulfill it,”<sup>4</sup> prompting public skepticism and an investigation by the NRO’s Inspector General.<sup>5</sup> When L3Harris Technologies, one of SpaceX’s competitors that was

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<sup>1</sup> New York Times, “Musk Is Likely to Get a West Wing Office for His Cost-Cutting Project,” Maggie Haberman, Jonathan Swan, Charlie Savage and Theodore Schleifer, January 20, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/20/us/politics/elon-musk-office-west-wing.html>, Reuters, “Exclusive: Trump Air Force nominee arranged satellite contract in manner that favored Musk’s SpaceX,” Joey Roulette, Marisa Taylor and Aram Roston, February 7, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-air-force-nominee-arranged-satellite-contract-manner-that-favored-musks-2025-02-07/>.

<sup>2</sup> SpaceNews, “NRO’s first batch of next-generation spy satellites set for launch,” Sandra Erwin, May 1, 2024, <https://spacenews.com/nros-first-batch-of-next-generation-spy-satellites-set-for-launch/>; SpaceNews, “SpaceX secures new contracts worth \$733.5 million for national security space missions,” Sandra Erwin, October 18, 2024, <https://spacenews.com/spacex-secures-new-contracts-worth-733-5-million-for-national-security-space-missions/>; National Reconnaissance Office, “Dr. Troy Meink,” <https://www.nro.gov/About-NRO/Leadership/leadership-meink/>.

<sup>3</sup> Reuters, “Exclusive: Trump Air Force nominee arranged satellite contract in manner that favored Musk’s SpaceX,” Joey Roulette, Marisa Taylor and Aram Roston, February 7, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-air-force-nominee-arranged-satellite-contract-manner-that-favored-musks-2025-02-07/>.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

booted out of the contract, approached you with concerns, you allegedly threatened the company by saying “future business with the agency could be hurt if it filed a formal protest.”<sup>6</sup>

Preferential treatment towards or dependence on any company hurts competition, innovation, and national security. A May 2024 report by the Defense Science Board found that the Pentagon’s dependence upon a sole vendor like SpaceX can lead to “stifling innovation and inflating prices.”<sup>7</sup> SpaceX’s monopoly over NRO Contracts has created a situation where “SpaceX is building hundreds of the satellites for the spy agency and then putting them into orbit on its own rocket.”<sup>8</sup> This type of vertical integration can “culminate in a de facto monopoly, cementing a stagnant and wasteful anticompetitive paradigm.”<sup>9</sup>

These are incredibly serious allegations of misconduct and favoritism. If you are confirmed to be Secretary of the Air Force, you will be responsible for key contracting and deployment decisions. You will inherit major decisions about human-piloted next-generation stealth fighters—something Mr. Musk has called “obsolete” and “inefficient.”<sup>10</sup> You will also make decisions about the role of mixed-use UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) and artificial intelligence and key space programs, crucially, “oversee[ing] lucrative contracts for critical space efforts where top Trump ally Elon Musk’s SpaceX dominates.”<sup>11</sup> Any or all of these may have a direct impact on SpaceX and other companies owned by Mr. Musk. We therefore request the following information by March 6, 2025:

1. Were you at any time, or are you currently, contacted by or under investigation or review by any inspector general personnel for your role in contracting decisions, or for any other reason?
  - a. If so, what is the status of the investigation(s).
2. Have you ever been counseled or advised that your working relationship with Mr. Musk or other officials from SpaceX creates a conflict of interest?
3. What is the nature of your relationship with Mr. Musk and SpaceX?
  - a. What role did Mr. Musk or other officials at SpaceX play in your nomination to be Secretary of the Air Force?
  - b. Did you have conversations with Mr. Musk or other officials at SpaceX regarding the nomination? If so, please describe the nature of these conversations.
  - c. Did Mr. Musk or other officials at SpaceX ask for anything in return for supporting your nomination?
4. Reuters reported that you altered key details of a major contract, effectively boxing out other companies from bidding. Are these reports accurate? Did you alter details of this contract, and if so, why did you do so?

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<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> New York Times, “Elon Musk’s SpaceX, Already a Leader in Satellites, Gets Into the Spy Game,” Eric Lipton, October 30, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/10/30/us/politics/spacex-spy-satellites-elon-musk.html>.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> Business Insider, “Elon Musk says human-piloted fighter jets like the F-35 are obsolete. Drone tech can’t yet fill the gap,” Ryan Pickrell, Mia Jankowicz, and Jake Epstein, November 26, 2024, <https://www.businessinsider.com/elon-musk-crewed-fighter-jet-f-35-obsolete-drone-technology2024-11>.

<sup>11</sup> BreakingDefense, “Trump picks NRO official Troy Meink as next Air Force secretary,” Michael Marrow and Theresa Hitchens, January 16, 2025, <https://breakingdefense.com/2025/01/trump-picks-nro-official-troy-meink-as-next-air-force-secretary/>.

5. Reports further suggest that you threatened to withhold future contracts from L3Harris if the company filed a formal complaint. Did you threaten or imply that you would withhold future contracts from L3Harris or any other contractors if they filed complaints, bid protests, or cooperated with the Inspector General's investigation?
6. Have you ever threatened or implied that you would withhold future contracts from a company if they filed a complaint, bid protest, or cooperated with an inspector general or other investigation?
7. If confirmed to be Secretary of the Air Force, what role would you play in Department of Defense (DoD) acquisition negotiations with contractors like SpaceX?
8. Do you think it is valuable to encourage competition and innovation in the defense industrial base?
9. On February 11<sup>th</sup>, Mr. Musk held a press conference in the oval office where he claimed that every government contract awarded to SpaceX was "by far the best value for money for the taxpayer." If confirmed to be Secretary of the Air Force, what measures would you take to ensure a robust bidding process to encourage competition for DoD projects?
10. In November 2024, Mr. Musk wrote on X (formerly Twitter) that "manned fighter jets are obsolete in the age of drones" and called those building jets like the F-35 "idiots."<sup>12</sup> Do you agree with Mr. Musk's characterization of fifth-generation stealth fighters?

Sincerely,



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Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



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Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator

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<sup>12</sup> Business Insider, "Elon Musk said the F-35's makers are 'idiots' for still building manned jets as drone tech rises," Matthew Loh and Mia Jankowicz, November 25, 2024, <https://www.businessinsider.com/elon-musk-f35-idiots-building-unmanned-jets-drone-warfare-doge-2024-11>.