

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 17, 2022

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Austin:

For months, the Department of Defense (DoD) has failed to provide information about your ambiguous August 24, 2021 COVID-19 vaccine mandate.¹ Perhaps as a result of your unwillingness to be transparent with service members, whistleblowers have come forward to share some of the information that I asked you to provide last year.

Over four months ago on October 12, 2021, I requested that DoD provide information about the number COVID-19 vaccinations administered to service members.² On October 27, 2021, I received a letter from Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Gilbert Cisneros stating that he would “provide a comprehensive response by November 29, 2021.”³ After DoD failed to meet this deadline, I reiterated my requests in a December 15, 2021 letter.⁴ On January 10, 2022, Mr. Cisneros wrote to me again stating that he will provide a “comprehensive response to [my] questions by March 31, 2022.”⁵ DoD’s consistent failure to respond to my requests in a timely manner is unacceptable particularly when my questions relate to the health and well-being of service members.

Recently, Thomas Renz, an attorney who is representing multiple DoD whistleblowers, released a 35-page unclassified DoD document titled, “Senior Leaders Brief COVID-19.”⁶ This brief, dated January 12, 2022, appeared to contain data that I had requested from you including information on the vaccination status of service members. Specifically, the document showed

¹ Memorandum from Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin to Senior Pentagon Leadership, et al. (Aug. 24, 2021) (available at <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Aug/25/2002838826/-1/-1/0/MEMORANDUM-FOR-MANDATORYCORONAVIRUS-DISEASE-2019-VACCINATION-OF-DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-SERVICEMEMBERS.PDF>).

² Letter to Lloyd Austin, Secretary of Defense et al., from Ron Johnson, U.S. Senator, Oct. 12, 2021, <https://www.ronjohnson.senate.gov/services/files/1BC1491B-CFAB-4784-9DBB-8DCAC9E30BD9>.

³ Letter to Ron Johnson, U.S. Senator, from Gilbert Cisneros, Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, Oct. 27, 2021.

⁴ Letter to Lloyd Austin, Secretary of Defense, from Ron Johnson, U.S. Senator, Dec. 15, 2021, <https://www.ronjohnson.senate.gov/2021/12/sen-johnson-demands-defense-department-provide-clarity-on-vaccine-mandate>.

⁵ Letter to Ron Johnson, U.S. Senator, from Gilbert Cisneros, Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, Jan. 10, 2022.

⁶ Thomas Renz, Renz New DOD Doc Proves Purging Unvaccinated Military Puts America At Great Risk, <https://renz-law.com/renz-new-dod-doc-proves-purging-unvaccinated-military-put-america-at-great-risk/>.

that for all services members, approximately 76% are fully vaccinated; 16% are partially vaccinated; and 8% are not vaccinated or unknown.⁷ I request that you immediately provide an official copy of this apparent packet of information (enclosed) and all similar briefings compiled since August 24, 2021. If this brief is authentic, then why did DoD not immediately send me this information on vaccination status as soon as it was compiled?

Given that DoD is still discharging service members who “refuse to be vaccinated for COVID-19,” I am concerned that your actions may threaten our defense capabilities.⁸ I am sure you realize that you cannot discharge thousands of service members who are not fully vaccinated and hope to maintain any semblance of military readiness.

The men and women of the armed forces who put their lives on the line to defend this country deserve your full transparency and cooperation with congressional oversight. I demand your immediate response to my previous letters.

Sincerely,



Ron Johnson
United States Senator

cc: The Honorable Sean O'Donnell
Acting Inspector General

Enclosure

⁷ *Id.* According to the document, service members include active duty, reserves, and National Guard.

⁸ Avie Schneider, U.S. Army begins to discharge soldiers who refuse COVID-19 vaccination, NPR, Feb. 2, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/02/02/1077625142/u-s-army-covid-vaccination>.