

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0908

December 1, 2021

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

Dear Secretary Austin:

We write to express concern for U.S. service members who could be unfairly targeted by your newly established Countering Extremism Working Group (CEWG). In the wake of the U.S. Department of Justice's efforts to silence parents protesting anti-American racial indoctrination being taught in schools across the country, we are deeply concerned that this latest effort by the Biden Administration will target service members who voice opposition to woke, Leftist ideology under the guise of protecting our "national security interest." Service members represent a cross-section of the country they faithfully serve, and hold beliefs and opinions as diverse as America itself. These patriotic men and women come from all backgrounds, ethnicities, and beliefs. Our military leaders should be honoring the diversity among our armed forces, not divide us by forcing false narratives that solely serve to alienate our fellow Americans based on the color of their skin.

There is no room for extremism in and among our service members. The Department of Defense (DoD) must utilize its resources to identify and neutralize real threats of extremism, such as the Royal Saudi Air Force student who killed two people aboard Naval Air Station Pensacola, Florida in 2019; the individual who killed 12 people at the Washington Navy Yard in 2013; and the individual who fatally shot 13 people at Fort Hood, Texas in 2009. The DoD should focus on real threats that pose a clear and present danger to our nation – not those who refuse to bow to the woke orthodoxy pushed by Liberal elites in the main stream media, academia, and government.

The CEWG's tasks appear to be more in line with an intelligence collection effort focused on service members than an honest effort to improve the DoD. These tasks include incorporating algorithms and additional processing into social media screening platforms, and training military leadership on "gray areas" such as reading, following, and liking extremist material and content in social media forums and platforms. In today's society, the definition of "extremist" is skewed to the person creating the definition. Service members respect clear, unambiguous terminology and application of counter-extremist efforts. However, there is nothing straight forward in understanding "gray areas," which by definition, are meant to be vague, and allow the possibility of being subjectively used in a way that disenfranchises service members from even using social media. This is particularly concerning when the individual in charge, Bishop Garrison, has a long history of rabid anti-conservative bias. In fact, Garrison sent a tweet saying former President Trump was a racist and that, "[i]f you support the [former]

President, you support that. There is no room for nuance with this. There is no more ‘but I’m not like that’ talk.”¹ We therefore request responses to the following questions:

- What type of intelligence collection will the DoD create to monitor these activities and initiatives, and who will monitor them?
- What is your plan to protect service members’ fourth amendment right to due process under the Constitution?
- What safeguards are in place to ensure the CEWG will not have a chilling effect on service members’ willingness to engage in protected political speech?
- How many extremists has the DoD found within its ranks from January 2011 to November 2021?
 - Please provide this information broken down by year and describe the context for determining these individuals were extremists.

Identifying and neutralizing extremist threats in, and among our service members, is an important goal. It is imperative that the Biden Administration and the DoD use existing resources to target legitimate threats, not use this working group as a cudgel to harass or silence conservative members of the armed forces. We look forward to your prompt response to this inquiry.

Sincerely,



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



Rick Scott
U.S. Senator



Thom Tillis
U.S. Senator



Kevin Cramer
U.S. Senator



Mike Braun
U.S. Senator



Josh Hawley
U.S. Senator

¹ <https://twitter.com/BishopGarrison/status/1155284928323620864?s=20>



Tom Cotton
U.S. Senator



John Boozman
U.S. Senator



Roger Marshall, M.D.
U.S. Senator



Steve Daines
U.S. Senator



James Lankford
U.S. Senator



Mike Lee
U.S. Senator