

March 14, 2024

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

Dear Secretary Austin:

I write with regard to concerning reports that the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) is considering diverting money from quality of life projects for U.S. service members, such as badly needed housing projects, in order to fund the DoD's operations to support Ukraine. While I am supportive of assisting allies and partners, the needs of our service members must come first. This means prioritizing the needs of the men and women who put their lives on the line for our country, and as such, I ask you to publicly commit to not divert funding away from projects that support our service members quality of life.

Last month, in discussing the prioritization of funding at the DoD, Maj. Gen. Patrick Ryder stated, "[a]t issue here again is the question of impacting our own readiness as a nation, and the responsibilities that we have." One of those responsibilities is taking care of our people, a "sacred obligation," that is a "national security imperative," as you stated in a September 2022 memo.¹ I agree with that statement. The U.S. cannot fight and win wars without our people, and ensuring that our service members and their families are afforded decent housing, competitive pay, and resources to help them thrive wherever the U.S. military calls them to serve should be the top priority of the Department.

Quality of life issues are fueling our military's poor performance in recruitment and retention, and the disregard for these programs remains a deterrent against joining the military. In January, I wrote about the recruitment crisis facing our military and that young people no longer feel called towards in serving our great country.² It is no secret that while fewer young people are signing up to serve our country, the world becomes increasingly more dangerous. Ensuring that service members, and potential recruits, know that the DoD is investing in them during their service is paramount to both the retention of current service members, and recruiting future warfighters.

I have seen the impacts of the quality of life issues and the concerns with housing, pay, and resources at the many installations in Florida. That is why recent reporting stating the U.S.

¹ <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Sep/22/2003083398/-1/-1/0/TAKING-CARE-OF-OUR-SERVICE-MEMBERS-AND-FAMILIES.PDF>

² <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/marco-rubio-military-recruitment-crisis-more-dangerous-we-know-208758>

Army is considering diverting money from “badly needed barracks construction or enlistment incentives amid record-low recruiting” is concerning.³ We will not win wars without taking care of our people first. Therefore, I request answers to the following questions to ensure that the DoD continues to prioritize U.S. service members:

1. Will you publicly commit to not reprogram funding intended to support U.S. service members quality of life programs, or recruitment and retention money, for any foreign country, including Ukraine?
2. What factors does DoD consider when deciding to reprogram funding to support other countries, such as Ukraine?
3. Has DoD taken any steps to begin reprogramming funding from quality of life projects towards other countries such as Ukraine? If so, please provide a list.

I appreciate your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Rubio', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator

³ <https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/19/politics/us-army-ukraine-support-pressure/index.html>