

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-4313**

November 4, 2021

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

Dear Secretary Austin,

On August 25, 2021, you issued a memorandum to Department of Defense (DoD) leadership for mandatory Coronavirus vaccination of Service Members. You stated that mandatory vaccination against COVID-19 is necessary to protect the Force and defend the American people. While we understand that your intent is to preserve readiness, we are concerned that a blanket vaccine mandate will have the opposite effect.

As you know, the COVID-19 vaccines were developed at an incredibly rapid pace thanks to the leadership of President Donald Trump and his vision to establish Operation Warp Speed. President Trump successfully took an unprecedented approach to develop the vaccine and took the program from concept to emergency use authorization from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in less than a year.

Unfortunately, President Biden and Vice President Harris have chosen to politicize the vaccine, which started before they were sworn into office and has included hypocritical mixed messaging. During her campaign, Vice President Kamala Harris said on national television that she would not take the vaccine "if Donald Trump tells us we should take it."<sup>1</sup> Further, President Biden said "I don't think it should be mandatory. I wouldn't demand it be mandatory...just like I don't think masks have to be made mandatory nationwide."<sup>2</sup>

Now, President Biden has gone back on his word and implemented vaccine mandates across the federal government, including the Department of Defense, which your memorandum supported. While a majority of the Armed Forces have been vaccinated voluntarily, it should remain a personal choice for every single American, just as it was for Vice President Harris. You are forcing many of our servicemembers into a very difficult personal decision, and that is fundamentally wrong.

Aside from the political implications of the vaccine mandate, we have additional concerns about the impact such a mandate has on operational readiness and our military's ability to conduct operations. There have been reports that servicemembers from the special forces

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/video/2020-vp-debate-kamala-harris-on-coronavirus-vaccine/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/video-biden-said-december-2020-wouldnt-make-vaccine-mandatory-2021-9>

Letter to Secretary Austin re Vaccine Mandate Impact

community are being told that they will not be deployed if they do not receive the vaccine and will no longer be able to serve in their current roles. We rely on Special Operations Forces (SOF) to execute time sensitive missions that usually involve a high degree of risk in hostile or politically sensitive environments. We value these servicemembers because they are highly trained and specialized to conduct operations that are vital to our national security. Losing even one Navy SEAL or other special operator is detrimental to our ability to conduct these operations and missions. Thus, if numerous SOF personnel are separated due to this mandate, we fear we will see an irreparable level of harm done to our readiness and operational capabilities.

Given the hastiness of your decision, we urge you to reconsider until you can verify with absolute certainty that readiness for our military, including the SOF community, will not be impacted. We request that you submit such a certification to the House and Senate Armed Services Committees prior to enforcing any mandate that would negatively impact readiness and degrade the DoD's ability to conduct operations globally. We further request that you provide a plan on how you would mitigate the impact of losing any number of highly trained and extremely capable servicemembers.

In your memo dated August 24, 2021 regarding the mandatory COVID-19 vaccine that was disseminated throughout the DoD, you claim that vaccination for the Armed Forces will save lives. Unfortunately, Mr. Secretary, we are gravely concerned that your vaccine mandate is going to endanger the lives of Americans and our freedoms by forcing some of the best and bravest among us to leave the military. We strongly urge you to reconsider your decision until you can ensure that a vaccine mandate will not have a detrimental impact on mission readiness and on our ability to conduct operations that keep our country safe.

Sincerely,



Ronny L. Jackson  
Member of Congress



Vicky Hartzler  
Member of Congress



Pat Fallon  
Member of Congress



Scott DesJarlais  
Member of Congress

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Doug Lamborn  
Member of Congress



Dan Bishop  
Member of Congress



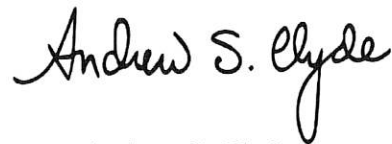
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Member of Congress



Jeff Duncan  
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Bill Posey  
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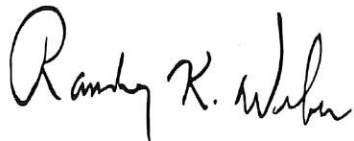
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Member of Congress



Andy Biggs  
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Matt Gaetz  
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Chip Roy  
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