

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 22, 2025

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Hegseth,

We write to express our deep concern regarding the turmoil taking place at the Department of Defense under your leadership. Just within the last week, your chief of staff was reassigned to a new position at the Pentagon, and your deputy chief of staff, senior advisor, and the chief of staff to the Deputy Secretary of Defense were terminated. Certainly it is the prerogative of every Secretary of Defense to choose his or her own staff, but the scale of these firings is simply staggering.

What is even more alarming is that this significant staffing shakeup only comes on the heels of wider unacceptable and dangerous behavior at the Department of Defense. You are currently facing an investigation by the Pentagon's Inspector General, prompted by your release of sensitive information regarding a military operation in Yemen in a Signal chat with other Administration national security leaders. More recently, there are reports from the New York Times that you shared details about the Yemen strike in a separate Signal chat that included your wife and brother. This lack of judgment is dangerous and has already put American lives at risk.

As members of the House Armed Services Committee, we intend to make full use of our oversight role to ensure our national security is not at risk given your actions and the ensuing staffing disruptions. We ask that you answer the following questions:

1. Please describe the individual roles and functions of your immediate front office staff, including military and civilian aides between the period of January 20, 2025 and April 20, 2025.
2. Each of the Secretary's military assistants (the Junior Military Assistant, the Principal Military Assistant and the Senior Military Assistant) perform distinct and critical tasks in support of the Secretary. Most importantly, these military assistants ensure the Secretary can make timely life or death decisions on matters including missile defense of the homeland, whether to shoot down a civilian airliner threatening the President or the Capitol, for example, and nuclear command and control. It is essential that the Secretary have well qualified, trained and experienced officers performing these "no fail" functions and that proper process and redundancies are well established. After the SMA and PMA were relieved on February 21, 2025, has the JMA been performing all those functions? If not, please provide the breakdown of these functions and roles and any changes between February 21, 2025 and April 20, 2025.
3. Civilian control of the military is paramount. In the absence of senior civilian staff—including a Chief of Staff and Deputy Chief of Staff—who in the Secretary's front office is in charge of ensuring that decisions teed up for the Secretary are properly adjudicated and implemented in the department? Is the Office of the General Counsel reviewing lethal force decisions and providing advice to the Secretary as part of this process?
4. Who in the Secretary's immediate office participates in his PDB or intelligence briefings? Who in the Secretary's immediate front office has access to the PDB? What process is in place to ensure classified information is being shared only with staff who have the requisite clearances and need-to-know access?

5. Are there any members of the Secretary's immediate office on any Signal chains related to operational matters? If so, please provide the substance of those communications.
6. What is the Secretary's front office process to ensure that any Signal texts on official department business comply with the Federal Records Act and who is ensuring compliance? What, if any, corrective action and process improvements have been put in place by the Secretary's front office since the revelations that the Secretary was using Signal to discuss operational matters?

We hope that you understand the severity of this situation. As Secretary of Defense, you hold significant responsibility in safeguarding our national security. Your actions to date provide no confidence in your ability to protect the American people, specifically those in uniform. We request a response to our questions by May 5th.

Sincerely,



Maggie Goodlander
Member of Congress



Seth Moulton
Member of Congress



Chrissy Houlahan
Member of Congress



Eric Sorensen
Member of Congress