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July 21, 2022

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

Dear Secretary Austin,

Even as it struggles to meet recruiting goals, the Department of Defense is continuing to terminate experienced, unvaccinated servicemembers by the thousands. The Department is simultaneously bleeding its best and brightest while desperately trying to recruit new talent. This is not a blueprint for success.

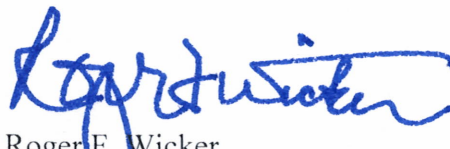
You stated in your August 24, 2021, memo that “mandatory vaccination against coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is necessary to protect the Force and defend the American people.” This was never the case, and it is even less the case now as the country fully recovers from the pandemic. As Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), said this week, “vaccines – because of the high degree of transmissibility of this virus – don’t protect overly well, as it were, against infection.” Moreover, service members, the vast majority of whom are under the age of 45 and have no serious or underlying health conditions, are also among those who are at the lowest risk for hospitalization and death from the coronavirus.

Despite this low mortality rate in the DoD’s target demographic, you are fast approaching the prospect of expelling more U.S. service members than all Americans who have died of COVID under age 45. To date, the Army has removed over 1,100 Soldiers, the Air Force has removed over 800 Airmen, the Navy has removed over 1,000 Sailors, and the Marine Corps has removed over 2,000 Marines because of COVID vaccination status. Each of these services have thousands of outstanding exemption requests that will also likely result in separations. Additionally, about 13 percent of National Guardsmen, (40,000) and 12 percent of Reservists (22,000) remained unvaccinated the day after the DoD vaccination deadline passed.

Your COVID vaccine mandate is on the precipice of irreversibly damaging the readiness of the U.S. military in the near-term and beyond. I strongly advise that you discontinue this mandate and work to make the services whole again.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Roger F. Wicker  
United States Senator