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United States Senate
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6050

ELIZABETH L. KING, STAFF DIRECTOR
JOHN P. KEAST, REPUBLICAN STAFF DIRECTOR

October 27, 2023

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

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am once again requesting information related to the abortion policies instituted by your department in February 2023. The Senate Armed Services Committee discovered your department is seeking public comment on proposed focus groups and surveys to be conducted with military personnel to “highlight areas related to family planning that may threaten the DoD's ability to field a ready and lethal force.” In other words, over a year after you stated unequivocally that the *Dobbs* ruling has “readiness, recruiting, and retention implications for the Force” the Department of Defense is still searching for evidence to support this baseless claim.

The same notification for the department’s proposed study also states that “there is little existing research on service members' experiences with family planning.” The intention to study this topic in the fashion described in the public notice— as well as the concession that little data exists on the issue— completely undermines previous statements made repeatedly by you and other senior Defense officials about the necessity of your abortion travel policy. On June 28, 2022, then-Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Cisneros claimed the Supreme Court’s ruling “will have significant implications for...the readiness of the Force.” In comments you made on June 25, 2022, you mentioned access to abortion directly in the context of “ensuring the readiness and resilience of our Force.” In an October 20, 2022 press call, an unnamed senior department official claimed that the “the Dobbs decision has diminished access to reproductive healthcare with...readiness impacts across the force.”

The Biden Administration’s repeated assertion that that there is force-wide readiness challenge due to limited abortion access cannot possibly be true if, simultaneously, the Department of Defense admits that it needs to study “areas related to family planning that may threaten the DOD’s ability to field a ready and lethal force.” If the Administration were actually committed to maintaining an apolitical military, a study such as this should have been undertaken months before you promulgated this divisive and inflammatory policy.

The resulting politicization of our armed forces has been shameful and completely self-inflicted. It is incumbent upon this administration to retract these unsubstantiated abortion-related readiness

claims, suspend this divisive policy, and take an unbiased approach to collect the necessary data to determine whether any force readiness challenges may be correlated to the recent change in law due to Dobbs. I earnestly await your prompt reply to this letter as well as those I sent to you on March 1, 2023 and September 15, 2023.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Roger F. Wicker". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Roger" being the most prominent part.

Roger F. Wicker
Ranking Member