



SPECIAL REPORT

MARCH 30, 2023

Report of the National Independent Panel on Military Service and Readiness

Convened by The Heritage Foundation

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Report of the National Independent Panel on Military Service and Readiness

I. Introduction

The National Independent Panel on Military Service and Readiness was commissioned and announced by the president of The Heritage Foundation on October 13, 2022.¹

The panel conducted research, held meetings, and wrote this report during the period of November 16, 2022, to February 20, 2023.

The panel consists of the following eight members, listed below in alphabetical order, except for the chairman. They were selected based on their demonstrated devotion to and concern for national defense, their experience with the U.S. military, and their expertise regarding the U.S. Armed Forces' capabilities. Their biographies can be found in Appendix A.

1. Congressman Michael Waltz (R-FL), Chairman
2. Mr. Mike Berry
3. Lieutenant General (Retired) Rod Bishop Jr., USAF
4. Ms. Rebecca L. Heinrichs
5. Mr. Jeremy Hunt
6. Mr. Earl G. Matthews
7. Lieutenant General (Retired) H. R. McMaster, USA
8. Ms. Morgan Ortagus

Purpose

The panel's mission was (1) to identify personnel policies and practices within the Department of Defense (DOD) that, by reason of their political orientation or other potential for divisiveness, reduce military readiness, impede military recruiting, and undermine retention; and (2) to recommend actions necessary to ensure that the Armed Forces are prepared to protect the nation for the foreseeable future. The primary audience for the panel's final report are the policymakers in Congress, Administration officials, and the American public.

Methodology

The panel combined hard evidence and data with reason and logic. To gather data and evidence, the panel conducted a review of all existing polling data and reports on politicization and personnel policies that appear to detract from readiness. The panel used anecdotal evidence only from verifiable sources. Further, to support the panel, The Heritage Foundation commissioned a poll focused on the scope of inquiry. During multiple meetings, the panel synthesized information and developed recommendations.

Early on, the panel assessed that the current recruiting crisis is connected to the perception that the military is becoming politicized. The panel acknowledges the difficulty of identifying causes of low recruiting, because it is impossible to capture all of the complex reasons for human decision-making and, in particular, why certain people are choosing not to join the military or are opting for shorter times in service than what they may have otherwise committed. However, the panel made a reasonable correlation between senior leaders engaging in or otherwise enabling politicization and downturns in recruiting and retention. It also focused objectively on how the senior political and military leaders' apparent focus on partisan political issues undermines readiness.

It is important to note that while the panel seeks to identify and outline the specific problems within the military, the panel is in emphatic agreement that the problems are reversible. Claims that the entire U.S. military is less disciplined or worse trained across the board than enemy forces are unsubstantiated and do not accurately reflect the attributes of the vast majority of U.S. forces. Embracing this erroneous claim could cause policymakers and Americans to become fatalistic about the direction of the military, which risks exacerbating the recruitment and retention challenges. Nonetheless, the problems are real and serious and demand the attention of U.S. policymakers as a matter of national security.



II. Background

The United States is at a historical inflection point. Multiple actors pose threats to U.S. security, at least two of which are major nuclear powers—the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation—that are also increasingly collaborating. Senior military leaders such as the recently retired commander of U.S. Strategic Command, Admiral Charles Richard, have warned that the potential for major war with a peer nation-state is looming, noting, “This Ukraine crisis...is just the warmup,” and “it isn’t going to be very long before we’re going to get tested in ways that we haven’t been tested” for “a long time.”²

Those who volunteer to serve in the U.S. military should be highly trained with rigorous standards and equipped with the best weapons and protection U.S. designers and engineers can provide. U.S. policymakers have the duty to ensure that the military is ready and able to protect the American people against adversarial forces and also that the patriotic men and women who volunteer to defend this country are optimally prepared to do so and have the greatest chance to come home safely.

While equipment and capabilities are of enormous importance, they only go so far: The human elements of training, discipline, cohesion, confidence, and morale are critical to fighting and winning in war. The panel concluded that those elements are under severe duress due to a prioritization of a political agenda that distracts from the warfighting mission and diminishes trust in military leadership.

Due to the demands of warfare, the military must organize and operate in a manner distinctly different from civilian organizations. Because war

involves killing and the prospect of death, military organizations emphasize discipline and adherence to values such as honor, courage, and self-sacrifice. In the United States, the warrior ethos and the professional military ethic set expectations for American servicemen and women that go beyond those codified in the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Not only are those who are trained to fight empowered to defend the nation, but they are also placed under unique legal strictures apart from American civilians. For example, the U.S. Supreme Court has long recognized the special status of military members, ruling that the protections all Americans enjoy under the Bill of Rights can be circumscribed in the case of military necessity. In *Parker v. Levy*, for example, the Court found that military necessity outweighed free political expression under certain circumstances that often arise in the military context.³

So critical is the need to ensure that servicemembers are unified in a sense of mission and national purpose that, to the extent possible, they should be protected from the impact of political factions in civilian American society. Many Americans across the political spectrum understand this special status and that servicemembers should not be used to further domestic political objectives. Politicization of the U.S. military risks dividing groups into factions while detracting time, resources, and focus on the priority mission: to prepare and train the force to fight and win in combat.

However, data collected by the panel indicates a growing politicization of the military, where *politicization* is defined as the imposition of policies, programs, and messaging designed for political, not military, reasons. Politicization can lead to a decline in both American public trust in the military—which, in turn, negatively impacts recruiting efforts—and the military’s readiness to fight and win wars.

The panel adopted a narrow focus on readiness, defining it as the ability to accomplish the mission: to deter and fight wars. A military that is distracted from combat readiness and fails to train and prepare adequately for combat because of requirements associated with progressive social justice programs or others outside the military’s set of missions will be *underprepared to fight in conflict*. An unpreparedness to fight puts at risk the lives of servicemembers and the national security of the United States.

As threats to national security increase, the U.S. military should be ready for contingencies against increasingly advanced adversaries in multiple places around the world. Based on objective criteria such as numbers of ships, planes, and brigade combat teams, the most recent edition of The Heritage Foundation’s *Index of U.S. Military Strength* already rates the military’s preparedness to protect the nation’s vital interests—to include U.S.

capabilities, capacity, and readiness—as “weak.” Additional impediments to military readiness—such as those imposed by politicization—only further diminish those capabilities and increase the threat to U.S. security.⁴



III. The Problem

The panel was commissioned based on a widely shared concern that the Biden Administration’s imposition of progressive social and environmental agendas is distracting the military from its primary mission and undermining readiness. Specifically, evidence indicates that appointed Pentagon political leaders are dragging divisive progressive social justice ideologies into an institution that, for 248 years, has sought to remain apolitical and neutral.

Fundamentally at risk is the warrior ethos within the U.S. Armed Forces. There is no single definition of the American warrior ethos, but at its core it “binds warriors to one another and to the citizens in whose name they fight and serve. It is grounded in values such as courage, honor, and self-sacrifice. The ethos reminds warriors of what society expects of them and what they expect of themselves.”⁵ A strong warrior ethos is essential for the military’s purpose—to deter conflict and fight and win should deterrence fail. If ensuring the ability to fight and win is not the focus of the DOD, confused priorities threaten to dilute the warrior ethos and create uncertainty about the military’s purpose and, as a result, threaten the military’s ability to defend Americans.

The panel aimed to identify those social or environmental policies imposed on the U.S. military not to improve military readiness or lethality but instead to advance progressive ideological goals, which are, in turn, leading to reduced readiness.

Poor Recruiting Success Is an Early Indicator. While there are many indicators of looming problems, the current military recruiting crisis is the most salient. In fiscal year (FY) 2022, the U.S. military had the worst year

for recruiting since the advent of the all-volunteer force in 1973. FY 2023 is already trending worse still.

- At the end of FY 2022 the Army fell 15,000 soldiers short of its recruiting goal, missing by 25 percent.⁶ The Army predicts that FY 2023 will be worse, estimating its end strength to be down by around 20,000 soldiers to a total of 450,000 active duty.⁷ In anticipation of another poor recruiting year, the Army asked for its end strength to be cut by 33,000 active-duty soldiers from FY 2022 to FY 2023, dropping from 485,000 in FY 2022 to 452,000 in 2023. Informal reports indicate that the combat occupational specialties are by far the most heavily impacted by this shortfall.⁸
- The other services are also experiencing problems. The Marine Corps, Navy, and Air Force normally start a fiscal year with as many as half of their recruiting goals already recruited and contracted, but as of October 1, those percentages were off by as much as 50 percent.⁹ Even the military academies are impacted. Applications to the Air Force Academy dropped by 28 percent for the class of 2026, the Naval Academy by 20 percent, and West Point by 10 percent.¹⁰

One of the reasons for the decline in recruiting is low unemployment (3.4 percent in January 2023).¹¹ Other sources further explain that fewer and fewer Americans are able to qualify for military service without waivers (down to 23 percent in 2022).¹² Another factor is that no senior members of the Biden Administration, other than the service secretaries, are actually asking young people to volunteer to serve their nation.

But all these factors cannot fully explain the problem, as similar conditions have been present in the past and recruiting did not fail so badly.

It is clear that today fewer young people are interested in pursuing military service. The question is: Why?

Sharp Drop in Americans' Confidence in the U.S. Military. The panel concluded that a large portion of the current recruiting shortfall is due to a drop in trust and confidence in the U.S. military.

- The Military Family Advisory Network found in a recent poll that the percentage of military and veteran families who would recommend military life had declined to 62.9 percent in 2021, down from 74.5 percent just three years ago in 2019.¹³ This decrease is especially concerning because military recruits tend to come from military families:

According to U.S. Army Recruiting Command, 79 percent of recruits have relatives who served.¹⁴

- A February 2022 Pew Research poll reported that the percentage of Americans who had either a great deal or a fair amount of confidence in the military *declined nine points between 2020 and 2021*.¹⁵
- In July 2022 a Gallup poll described a five-point decline in American confidence in the U.S. military *in just one year*.¹⁶
- Finally, and most alarming, in its November 2022 poll the Ronald Reagan Institute found that there had been a sharp decline in the trust and confidence in the U.S. military, with 70 percent saying they had “a great deal” of trust in 2018, *dropping to 48 percent in 2022*.¹⁷

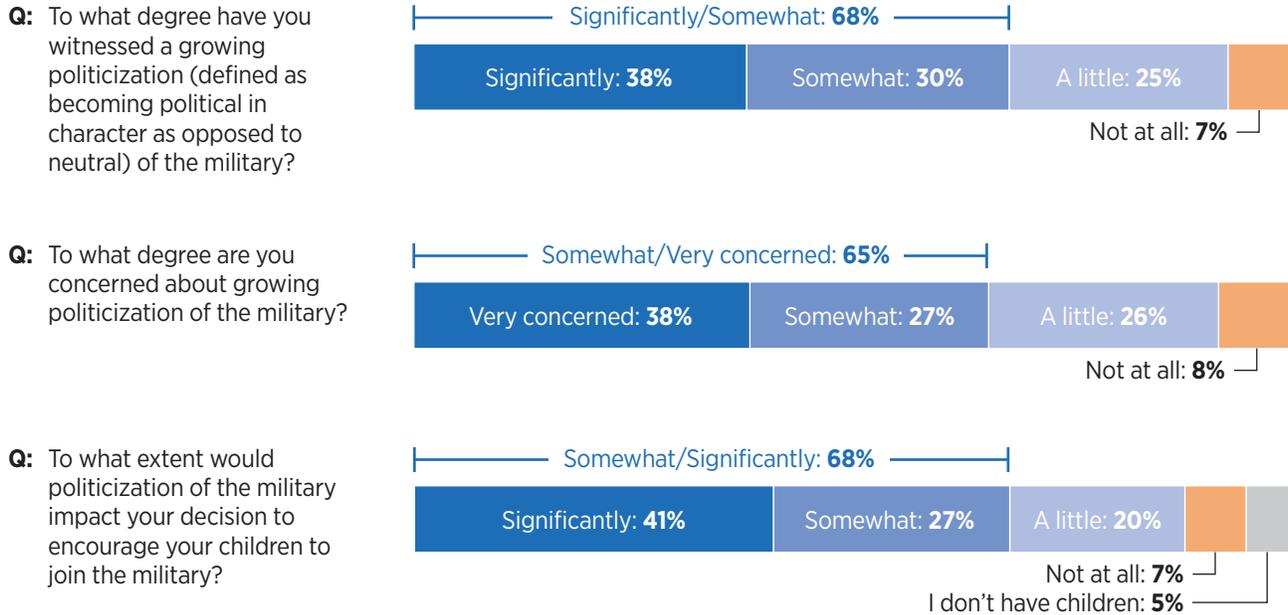
Studies have shown that young people are very susceptible to career influence from individuals in their lives such as parents, relatives, guidance counselors, and teachers.¹⁸ When these less positive views of the American public regarding the military are widely shared, it negatively influences military recruiting and retention efforts.

While there is not a great deal of data on what is causing the decline in public trust, the panel concluded that a major contributor to this loss is the *perception that the U.S. military is pursuing ideological goals at the expense of military readiness and effectiveness*. In recent years, the Pentagon has pursued certain policies largely in support of a partisan political, versus readiness-based, agenda. These policies include:

- The drive to indoctrinate servicemembers using hermeneutical methods rooted in Marxism (e.g., Critical Race Theory);¹⁹
- The introduction of distinctly partisan policies on issues such as abortion,²⁰ instruction to promotion boards to consider the need for diversity, and advocating for racial preferences in military officer accession programs;²¹
- Reducing physical fitness in order to “level the playing field” so that more women and other groups can meet the standards;²²
- Relaxation of standards in career fields or military enlistment to promote equitable outcomes;²³ and

CHART 1

Poll: Active Military Members' Concerns About Politicization



SOURCE: Maru/Blue survey conducted December 12-19, 2022. For more information, see the methodology in Appendix B.

- The push to prioritize environmental ideology (as opposed to necessary environmental stewardship) over warfighting, thereby siphoning resources away from military readiness.²⁴

Polling data supports this conclusion. According to the Ronald Reagan Institute’s November 2022 poll, the most frequently selected reason for decreased trust in the U.S. military was the “military leadership becoming overly politicized.” Reasons also found at the top of the list were “the performance and competence of presidents, as the Commander-In-Chief” and “so-called ‘woke’ practices undermining military effectiveness.”²⁵

A recent poll conducted by The Heritage Foundation further lends credence to these conclusions (see Appendix B): Over two-thirds of active-duty military surveyed said they witnessed politicization in the military, and 65 percent of active-duty personnel are concerned about growing politicization of the military. Their most selected areas for concern were “An over emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion programs” (41 percent); “Reduction of physical fitness standards to promote equity” (41 percent); and “Requirement for the military to pay for abortion-related travel” (40

percent). Over half of non-active-duty military personnel also said they believe that the military has become too politicized.

Moreover, 68 percent of active-duty military personnel stated that politicization of the military would impact their decision to encourage their children to join, which is particularly concerning given the role that military families play in recruiting.

Military culture and discipline suppress the general public's knowledge of progressive policies imposed within the DOD. Unless an order is illegal, military members must obey and are discouraged from voicing dissent outside the chain of command. When academy cadets, midshipmen, or servicemembers report such policies or programs, even anonymously, they place their careers at risk.

Is Military Retention the Next Crisis? There are indications that retention—the voluntary decision by servicemembers to remain in the service beyond their initial enlistment or service obligation—is beginning to experience the same challenges as recruiting. The Navy has stopped early discharges, is increasing incentives for sailors to remain in service, and recently erased all record of past physical fitness test failures.²⁶ It is also reportedly offering bonuses to Naval Special Warfare sailors in order to improve retention.²⁷ In the Air Force, fighter pilot retention has suffered over recent years.²⁸ The Marine Corps is normally the last service to experience recruiting or retention challenges and thus far is not reporting retention issues.

One factor likely contributing to a downfall in retention is that military culture is under threat. A recent report commissioned by Members of Congress regarding the fighting culture of the U.S. Navy surface fleet found over the course of 77 separate interviews of active-duty sailors “a broad consensus across interviewees on numerous cultural and structural issues that impact the morale and readiness of the Navy’s surface force. These include: an insufficient focus on warfighting skills, the perception of a zero-defect mentality accompanied by a culture of micromanagement, and over-sensitivity and responsiveness to modern media culture.”²⁹ One destroyer captain reportedly commented that “where someone puts their time shows what their priorities are. And we’ve got so many messages about X, Y, Z appreciation month, or sexual assault prevention, or you name it. We don’t even have close to that same level of emphasis on actual warfighting.”³⁰

As time passes and servicemembers become more disillusioned by the state of the military and its leadership that lacks an overall guiding principle, retention will likely degrade. Indeed, the perception that non-warfighting missions are distracting senior military leadership may alienate experienced,

skilled, and knowledgeable warfighters, incentivizing their early departure or, for those who remain, dampening their enthusiasm and contribution.



IV. The Panel's Major Areas of Concern

It is important to note that the way that some of the media and self-described experts portray the imposition of politicization and progressive policies has a bearing on the magnitude of the problem. The panel concluded that although the politicization and the progressive policies that civilian officials in the Administration are imposing on the military are harmful, those policies should not be a reason to forgo volunteering for military service. Some commentators have gone so far as to assert that the military has gone “full woke”³¹ and that American youth would be better off not serving. The panel rejected this pessimism and remains confident in the resilience of the U.S. military's ethos and professional ethic. The panel did acknowledge that ridding the military of divisive ideologies will not happen overnight, even with the elimination of the offending policies. Indeed, a strong visible campaign is needed to signal to servicemembers and the public that the military is returning focus to where it belongs: readiness.

To bound the problem, the panel decided to limit its inquiry to the following eight areas:

1. The DOD's Sweeping Embrace of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Ideology. One of the central organizing principles of the DOD has become to view all matters through the lens of DEI, which is inessential if not actively harmful to warfighting capabilities. The DOD's own Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Strategic Plan contains a litany of goals related to identity politics rather than warfighting.³² For example,

the list of individual characteristics that must be protected according to the plan include

parental or caregiver status; gender identity or sexual identity, to include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, and all others (LGBTQIA+); pregnancy; disability, including people with hidden disabilities and the neurodiverse population; members of religious minorities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.³³

The plan exposes an agenda to “narro[w] the demographic gaps between DOD and the U.S. population.”³⁴ With no supporting evidence, the plan promulgates the idea that becoming more diverse results in higher levels of national security. For example, U.S. Solicitor General Elizabeth Prelogar recently argued before the Supreme Court that military officer corps diversity “is a critical national security imperative” and that “it’s not possible to achieve that diversity without race conscious admissions, including at the nation’s service academies.”³⁵ Prelogar offered no facts to support those assertions.

Yet the precepts of DEI distract from developing a well-trained, merit-based military, and some manifestations of DEI, such as the teaching of postmodernist³⁶ theories, run counter to the foundational principles that define the United States, especially equality of opportunity rather than equality of outcome. Ensuring equality of opportunity is vital for combat effectiveness because it allows the military to be selective within a larger pool of talented Americans willing to serve their nation and their fellow servicemen and women. Policies that aim for equality of outcome risk a degradation of combat effectiveness. Moreover, the concept of “equity”—a push for equal outcomes rather than equal opportunity—contradicts the foundational principle that has helped the military earn the reputation as the nation’s most successful meritocracy, with rank and benefits bestowed on those who distinguish themselves by extraordinary performance—no matter their race, gender, ethnicity, or any other personal characteristic.

Finally, the *I* in DEI advances the concept of inclusion, suggesting it should be a goal to include as many individuals in as many opportunities as possible. That concept has no place in the military. The military is, by design, *exclusionary* to ensure its readiness. Not everyone can enlist. Deployment

standards exist for a reason. Fewer still qualify for such demanding positions in combat units or as Special Forces or paratroopers, for example. By maintaining standards, the military preserves its critical fighting edge.

Of all institutions in America, the military has a remarkable history of inclusion, adhering to merit-based standards, enforcing mutual respect within its ranks, and adherence to virtuous principles such as honor, service, and tolerance. Indeed, the military was desegregated after President Harry Truman signed Executive Order (EO) 9981 in 1948, well before the rest of the country. Progress was not linear and was sometimes halting, but the U.S. military evolved and is continuing to evolve toward an institution in which all Americans, regardless of the color of their skin, can fully belong and enjoy equal treatment. The military culture is fundamentally intolerant of racism, sexism, or other forms of bigotry or prejudice because leaders understand their harmful impact on unit cohesion and teamwork.

But civilian and military leaders should not allow reified postmodernist theories to erode the military's meritocracy and objective realities that are essential to preserving the warrior ethos as the foundation of combat effectiveness. For example, these vague DEI principles detract from the military's warfighting mission when they disguise practices that give preference based on identity category rather than adhering exclusively to meritocracy. Injecting identity considerations unrelated to leadership ability or military skills dilutes combat effectiveness. Promotion, schooling, and command selection processes at every level should instead be driven exclusively by objective evaluation of demonstrated performance and potential to serve and lead at higher levels of responsibility.

One of the manifestations of the emphasis on DEI is training in postmodernist theories such as Critical Race Theory (CRT), an ideology rooted in Marxism that claims that America is fatally flawed by systemic racism and ruled by white privilege. The concept of CRT is anathema to the core principles of the U.S. military, an institution that depends on a team approach, one where every member must rely on one another and not have to worry that his leader or his subordinates doubt their abilities or decisions based on considerations of race, gender, or ethnicity.³⁷ Rather, CRT is inherently divisive as it sets out to categorize individuals into groups of oppressors and victims, which cannot be overcome unless the entire system is overturned.

Senior military leaders publicly deny the existence of instruction in postmodernist theories, such as CRT or postcolonial theory, both of which categorize people as either victims or privileged oppressors. Although there are no such explicitly labeled programs or policies, an examination

TABLE 1

Poll: Impacting Active Military Members' Trust in Military

Q: To what degree have the following events or reports decreased your trust in the military?

	Net: A great deal/some	A great deal	Some	A little	Not at all	Not aware of this
Changing of policy to allow unrestricted service by transgender individuals in the military	80%	56%	24%	9%	8%	3%
The withdrawal from Afghanistan	71%	37%	34%	14%	12%	3%
Reduction of physical fitness standards to "even the playing field"	70%	44%	26%	16%	11%	3%
Focus on climate change as a top national security threat	70%	45%	25%	15%	12%	4%
Critical race theory books appearing on Chief of Naval Operations' reading list	69%	39%	30%	14%	11%	5%
Requirement for the military to pay for travel for abortions	65%	42%	23%	16%	14%	5%
Embracement of a goal to pursue all electric military vehicles	64%	38%	26%	19%	13%	4%

SOURCE: Maru/Blue survey conducted December 12–19, 2022. For more information, see the methodology in Appendix B.

of the DOD's DEI training reveals that the DOD is promoting philosophies that are divisive, far out of the mainstream of American beliefs, and part of postmodernist theories' schools of thought. Indeed, CRT's principles are being taught and implemented through policy actions and decisions at the service academies across the military. They have been, in some cases, promoted by senior leaders.

For example, Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Michael Gilday included *How to Be an Antiracist*, by Dr. Ibram Kendi—one of the most virulent of the critical race theorists—on his personal list of recommended professional readings. According to the recent Heritage poll, 69 percent of active-duty respondents and 34 percent of a nationally representative sample stated that the endorsement of that book decreased their trust in the military. (See Appendix B.) One of Kendi's observations is: "Capitalism is essentially

racist; racism is essentially capitalist.”³⁸ This idea not only radically departs from mainstream American thinking; it is contrary to the military’s goal of defending the American principle of individual freedom.

In May 2021, U.S. Space Force Guardian Lieutenant Colonel Matthew Lohmeier was removed from command because he wrote a book about the Marxist philosophical roots of CRT and how it was being used to indoctrinate servicemembers at his installation.³⁹

Sadly, it seems as if the military service academies serve as “ground zero” for many of the DOD’s divisive DEI education programs:

- An Air Force Academy slide presentation titled, “Diversity & Inclusion: What it is, why we care, & what we can do,” advises cadets to use gender-neutral language and avoid terms such as *mom* and *dad*. Shockingly, it included an admonition to avoid using the term *colorblind* and instead be “color conscious.” However, the concept of color blindness for generations has been a part of the warrior ethos of selflessness, which requires the subordination of self, including rejection of subgroup identities and regarding one’s teammates’ race as inconsequential.⁴⁰
- Air Force denials that progressive ideology exists at the Air Force Academy ring false when it hosts seminars such as “Transgender Visibility and Awareness in our Air Force.”⁴¹ The academy has also encouraged cadets to apply to the Brooke Owens Fellowship program—a nine-week paid internship for cadets interested in aerospace. The program, however, excludes “cisgender men,” as it is reserved for women and “non-binary, agender, bigender, two-spirit, demigender, genderfluid, genderqueer, or another form of gender minority.”⁴²
- In June 2022, multiple media outlets reported on materials they accessed from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point reflecting curriculum materials on the problem of “whiteness.”⁴³ One of the training slides stated, “In order to understand racial inequality and slavery, it is first necessary to address whiteness.”⁴⁴
- In 2020, the Navy stood up “Task Force One Navy” to tackle DEI issues. This task force included a pledge to invest time to analyze “Navywide issues related to racism, sexism, ableism and other structural and interpersonal biases” and to “advocate for and acknowledge all lived

experiences and intersectional identities of every Sailor in the Navy.”⁴⁵
This effort cost nearly half a million dollars.⁴⁶

Including such DEI training programs impacts not only the public’s perception of the military but also military culture. Perceptions that were once mainstream cultural norms (such as the concepts of equal opportunity, meritocracy, and “colorblindness”) are, in practice, sometimes deliberately ignored or viewed as unacceptable and problematic. They not only cause alienation; they also create cultural confusion, resulting in warfighter-institutional dissonance and conflict for those who believe those traditional concepts to be essential to the selfless servant warrior ethos or to other institutional values.

But most significantly, this inclusion of DEI training programs detracts from the focus on warfighting. A report commissioned by a bicameral group of Members of Congress based on lengthy interviews with Navy personnel, for example, found that a major problem impacting the Navy’s mission effectiveness is an insufficient focus on warfighting. In particular:

While programs to encourage diversity, human sex trafficking prevention, suicide prevention, sexual assault prevention, and others are appropriate, they come with a cost. The non-combat curricula consume Navy resources, clog in-boxes, create administrative quagmires, and monopolize precious training time. By weighing down sailors with non-combat related training and administrative burdens, both Congress and Navy leaders risk sending them into battle less prepared and less focused than their opponents.⁴⁷

The cost is not only the warfighting focus that guides the mission of the military but the lives of servicemembers. Indeed, the report was commissioned to determine the cultural causes behind several high-profile and damaging operational failures within the Navy, such as the fire on the USS *Bonhomme Richard*, which resulted in 63 injuries.

2. An Enormous DEI Bureaucracy. Unit cohesion is a critical military fundamental that enables units to withstand the pressures of war and to act without panic, selfishness, or preferential treatment of others based on factious divides. The U.S. military has perhaps best exemplified *E Pluribus Unum*, “Out of many one.” Efforts to accentuate DEI undermine this critical and long-standing concept.

President Biden’s three broad executive orders on DEI—(1) “On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through

the Federal Government,” EO 13985⁴⁸; (2) “Establishing a Coordinated Government-wide Initiative to Promote Diversity and Inclusion in the Federal Workforce,” EO 13583⁴⁹; and (3) “Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce,” EO 14035⁵⁰—accelerated a trend that dates back to a diversity and inclusion executive order from President Barack Obama in August 2011.⁵¹ These orders have resulted in a dramatic increase in effort and expense devoted to DOD DEI programs and staffs.

One of the outgrowths of these executive orders has been explosive growth in the number of positions dedicated to DEI in the DOD. Each military department has been directed to appoint a senior advisor for diversity and inclusion, reporting directly to the service secretary. The Secretary of Defense has stood up a Defense Equity Team within the department and commissioned a new advisory committee, the Defense Advisory Committee on Diversity and Inclusion.⁵²

These actions impact both military warfighting culture and efficient defense spending. First, it risks supplanting the U.S. military’s culture of warfighting with a new culture of DEI promotion and compliance. Second, the money, personnel, and time devoted to the DEI bureaucracy detracts from resources that would be better applied to training and readiness.

3. Blatant Support of Partisan Purposes Within the DOD. The blatant support for partisan progressive goals puts at risk the DOD’s apolitical nature while detracting efforts to improve warfighting capability. For example, following the 2022 *Dobbs v. Jackson* Supreme Court decision that overturned *Roe v. Wade*—a decision that earned support and condemnation along party lines—Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin announced that the DOD would pay for servicemembers and their families to travel to different states to receive abortions and to receive three weeks of paid vacation.⁵³ House Armed Services Committee Chairman Mike Rogers (R-AL) commented on the new policy: “Today, [President Joe] Biden’s administration chose to make the Department of Defense an abortion travel agency over a lethal fighting force.”⁵⁴ This policy runs counter to the spirit of the Hyde Amendment, which since 1977 has prohibited the use of federal funds for abortion.⁵⁵

The DOD has also entered the political realm by using its resources to actively promote social causes for which there is no linkage to warfighting. The military has promoted “Pride” events on military bases and official Twitter pages.⁵⁶ Some bases have featured “family friendly” drag queen performances and story hours at base libraries.⁵⁷ It should not be the mission of the U.S. military to promote or celebrate gender preferences, as these are private preferences and activities that do not relate to warfighting.

Shortly after being sworn into office, Secretary Austin, in an unprecedented move, suspended the operations of DOD advisory boards and fired all the serving members. Ostensibly the reason for the action was to counter the appointments of individuals that had been made in the waning months of the Trump Administration. After seven months, many of the boards were reinstated with new members. A recent analysis reflects that the number of Democratic members of these new boards was doubled, raising questions about the nonpartisan basis for the action.⁵⁸

In two U.S. Supreme Court cases involving the highly controversial use of racial preferences in college admissions, the DOD joined in a “friend of the court” brief that argues that the Constitution’s equal protection clause should continue to be suspended to facilitate colleges’ and universities’ use of racial preferences in admissions decisions.⁵⁹ The brief admits that the service academies are using racial preferences to achieve and maintain officer racial diversity. It then cites defense officials’ unsupported claims that diversity is “a national security imperative,” which lies in opposition to the military’s meritocracy.

Actions on the part of DOD leaders perceived to stem from political motivations undermine the trust servicemembers have in their leaders, contributing to diminished morale and cohesion. These actions also cost the military the public’s trust, which is crucial for recruiting and support for the military at large.

4. Searches for Extremists and Racists in the Military Based on a Presumption of Guilt. The panel emphatically supports the importance of ensuring loyalty to country and devotion to uphold the Constitution and the rule of law. Yet efforts in the military to this effect should be free from political bias.

In the wake of the January 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol, which involved some ex-military members, Secretary Austin ordered a 60-day standdown to address extremism in the ranks and the creation of a DOD Countering Extremism Working Group. There was no evidence that this drastic measure was warranted. According to the DOD’s own records, fewer than 100 members of the military have been “subject to official action due to engagement in prohibited extremist activity.”⁶⁰ That number represents about 0.005 percent of the military out of 2.1 million active and reserve personnel. Nevertheless, the DOD spent 5,359,000 hours on extremism prevention and over \$500,000 on the standdown, not including the cost of compiling the report.⁶¹ Further, the DOD’s FY 2023 budget request contained \$34.2 million for “countering extremist activities,” money for a problem that may not even exist.⁶²

Indeed, while the DOD's anti-extremism training materials were portrayed as benign and reasonable, evidence shows that training proceeded to reflect leftist ideology. Calls from servicemembers to a hotline established by Senator Tom Cotton (R-AR) and Representative Dan Crenshaw (R-TX) reported being forced to participate in "privilege walks," where members were required to separate themselves by race and gender to signify their "perceived privilege," while other calls reported that they were encouraged to report other servicemembers who voiced the belief that "All Lives Matter."⁶³ Voicing this belief does not compare with the examples of extremism provided by the DOD, which included the discovery of plans for a domestic terror attack and association with Nazism.⁶⁴

As further evidence of a political bias, the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, a DOD school and research laboratory focused on supporting readiness, published a student guide entitled, "Extremism," in which it explains that "nowadays instead of dressing in sheets or publicly espousing hate messages, many extremists will talk of individual liberties, states' rights, and how to make the world a better place."⁶⁵ In reality, defending individual liberties and making the world a better place are typical reasons why a young recruit may choose to serve his country.

Despite the pressing necessities facing the U.S. military to revamp the force to prepare for great-power competition, addressing extremism somehow became a DOD top priority. The DOD's vigorous response to January 6 included considering changes to the Uniform Code of Military Justice, improving information sharing with law enforcement, screening of servicemembers, and increased education and training.⁶⁶

Given the incredibly small number of extremists in the military and the military's intolerance of extremists of any kind, the vast resources and time spent on this problem detract from investments into warfighter training and their ability to pivot to face adversaries such as China and Russia.

5. Senior Leader Prioritization of Non-Warfighting Issues. Pentagon senior leader statements often shed light on their priorities. In Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro's first message to the fleet, he listed four "Cs" as his priorities: China, culture, climate, and COVID-19. But after quickly addressing China, he then spent the bulk of his message talking about culture, climate, and COVID-19.⁶⁷ His focus on social issues and failure to address a need to grow the fleet or to enhance warfighting skills sends the message that warfighting is at best not the top priority and at worst an afterthought.

Similarly, Army Secretary Christine Wormuth's six priorities do not address warfighting proficiency. Instead, Wormuth telegraphs that the

Army will have to determine how to manage “increased fiscal pressures” and that “difficult choices” must be made. Her third objective (of six) is “to continue our efforts to be resilient in the face of climate change,” while five is to “reduce harmful behaviors in our Army.”⁶⁸

6. Lowering of Standards in the Pursuit of a “Level Playing Field.”

Military standards exist for a reason. Enlistment criteria ensure that individuals enter service free from disability and medical conditions requiring follow-on medical care that potentially put volunteers at increased risk and jeopardize the success of their units’ missions. Similarly, standards for service in military occupational fields exist to ensure that individuals have the necessary physical and mental attributes to accomplish the position’s requirements. Cannoneers in the Army, for example, must be capable of routinely lifting 90-pound artillery shells.⁶⁹

Yet of late the military has been lowering standards. For instance:

- Even though the Air Force was short 1,650 pilots in 2021, officials announced a deliberate plan to reduce the percentage of white male pilots, currently 86 percent, by dropping prior flight training as a “plus” factor for selection. Prior completion of flight training is highly correlated to success in Air Force flight school and dropping it as a criteria represents a compromise on standards.⁷⁰
- The Administration chose not to contest a court ruling allowing servicemembers who are HIV positive to serve in combat zones, overturning years of rational health policy in favor of “inclusiveness.”⁷¹
- The Army lowered its minimal physical fitness standards and simultaneously discarded its gender-neutral fitness test over a concern that women were not scoring highly enough.⁷² When the Army lowered the minimum standard for the two-mile run to a dawdling 21 minutes, Captain Kristen Griest, the first female to pass the Army’s grueling Ranger School, commented in an article that “the presence of just a handful of individuals who cannot run two miles faster than twenty-one minutes has the potential to derail a training exercise, not to mention an actual combat patrol.”⁷³

According to the Heritage poll, 70 percent of active-duty personnel and 42 percent of a nationally representative sample stated that reduction of physical fitness standards to “even the playing field” had decreased their trust in the military. (See Appendix B.)

Standards to join the military have also been lowered by the modification of military entrance criteria to allow enlistment of transgender individuals suffering from gender dysphoria. At the start of the Biden Administration, the President quickly removed any enlistment restrictions on transgender individuals who suffer from gender dysphoria. Allowing individuals suffering from gender dysphoria—proven to be medically pre-disposed to severe anxiety and who attempt suicide at rates 10 times the general population—to enter service with no regard for consequences was reckless. It may have satisfied a campaign promise but at the expense of reduced military readiness.⁷⁴ In a break from centuries of military entrance policy, the Administration also permitted enlistment of these individuals with full knowledge that they may require appropriated funds and extensive paid time off for gender reassignment surgery and hormone therapy.⁷⁵

These actions represent additional examples of the prioritization of “inclusion” over readiness in the military. According to the Heritage poll, 80 percent of active-duty personnel and 35 percent of a nationally representative sample stated the changing of the policy to allow unrestricted service by transgender individuals in the military has decreased their trust in the military. (See Appendix B.)

The panel believes that lowering of standards can be directly traced to an increased risk to military readiness. If the standards are lowered in pursuit of diversity, equity, and inclusion, it results in those individuals who are most able being required to shoulder more of the burden, contributing to mission failure. Allowing those who lack preparedness to fight based on physical or mental constraints only puts their lives at greater risk when they go into combat.

7. Pursuit of a “Green” Agenda at the Expense of Warfighting. The panel agreed that some aspects of a changing climate pose challenges and concerns for military operations and that some preventative measures are justifiable. For example, the Biden Administration’s budget request for FY 2023 included \$7 million to increase installation resilience for rising sea levels or extreme weather. Some investments into improving energy efficiency for platforms, operations, or installations are also reasonable.⁷⁶

However, it is important to distinguish between tangible impacts on the military’s ability to accomplish its mission and those that will divert personnel and resources to non-essential functions at the expense of warfighting skills and capabilities.

The Biden Administration’s Pentagon has proclaimed fighting climate change as a “top priority” for U.S. national security, an emphasis that often seems to take priority over the military’s mission to deter and defeat threats

to the United States posed by adversaries. As a telling sign of its priorities, the DOD released a climate strategy a full year before publishing the congressionally mandated National Defense Strategy. During the humiliating retreat from Afghanistan, for example, the Pentagon was busy developing a climate strategy in response to the President's guidance to "prioritize climate change considerations."⁷⁷ Indeed, according to the Heritage poll, 70 percent of active-duty personnel and 34 percent of a nationally representative sample stated that the focus on climate change as a top national security threat has decreased their trust in the military. (See Appendix B.)

According to Nadia Schadlow of the Hudson Institute, at the root of the problem is an inability to distinguish climate change from strategic threats such as China that can actively make choices to advance its threatening goals.⁷⁸ Labeling climate change an "existential" threat lacks credibility compared to threatening actors that can actively choose to launch nuclear weapons at the United States, for instance.

The Pentagon's budget request for FY 2023 included \$3.1 billion for "Meeting the Climate Challenge." Existing in that category of dubious investments is \$10.5 million for the Navy to capture and store carbon dioxide.⁷⁹ Assigning this role to the U.S. Navy does not align with its warfighting mission and only detracts from the time and resources needed to improve Navy readiness. Moreover, the Army Climate Strategy proposes to invest hundreds of millions of dollars to build microgrids and greenhouse-gas-free power plants and to field a 100 percent zero-emission nontactical vehicle fleet by 2027.⁸⁰

Indeed, prioritizing addressing climate change comes at the expense of real defense objectives. As an example of these misplaced priorities, a DOD rule currently under consideration would require federal contractors to frequently disclose and reduce carbon emissions and climate financial risks. Such a rule would burden the defense industrial base with an administrative nightmare of bookkeeping and recordkeeping, all with no discernible benefit to warfighting.⁸¹

Nor is Biden's proposal to make every U.S. military vehicle "climate friendly" beneficial to national defense. Converting tactical vehicles to use electricity would risk sacrificing warfighting capability while wasting billions of dollars—which would be better spent on much-needed capacity and capability upgrades.⁸²

8. The COVID-19 Vaccine Mandate. The COVID-19 military vaccine mandate negatively impacted the recruitment and retainment of military personnel. Some servicemembers were unwilling to receive the COVID-19 vaccine due to their sincerely held religious beliefs and concerns about

a vaccine that was initially developed and approved under expedited emergency-use authorization. More than 8,300 servicemembers were separated from service due to objections to the vaccine, and 45,000 National Guardsmen were unable to participate in training due to this mandate.⁸³ The military's categorical denial of the vast majority of religious exemption requests provides evidence that the review process was anything but fair.

Servicemembers must follow lawful orders, but it is also the duty of military officers and DOD officials to reconsider any standing order that is rendered moot as the facts on the ground change. Moreover, there is an abundance of evidence that the legality of the order itself is in question. Multiple federal courts have considered the legality of the order and the manner in which the DOD has enforced it.⁸⁴

As a result of changing conditions on the ground, the COVID-19 vaccine mandate became more detrimental than beneficial to military readiness. Every servicemember separated from service or formally restricted from operations is also not deployable, which reduces overall readiness. The cumulative effect of the vaccine mandate has equated to entire divisions no longer available for deployment. Thankfully, the FY 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) rescinded this policy, but to a degree, damage has already been done. Given the critical shortfall of personnel in the DOD, the Pentagon should consider a pathway back to service for those who were discharged.

The military's failure to reconsider the vaccine mandate when circumstances changed contributed to a diminished amount of trust between leaders and subordinates, especially as it became clear that those on the left were becoming the political champions of vaccine mandates across the country. Moreover, allowing members who are HIV positive, are suffering from gender dysphoria, or failing to meet long-standing combat standards while simultaneously discharging people without a COVID-19 vaccine demonstrates the political nature of these decisions while further engendering mistrust.



V. Recommendations

While politicization of the military has dangerous implications for both the lives of servicemembers and U.S. national security, these problems can be solved by implementing policies that restore the DOD's focus to warfighting.

General.

- In the 118th Congress, Members should challenge Administration and Pentagon officials to defend, with supporting evidence, how novel, controversial social policies are increasing military readiness, defined as making the force optimally prepared with high standards and strong unit cohesion.⁸⁵ Social science theories are no basis for changing the standards in the U.S. military.
- Members of the Senate Armed Services Committee should ask nominees how they will commit to strengthening the warrior ethos, ensuring unit cohesion, and defending the impartiality and nonpolitical nature of the fighting force.
- The DOD should cooperate with outside organizations so that potential recruits, those voluntarily leaving the military, and current personnel can express honest views about perceptions and morale, with particular attention to the perception of politicization of the

military. Data of this nature is sorely lacking, and what does exist is owned solely by the executive branch. A public accounting of the nature of the problem will enable the nation to correct any errors and to regain and earn the trust and confidence of our servicemembers, their families, and the broader American public.

- Congress should legislate greater physical access by military recruiters to U.S. secondary school campuses and authorize agreements with states, cities, and counties to allow military personnel to assist educators with such topics as physical education and citizenship.
- Congress should consider consolidating the list of recommendations below into an “Increasing Military Readiness” bill rather than tackling them piecemeal.

Eliminate the DEI Construct from DOD.

- Congress (or a future Administration) should direct the elimination of the entire DEI construct within the DOD. Offices and staffs that were formerly titled as Equal Opportunity (EO) and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) should be restored in their stead to ensure that the military remains free from prejudice, bigotry, unequal treatment, and discrimination. These newly restored EO and EEO offices should be staffed at the level necessary to investigate complaints and provide necessary training but at a level no larger than 1:2,000 EO/EEO staff/military or civilian members to uniformed servicemembers.
- Congress should require a full audit of the current DEI bureaucracy in the DOD, including all staff, programs, and funding.
- Congress should pass legislation expressly barring the use of appropriated dollars to fund race-conscious selections, assignments, accessions, or promotions.
- Congress should require that fields of study at service academies be in fields traceable to military needs such as military history, leadership, nuclear engineering, personnel management, or software development. Because the U.S. government is fully underwriting the cost of this education, the list of available academic disciplines should be narrowly focused on the needs of the DOD.⁸⁶

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- Congress should pass legislation prohibiting the instruction or propagation of critical theories such as CRT as part of military training. Rather than specifying “CRT,” which can often be challenging to find and prove, prohibit the instruction of any idea that:
 - Violates the Civil Rights Act of 1964, including that individuals of any race, ethnicity, color, or national origin are inherently superior or inferior;
 - Teaches that individuals should be adversely or advantageously treated on the basis of their race, ethnicity, color, or national origin;
 - Holds that individuals, by virtue of race, ethnicity, color, or national origin, bear collective guilt and are inherently responsible for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race, ethnicity, color, or national origin.⁸⁷
 - Rather than present flawed academic theories that America is systematically racist, Congress should require the DOD to present military training that focuses on promoting opportunity for minorities and women and the significant role these groups and individuals have played in service to the nation. The history of segregation and unequal treatment should be confronted so that hard-won progress is celebrated and servicemembers understand how prejudice, racism, and sexism are intolerable and destructive to combat effectiveness.
 - Congress should direct the service academies, to the maximum extent possible, to rely on uniformed military professors and Title 10 employees except when it is not possible to train a military member to perform those duties. Civilian professors from academia sometimes arrive at the military academies with agendas to advance orthodoxies associated with critical theories or DEI policies.
 - Congress should explicitly prohibit non-merit-based criteria in selection for the military academies. Actively solicit more applications from more diverse communities but select the best applicants regardless of identity categories.

Redirect Politicized Efforts to Combat Extremism to Improving Readiness.

- Congress should pass legislation that would discontinue the DOD's efforts to combat the rare instances of extremism of the military. The Senate expressed this belief in its version of the FY 2023 NDAA. This year, it should be codified into law. The funding put toward combating extremism should be redirected to readiness efforts.
- Congress should require the DOD to establish a means for service-members to report incidents of dangerous extremist behavior rather than rely on a presumption of extremism and racism among the ranks.

Establish DOD and Service Standards Based on Readiness.

- Congress should prohibit enlistments of volunteers who are predisposed to a requirement for long-term medical care and treatment at a frequency greater than that of the general public.
- Congress should require all military services to establish the necessary physical qualifications for their occupational specialties and that each service establish a recurring gender-neutral physical fitness test to evaluate whether individuals can serve, and continue to serve, in those specialties.
- Congress should pass legislation expressing the sense of Congress that indeed the military should provide equal opportunity for all members, that advancement and selection should be based solely on merit, that promotion and selection boards should not see photos of candidates during the selection process, and that meeting the needs of the services should always take precedence over meeting artificially derived quotas for diversity.

Prioritize Warfighting Over Combating Climate Change.

- Congress should require a cost-benefit analysis for any DOD environmental projects affirming that they will improve warfighting capabilities and that there is no less expensive alternative available.

Senator Joni Ernst (R-IA) successfully introduced such a measure dealing with the DOD's transition to non-tactical vehicles in the FY 2023 NDAA.⁸⁸

Remedy the COVID-19 Vaccine Mandate.

- The DOD should extend the same accommodations to servicemembers discharged from their service for refusal to take the COVID-19 vaccine as those extended to those still serving. The DOD's rescission memo in response to the NDAA directive to end the mandate calls for ceasing any adverse actions against servicemembers who "sought an accommodation on religious, administrative or medical grounds" and directs the military departments to "remove any adverse actions solely associated with the denials of such requests."⁸⁹ If the DOD does not extend those same accommodations to servicemembers already discharged, Congress should legislate those actions.
- The DOD should provide a pathway for those discharged for refusing the COVID-19 vaccine for reasons other than religious, administrative, or medical accommodation. In the absence of DOD action, Congress should appoint a special administrative board or a special master to investigate and then reward across-the-board remedies for current and former servicemembers who refused to take the COVID-19 vaccine.

VI. Conclusion

National defense should not be a partisan issue. All Americans share the common interest in a strong U.S. military and should be united in reducing obstacles that thwart the highest levels of readiness. The panel expresses its appreciation for the men and women serving in the Armed Forces and for their sacrifices. It is in their names and interest that the panel fervently hopes that the changes recommended in this report will be implemented as soon as possible.

Appendix A: Panel Members



Representative Mike Waltz, Chairman

Representative Mike Waltz (R) represents north central Florida, is a colonel in the National Guard, a combat-decorated Green Beret, former White House and Pentagon policy advisor, a small business owner, an author, and a proud father. He is the first Green Beret to be elected to Congress.

Mike has served his country his entire life. He graduated from the Virginia Military Institute with Honors, has served over 26 years in the U.S. Army, and is presently serving in the National Guard. After being commissioned as an Army lieutenant, Mike graduated Ranger School and was selected for the elite Green Berets, serving worldwide as a Special Forces officer with multiple combat tours in Afghanistan, the Middle East, and Africa. For his actions in combat, Mike was awarded four Bronze Stars, including two for Valor.

Mike's servant leadership continued in the Pentagon as a defense policy director for Secretaries of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Robert Gates. Mike then went on to serve in the White House as Vice President Dick Cheney's counterterrorism advisor, where he saw firsthand the difficult decisions the President and his Cabinet must make to protect our national security. Mike's position in the White House was unique, as he advised the George W. Bush Administration on policy he actually carried out in the military.

Following his time in the White House, Mike then built a small business to over 400 employees and was repeatedly listed in the Inc. 500 index as one of the fastest-growing private companies in America.



Mr. Mike Berry

Michael Berry is vice president of External Affairs, director of Military Affairs, and senior counsel for First Liberty Institute. He joined First Liberty in 2013 after serving for seven years on active duty as an attorney with the U.S. Marine Corps. Among Mr. Berry's numerous positions within the Marine Corps, he deployed to Afghanistan in 2008, and from 2009–2012, Mr. Berry served as an adjunct professor of law at the U.S. Naval Academy. Mr. Berry continues to proudly serve our nation as a member of the Marine Corps Reserve.



Lieutenant General Rod Bishop, Jr. (ret.)

Lieutenant General Bishop is the Chairman of the Board of Stand Together Against Racism and Radicalism in the Services (STARRS). He retired from active duty in August 2008 after 34 years of service in the United States Air Force. His last assignment was as Commander, 3rd Air Force, United States Air Forces in Europe, Ramstein AB, Germany, where he oversaw all American air and space activities in the 93 countries in Europe and Africa. Additionally, he was responsible for the organizing, training, and equipping of nearly 30,000 airmen assigned to the 10 different Air Force Wings under his command throughout Europe.



Ms. Rebecca L. Heinrichs

Rebecca L. Heinrichs is a senior fellow at Hudson Institute, specializing in U.S. national defense policy with a focus on strategic deterrence. Ms. Heinrichs publishes frequently in leading political magazines and academic journals, and regularly provides analysis on cable news and radio programs. Ms. Heinrichs serves as an adjunct professor at the Institute of World Politics where she teaches nuclear deterrence theory and is a staff member of the Defense and Strategic Studies Program at Missouri State University. She is also a contributing editor of *Providence* magazine, a publication of The Institute of Religion and Democracy.

Ms. Heinrichs served in the U.S. House of Representatives as an advisor to former Representative Trent Franks (R-AZ), where she focused on matters related to the Strategic Forces Subcommittee of the Armed Services Committee. She was instrumental in starting the Bipartisan Missile Defense Caucus. Prior to her work on defense policy, she was on the oversight staff of the House Judiciary Committee.



Mr. Jeremy Hunt

Jeremy Hunt is a media fellow at Hudson Institute. In 2015, Mr. Hunt graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. He commissioned as an active-duty military intelligence officer, stationed in South Georgia. During that time, he deployed to Ukraine, where he was part of a multi-national mission to train the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Mr. Hunt eventually rose to the rank of captain and now serves in the US Army Inactive Ready Reserve as he completes his final year at Yale Law School.

A recent U.S. congressional candidate, Mr. Hunt has written thought-provoking commentary on military service, race relations, and other national issues. His work has appeared in the *Washington Post*, Fox News, *New York Post*, and *The Hill*. He frequently appears as a guest commentator on Fox News Channel.



Mr. Earl G. Matthews

Earl G. Matthews is an American government official and attorney who held senior positions within the Department of the Army and at the White House during the Administration of President Donald Trump. Mr. Matthews was a member of Trump's Department of Defense transition team and was appointed as a special assistant to Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis on January 20, 2017. He was detailed to the White House to serve as special assistant to the President and senior director for Defense Policy and Strategy on the National Security Council staff in late May 2018. Mr. Matthews was subsequently appointed as the principal deputy general counsel of the Army on June 21, 2019.

Mr. Matthews has been an Army Reserve officer for 23 years, including 3 years deployed to combat zones, and is still serving as a colonel in the Army Reserve.



Lieutenant General H. R. McMaster (ret.)

H. R. McMaster is the Fouad and Michelle Ajami Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University. He is also the Bernard and Susan Liautaud Fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute and lecturer at Stanford University's Graduate School of Business. He was the 25th assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. Upon graduation from the U.S. Military Academy in 1984, McMaster served as a commissioned officer in the U.S. Army for thirty-four years before retiring as a lieutenant general in June 2018.



Ms. Morgan Ortagus

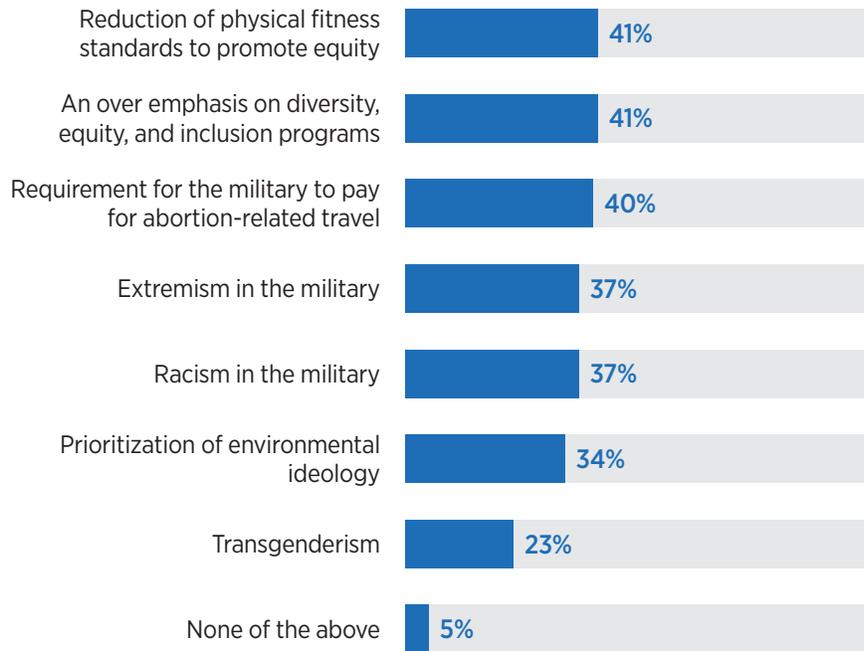
Morgan Ortagus is the Founder of POLARIS National Security. She is an American television commentator, financial analyst, and political adviser who served as spokesperson for the U.S. Department of State from 2019 to 2021. She previously held government positions as a deputy attaché and intelligence analyst at the U.S. Department of the Treasury and as a public affairs officer at U.S. Agency for International Development. Ortagus worked as national security contributor at Fox News prior to her appointment as State Department spokesperson. She is an officer in the U.S. Navy Reserve.

Appendix B: Poll Results

APPENDIX CHART 1

Poll: Areas of Concern for Active Military Members

Q: Which areas of politicization of the military have given you reason for concern?



SOURCE: Maru/Blue survey conducted December 12–19, 2022. For more information, see the methodology in Appendix B.

APPENDIX TABLE 1

Poll: Impacting Active Military Members' Trust in Military

Q: To what degree have the following events or reports decreased your trust in the military?

	Net: A great deal/some	A great deal	Some	A little	Not at all	Not aware of this
Changing of policy to allow unrestricted service by transgender individuals in the military	80%	56%	24%	9%	8%	3%
The withdrawal from Afghanistan	71%	37%	34%	14%	12%	3%
Reduction of physical fitness standards to “even the playing field”	70%	44%	26%	16%	11%	3%
Focus on climate change as a top national security threat	70%	45%	25%	15%	12%	4%
Critical race theory books appearing on Chief of Naval Operations' reading list	69%	39%	30%	14%	11%	5%
Reports of sexual assault in the military	68%	45%	23%	16%	12%	4%
A worry that the military is dominated by males	68%	40%	28%	15%	13%	4%
Requirement for the military to pay for travel for abortions	65%	42%	23%	16%	14%	5%
Embracement of a goal to pursue all electric military vehicles	64%	38%	26%	19%	13%	4%

SOURCE: Maru/Blue survey conducted December 12–19, 2022. For more information, see the methodology in Appendix B.

APPENDIX TABLE 2

Poll: Impacting U.S. Adults' Trust in Military

Q: To what degree have the following events or reports decreased your trust in the military?

	Net: A great deal/ some	A great deal	Some	A little	Not at all	Not aware of this
Reports of sexual assault in the military	58%	35%	23%	20%	14%	8%
Reduction of physical fitness standards to "even the playing field"	42%	22%	20%	21%	21%	16%
Changing of policy to allow unrestricted service by transgender individuals in the military	35%	19%	16%	12%	39%	14%
Critical race theory books appearing on Chief of Naval Operations' reading list	34%	20%	14%	13%	27%	26%
The withdrawal from Afghanistan	33%	16%	17%	19%	41%	7%
Focus on climate change as a top national security threat	33%	19%	14%	14%	35%	18%
Requirement for the military to pay for travel for abortions	31%	18%	13%	11%	34%	24%
A worry that the military is dominated by males	30%	11%	19%	19%	43%	8%
Embracement of a goal to pursue all electric military vehicles	26%	14%	12%	14%	36%	23%

SOURCE: Maru/Blue survey conducted December 12–19, 2022. For more information, see the methodology in Appendix B.

Methodology

Data collection was undertaken by the sample and data experts at Maru/Blue between December 12 and 19, 2022, among a random selection of 1,000 American adults aged 18+ and an additional sample of 299 young Americans aged 18 to 24, who are Maru Springboard America online panelists. For comparison purposes, a probability sample of each size has an estimated margin of error (which measures sampling variability) of +/- 3.1 percent (n=1000) and +/- 5.7 percent (n=299), 19 times out of 20. The results have been weighted by education, age, gender, and region to match the population according to U.S. Census data, which ensures that the sample is representative of the entire adult population of the United States. An additional sample of active military personnel (n=301 +/- 5.7 percent) was included to complete the study sample frame.

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