

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

May 15, 2025

The Honorable Dan P. Driscoll
Secretary of the Army
101 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310-0101

Secretary Driscoll,

We write to express our opposition to and disappointment with your directive to potentially downsize Pine Bluff Arsenal. As you may know, current law prohibits the Army from closing the arsenal, but your directive in effect evades this prohibition. Perhaps worse, the directive would undercut President Trump’s goal of accelerating munitions manufacturing in America, which we strongly support and foresee in Pine Bluff Arsenal’s future. As longtime supporters of the Army who would prefer to continue to work cooperatively with the Army on its priorities, we urge you to reverse immediately this ill-advised decision based on stale, years-old, bureaucratic plans—the exact kind of thinking President Trump was elected to upend.

Though we agree with the Army Transformation Initiative’s broad goals to make the Army more efficient and more lethal, a downsizing at Pine Bluff Arsenal wouldn’t advance these goals. Secretary Hegseth directed the Army “to generate the ammunition stockpiles necessary to sustain national defense.” Unfortunately, the defense industrial base—including the Army’s arsenals—is too small, riddled with supply-chain issues, and often dependent on foreign sources for key materials. Neither the Army’s arsenals nor the larger defense industrial base can meet the munitions needs of our forces and allies. As we’ve explained for years—well before your appointment as secretary—the Army needs to use fully the resources it already owns, like Pine Bluff Arsenal, to meet these needs.

Pine Bluff Arsenal is a solution for these challenges, not some redundant or outdated relic. While it’s true that the arsenal is under-used, that’s because the Army bureaucracy has repeatedly resisted our proposals to expand its operations. Pine Bluff Arsenal is the only site in America that produces vital white-phosphorous ammunition. Further, we have long advocated that the Army use Pine Bluff Arsenal to produce materials like, for instance, nitrocellulose and RDX—both key components of our munitions, but also chokepoints in the supply chain. The arsenal already has access to critical utilities, a significant transportation network, and proximity to raw materials and loading facilities to supply the Army’s needs.

The Army has never offered persuasive explanations for its bureaucratic hostility to expanding operations at Pine Bluff Arsenal. We’ve heard from the Army that commercial facilities or building new facilities are a less expensive, more efficient alternative to using the current arsenals for its munition needs. But this argument is far-fetched. Though commercial industry plays a role, recent experience has proven the extreme difficulty of acquiring sufficient quantities of 155mm rounds because commercial production lines have little to no room for expansion. Likewise, building a new ammunition plant from scratch is an expensive, time-consuming

endeavor—at least four years and around a half a billion dollars. For instance, the necessary and overly complicated environmental permits alone can take years.

By contrast, Pine Bluff Arsenal offers inherent advantages over any commercial site—advantages that likely cut in half the timeline for munitions production. The arsenal not only has the type and amount of land necessary to handle dangerous explosives, but also has the existing workforce with deep and irreplaceable expertise. Further, Pine Bluff Arsenal has operated in this space for decades and successfully navigated the burdensome environmental requirements. As we have before, we continue to insist that abandoning these advantages in favor of a speculative new commercial production line or, even worse, to buy ammunition from foreign sources is reckless and a waste of taxpayer money.

We've also heard from the Army that its plan results in cost savings, but this argument doesn't hold water either. Army Materiel Command may appear to save a little money up front by downsizing Pine Bluff from its current capacity or even closing it, but those costs will have to shift to another site to produce white phosphorus. The Army answers that those costs might decrease because of unspecified, magical "efficiencies"—a strange claim since no other site in America produces white-phosphorus ammunition. But any supposed savings from "efficiencies" would likely be dwarfed by the long-term costs of shutting down arsenal operations, safely disposing of explosive materials, conducting environmental remediation, and maintaining perpetual site security. While not gaining much on the munitions front, the Army would add needless costs to operate a virtual ghost town. To be frank, it appears that Army Materiel Command bureaucrats want to shift the costs off their books and onto other Army commands. But that doesn't result in savings for the Army or the taxpayer, nor does it improve the Army's munitions crisis.

We appreciate your efforts through the Army Transformation Initiative to make the Army more lethal and more efficient, but the directive to potentially downsize Pine Bluff Arsenal—which is based on old, hidebound, bureaucratic recommendations—misses the mark and sets those goals back. We request an in-person briefing no later than May 22 from you and General George about this matter and how we can collaboratively ensure that Pine Bluff Arsenal will advance President Trump's munitions goals and continue to contribute to our national security for years to come.

As we noted, we've long worked with the Army to support its priorities in the NDAA and the appropriations process, and lately to advance promptly its civilian nominees toward confirmation. We hope this cooperation can continue and grow, rather than be impaired by an unwise decision about the future of Pine Bluff Arsenal.

Sincerely,



John Boozman
United States Senator



Tom Cotton
United States Senator



Bruce Westerman
Member of Congress

cc:

The Honorable Pete Hegseth,
Secretary, Department of Defense

The Honorable Steve Feinberg,
Deputy Secretary, Department of Defense

General Dan Caine,
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

General Randy A. George,
Chief of Staff, United States Army