

United States Senate

November 25, 2024

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

Secretary Austin,

I write to express my concern that Pentagon officials are seeking to undermine President Trump's incoming administration. It appears that partisans and obstructionists inside the Department of Defense are laying groundwork to defy or circumvent President Trump's plans for both military and civil-service reform. These actions undermine civilian control of the military and our constitutional structure of government.

For example, media reports indicate that Pentagon officials have held meetings to strategize against President Trump's defense agenda, while also promulgating false claims that the incoming administration plans to arbitrarily fire uniformed leaders. You also issued a message to the department the day after the election commenting that the military will follow "lawful orders" from the new president—a thinly veiled and baseless insinuation that President Trump will issue unlawful orders.

Similarly, the department has also attempted to preemptively obstruct President Trump's plans for (badly needed) defense civil-service reform. Earlier this year, you released a memo on the "Integrity and Continuity of the Defense Career Civilian Workforce" to impede efforts to remove underperforming personnel and eliminate unnecessary positions. Comptroller Michael McCord also lectured the incoming administration about avoiding the "self-inflicted wound" of civil-service reform.

I have to observe that these actions and reports only prove the need for reform and fundamental change at the Department of Defense. And, of course, while inappropriate and annoying, these tactics are also useless because no action by the outgoing administration can limit the incoming president's constitutional authority as commander-in-chief.

Please, therefore, knock off this nonsense and get on with the business of handing over the reins to the next administration.

Sincerely,



Tom Cotton
United States Senator