

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2004

July 30, 2020

The Honorable Mark T. Esper
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense, Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Esper:

We are writing today with concern regarding the Department of Defense's policy for the display of flags on military installations. While we applaud the Department for taking steps to remove the Confederate Battle Flag from our military bases, the action unnecessarily avoids a clear rebuke of this oppressive symbol while simultaneously limiting how servicemembers can freely express themselves in line with our values.

The Department issued a new policy on July 16, 2020 on the display or depiction of flags. This policy does not explicitly ban the Confederate Battle Flag, and instead outlines which flags are exclusively allowed on installations. Such a blanket ban on the display of all but a limited number of flags is convoluted, harmful, and unnecessary. While we understand the intent is to ban divisive symbols from Department installations, this policy has inadvertently banned other flags, such as those of professional or collegiate sports teams, and most significantly, those that support diversity and inclusion, including sovereign Native Nations and LGBTQ Pride Flags.

The implicit banning of these symbols of diversity and inclusion runs counter to our ideals as a nation and a military. The Department must have the strength and courage to be able to simultaneously stand against a symbol of hate and oppression in the Confederate Battle Flag while allowing the display of support for civil rights, equity, and justice. The resolute ideal that "all men are created equal" is embodied by the victory of the United States Armed Forces in the American Civil War, and the defeat of an armed insurrection that sought to maintain the slavery and oppression of African Americans. Our country has courageously carried these principles into the global sphere, rising to advance human rights and fighting for

the oppressed wherever they may be found. We do not honor or display the Parteiflagge of Nazi Germany on our military bases, and any decision on the Confederate Battle Flag must likewise be unequivocal: it must be banned outright.

Furthermore, an explicit, direct ban of the Confederate Battle Flag has broad support throughout the services and in Congress. The Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard have all banned the flag internally and the House passed a provision to ban the Confederate Battle Flag in this year's National Defense Authorization Act with strong bipartisan votes in committee and on the floor. Such a policy would clearly establish that the Confederate Battle Flag has no place within our military while providing a diverse and inclusive environment in which service members may freely express themselves in line with our values.

While the Department and the United States Armed Forces have long been at the forefront in advancing diversity and inclusion in our nation, we have fallen far short of expectations. Minorities remain vastly underrepresented in commissioned officer and senior leader ranks. The action by the Department to implicitly ban the LGBTQ Pride flag only serves to create a discriminatory environment for LGBTQ service members and continue to isolate them from their fellow Airmen, Marines, Sailors, and Soldiers. If the Department is to continue to lead on advancing diversity and inclusion, and to ensure that all Americans who wish to serve are able to do with pride, it must be an active partner and an ally for these causes.

We ask that you immediately revise the new policy on flag display, explicitly ban the Confederate Battle Flag, and ensure that service members can express support for diversity and inclusion through the display of sovereign Native Nations and LGBTQ Pride flags. We look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure that our military represents the ideals to which our nation aspires.

Sincerely,



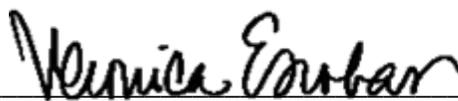
Anthony G. Brown
Member of Congress



Jackie Speier
Member of Congress



Chris Pappas
Member of Congress



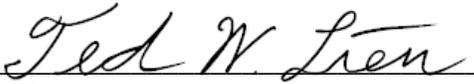
Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress



Ruben Gallego
Member of Congress



Deb Haaland
Member of Congress



Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress

/s/

Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress

/s/

Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress

/s/

Salud O. Carbajal
Member of Congress

/s/

Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr.
Member of Congress

/s/

Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress

/s/

Susan A. Davis
Member of Congress

/s/

Suzan K. DelBene
Member of Congress

/s/

Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress

/s/

Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress

/s/

Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

/s/

Jared Huffman
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Joseph P. Kennedy, III
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Ro Khanna
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress

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James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

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Grace Meng
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Seth Moulton
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Ilhan Omar
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Jimmy Panetta
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Jamie Raskin
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Mary Gay Scanlon
Member of Congress

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Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

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Darren Soto
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Dina Titus
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_____/s/
Lori Trahan
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress