

United States Senate

May 9, 2023

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1400

Dear Secretary Austin,

I am writing in response to your April 18, 2023, letter in which you contradict your own congressional testimony delivered on March 29, 2023, as well as that of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley. Your responses were inadequate in addressing my questions so I am asking for further clarification.

In that testimony you claimed drag shows are not something the Defense Department supports or funds and that you were unaware the event was happening. General Milley even stated they “should not be happening” on military installations.

However, in your April 18 letter, you write in regard to the drag show for children that was held at Malmstrom Air Force Base in Great Falls, MT, that leadership at the Department of the Air Force “values an inclusive and supportive environment” because it “enables Service members to focus on mission and being part of a high performing team.”

How do you reconcile that claim with the testimony you and General Milley gave on March 29, specifically General Milley’s emphatic statement that these events should not be happening?

As I said in the first letter I sent you on March 31, 2023, when it comes to the crisis of military recruitment, it is clear that activities like “Drag Story Time” only weaken cohesion and morale and further degrade the recruitment and retention of men and women serving our country in uniform.

Furthermore, your April 18 letter states that, “Event spaces on the installation are made available to military-affiliated individuals and installation-recognized private organizations to host events with a variety of themes.” Your response also claimed that “no taxpayer funds were spent to host or facilitate the event.”

How do you reconcile that claim with that fact that the event was shared on the base’s official social media channels?

I look forward to your response to these additional questions.

Sincerely,



Steve Daines
United States Senator