

June 6, 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 today to inquire about official Pentagon policy as it relates to drag shows and drag show story hours on military bases.

On March 31, 2023, I wrote your office because I was alarmed to find out a “Drag Story Time” for children was held on Malmstrom Air Force Base in Great Falls, Montana. In response to this inquiry on April 18, 2023, the Pentagon stated, “The Department of the Air Force leadership values an inclusive and supportive environment to enable Service members to focus on mission and being part of a high performing team.” There was no indication in your department’s letter that the Pentagon disapproves of such activity. In fact, the letter could be construed as an endorsement of such action. This further alarmed me and is the reason I sent a response asking for clarification and also introduced legislation to stop the DoD from using taxpayer funds or taxpayer-funded facilities from hosting drag queen performances.

However, according to press reports on May 30, 2023, a drag show hosted at Nellis Air Force base was canceled due to pressure from Defense Department leadership.

This leads to a number of questions:

1. Is precluding drag shows on military facilities now official Pentagon policy?
2. If so, when was this decided since it contradicts your April 18, 2023, letter?
3. The Malmstrom AFB event was deemed appropriate to be held on a military installation. In contrast, the Nellis AFB event did not meet DoD standards for holding an event at a DoD facility. What differences between the two events made one acceptable while the other was not?

The U.S. military’s active engagement in, and support for, divisive political and ideologically-driven issues weakens cohesion and morale and further degrades the recruitment and retention of the men and women serving our country in uniform. In doing so, these policies undermine the core mission of our military and constitute poor judgment by supportive military leaders.

I look forward to your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



---

Steve Daines  
United States Senator