

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 15, 2026

Hon. Platte B. Moring III
Inspector General
U.S. Department of Defense
4800 Mark Center Drive
Alexandria, VA 22350-1500

Dear Inspector General Moring,

We write to express our concern about the reported decision by Secretary Hegseth to remove certain officers from approved lists provided by promotion selection boards.¹ Secretary Hegseth allegedly took the unprecedented step to remove these officers from promotion lists after selection boards had formally approved them, using what appear to be arbitrary vetting standards. If accurate, such an intervention risks depriving the armed services of highly qualified and distinguished leaders.

Federal law states that the selection board process lives with the respective service secretaries and outlines the composition of these boards. A selection board is established to evaluate officers through a structured and comprehensive merit-based framework. The board determines whether to promote an officer and the service secretary certifies that decision.² This process should remain unimpeded. An intervention by the Secretary of Defense in that process is highly irregular.

Secretary Hegseth's alleged use of his personal views and perceptions on race and gender to interfere with the promotion process completely nullifies the extensive, competitive, rigorous, and merit-based vetting process of candidates that the selection boards put forward. It is clear his determinations are antithetical to the standards that should be assessed when considering promotions.

Equally concerning is reporting that Secretary Hegseth weaponized DoD-sanctioned statements, speeches, and appearances by these officers against them.³ Reports indicate that the secretary and his senior aides "ordered" officials in the respective military departments to conduct online searches of the officers selected by the boards. The apparent goal was "to look for photos, videos or news articles that might draw Mr. Hegseth's ire." According to the same reporting, DoD officials hoped "they could show that the officers had been following previous Pentagon policies" and therefore should not be removed. In the end, following Pentagon policies made no difference and the secretary moved forward with removing the names from the promotion list.

¹ Greg Jaffe & Kate Kelly, *Secret Vetting and Blocked Promotions: Inside Hegseth's War on Diversity*, N.Y. Times, June 19, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/06/19/us/politics/hegseth-navy-blocked-promotions-diversity.html>

² 10 U.S.C. § 629 (2024).

³ Greg Jaffe & Kate Kelly, *Secret Vetting and Blocked Promotions: Inside Hegseth's War on Diversity*, N.Y. Times, June 19, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/06/19/us/politics/hegseth-navy-blocked-promotions-diversity.html>

There are also reports of Secretary Hegseth using public remarks by DoD officials as a basis for blocking promotions.⁴ Department policy requires clearance for appearances and remarks for any officers acting in their official capacity. In some cases, officers were merely speaking about their experience rising through the ranks to provide context and mentorship to the next generation of military leaders. Secretary Hegseth's decision to use appropriately cleared appearances and remarks as a basis for denying promotions significantly undermines the leadership of those officers.

Previous secretaries of defense have allowed the service secretaries and their respective selection boards to maintain and run their promotion list process without undue bias and interference. This was standard procedure for years and followed the spirit of the law. Secretary Hegseth's alleged direct intervention to block nearly 40 officers, half of whom are women or members of minority groups, is an unprecedented overreach. Though Secretary Hegseth stated that he would install a promotion system that would be "ruthlessly meritocratic," he has done the opposite by imposing his own political biases to overturn merit-based decisions by senior military officers serving on selection boards.

We request a review of Secretary Hegseth's reported removal of officers from the various selection boards' lists that addresses the following:

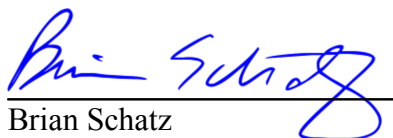
1. Did Secretary Hegseth's alleged removal of officers from promotions lists follow a systemic pattern to prioritize political or other non-merit-based considerations?
2. Was Secretary Hegseth personally involved in directing, pressuring, or otherwise influencing his aides or staff of the services' promotion boards in removing individuals from approved promotion lists?
3. What statutory, regulatory, or policy authority did Secretary Hegseth use to justify his alleged intervention to remove officers from board approved promotion lists?
4. Provide Secretary Hegseth's justification and any documented rationale for the removal of each officer from approved lists, including attention to whether the officer's race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, religion, socio-economic status or other characteristics were contributing factors to their removal or if their public statements or attendance at DoD-approved events contributed to their removal;
5. Outline the role of Secretary Hegseth in the removal of officers from approved lists prior to transmission to the president and Congress;
6. Provide copies of any written guidance, directives, memoranda, emails, briefing materials, evaluation criteria, or instructions received by DoD personnel conducting the internal reviews of officers removed from approved boards' lists;
7. Identify all communications between the Office of the Secretary of Defense and service secretaries regarding coordination of removal processes for officers pulled from promotion lists, including dates of such communications and the participants involved.
8. Indicate whether any legal review was conducted prior to the removal of officers from promotion lists, and if so, identify the offices responsible and detail their conclusions.
9. Describe whether affected officers were notified of their removal from promotion lists, and if so, when and through what process such notification occurred.

⁴ Greg Jaffe & Kate Kelly, *Secret Vetting and Blocked Promotions: Inside Hegseth's War on Diversity*, N.Y. Times, June 19, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/06/19/us/politics/hegseth-navy-blocked-promotions->

10. Provide recommendations on what recourse could be taken by individuals impacted by these actions;
11. Provide recommendations for immediate corrective actions that DoD must take to protect the work of promotion boards from undue political interference.

We look forward to your response. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Brian Schatz
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

CC:

Lieutenant General Gregory J. Brady, Inspector General, Department of the Army
Vice Admiral Michael W. Baze, Inspector General, Department of the Navy
Lieutenant General David B. Lyons, Inspector General, Department of the Air Force