

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0908

June 21, 2023

The Honorable Lloyd Austin
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Austin:

We write out of concern over the U.S. Department of the Air Force's (DAF) use of taxpayer dollars to cover the travel, lodging, and participation expenses for service members and civilians for DAF Pride events held in Washington, D.C. According to the DAF Office of Diversity and Inclusion, Air and Space Force Commanders have been authorized to utilize unit funds for this purpose for the professional development of service members and civilians. This is an abuse of taxpayer money, and completely unacceptable.

At a time of global instability and heightened threats against the U.S. and our allies and partners, the U.S. military should not be funding activities that have no direct impact on providing for the national defense. Within the past several weeks, a Chinese fighter jet flew aggressively close to a U.S. reconnaissance aircraft conducting a lawful operation in the South China Sea, and a Chinese warship cut dangerously close to a U.S. Navy destroyer, threatening a collision. These incidents should be a wake-up call to the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) that the priority and focus of all expenditures should be to safeguard U.S. assets and interests, and anything that does not contribute to that mission is a waste of taxpayer funding.

Closer to home, strained defense budgets call into question what DAF and the broader DoD are sacrificing in order to fund personnel trips to Washington, D.C. for Pride events that distract from building a more lethal force. As you recently pointed out in relation to drag show performances on military bases, such activities are "inconsistent with regulations regarding the use of DoD resources."¹ Meanwhile, the U.S. military remains woefully underfunded in areas such as procurement and there exists a critical need to expeditiously rebuild our stockpiles.

Given these facts, it is essential that DAF and DoD refocus and prioritize funding on providing for the common defense. Given our role in ensuring that DAF and DoD remain responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars, we request answers to the following questions:

- How much funding was expended by the DAF to send Airmen and Guardians to Washington, D.C. for Pride events?
- How many Airmen and Guardians chose travel to Washington, D.C. for Pride events?

¹ <https://www.foxnews.com/us/defense-secretarys-new-guidance-on-drag-shows-on-military-bases-has-immediate-impact-report>

- As part of the DAF's Pride events, the Department hosted a recruiting booth at the D.C. Pride Festival. Can the Department provide an analysis of interest it received at that booth?
- What skills that contribute to professional development does the DAF assess that Airmen and Guardians gained from the Pride events?
- How many total hours did service members and civilians, who attended DAF Pride events in Washington, D.C., spend away from their units?
- What factors contributed to DAF's determination that such events would enable service members and civilians to "improve professional competency" or "improve management of the Department's functions and activities" as presented in the DAF memo?
- How much money has the DoD budgeted for Pride month events, broken down by service, and the exact expenditures?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



Tom Cotton
U.S. Senator



Bill Cassidy, M.D.
U.S. Senator



Ted Cruz
U.S. Senator



Steve Daines
U.S. Senator