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## CONGRESSIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS 117<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS

March 16, 2021

Honorable Lloyd Austin  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Austin:

As Members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, we write to express our concerns about extremism within the United States military, especially white supremacy, and right-wing radicalism within the ranks. We applaud your recent Department of Defense (DoD)-wide order<sup>1</sup> to “stand down” for leaders of each branch of the armed forces over the next two months, where each command and each unit can discuss the problem of extremism in the ranks. The CHC encourages you to prevent enlisting in the military individuals with ties to white supremacy ideology or group. To this end, we are committed to work closely with you and the DoD.

On January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the U.S. Capitol was attacked by violent extremist and white supremacy insurrectionists. A recent NPR analysis<sup>2</sup> found that nearly 1 in 5 people charged over their alleged involvement in the attack on the U.S. Capitol appeared to have a military history. In addition, the group of insurrectionists included former Air Force officer Lt. Col. Larry R Brock—the man who held up zip ties on the U.S. Senate chamber—whose behavior was not condemned by the Air Force Academy’s Association of Graduates.<sup>3</sup> Lt. Col. Brock and other members were using military skills to attack the U.S. Capitol. Our military should not be a training ground for white supremacists to execute the goals related to their extreme violent beliefs.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2492530/austin-orders-military-stand-down-to-address-challenge-of-extremism-in-the-ranks/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2021/01/21/958915267/nearly-one-in-five-defendants-in-capitol-riot-cases-served-in-the-military>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/01/29/us/biden-trump-impeachment?referringSource=articleShare#capitol-riot-air-force-academy>

While there are current DoD instructions<sup>4</sup> that expressly prohibit military personnel from actively advocating for and participating in supremacist, extremist, or criminal gang doctrine—including ideology or causes where violence is likely to result—it has proven to be insufficient to prevent violent extremism in the military. A survey conducted in 2019 by the Military Times and Syracuse University Institute for Veterans and Military Families found that roughly one-third of active duty troops said they had "personally witnessed examples of white nationalism or ideological-driven racism within the ranks in recent months."<sup>5</sup> In addition, just last year, CHC members were alarmed by an incident involving Army Cadets and Navy Midshipmen at the 2019 Army-Navy Game where at least three military uniformed individuals made a hand gesture behind an ESPN reporter that resembled the one that the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) recently added to their database of hate symbols as an “expression of white supremacy.”<sup>6</sup> Recently, a news report mentions an October 2020 DOD report to Congress with evidence that white supremacy is infiltrated in the military, including a quote from a soldier stating “he felt free to be a neo-Nazi in the US Army.”<sup>7</sup> It is critical that servicemembers who have chosen to defend our country are held to standards of decorum and respect.

Last Congress, CHC Members worked to address the issue of white supremacy in the military through legislative language in the NDAA. The Fiscal Year 2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) included some provisions to improve tracking and reporting of white supremacist and violent extremist activities by servicemembers, including the establishment of a Deputy Inspector General responsible of monitoring and evaluating DoD’s response to these threats. Many other provisions were removed in the Republican-controlled Senate during negotiations, but we look forward to working closely with you to ensure these provisions get signed into law by President Biden this Congress.

*CHC Member-led NDAA provisions:*

1. Amendment by Rep. Pete Aguilar: Require the DoD Secretary to explicitly study the feasibility of screening for white nationalist beliefs in military enlistees<sup>8</sup>.
2. Amendment by Rep. Pete Aguilar: Enhances a yearly report to Congress on white supremacist, extremist and criminal-gang activity within the military by requiring the total number of allegations, investigations, and inquiries be reported.

Addressing white supremacy in the military is a top priority for the CHC, and we request a meeting with you before April 31, 2021 to discuss this priority and to also discuss Latino representation in the top military ranks and leadership. To schedule a meeting, please have your staff contact CHC Executive Director Alma Acosta at [alma.acosta@mail.house.gov](mailto:alma.acosta@mail.house.gov).

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.jbsa.mil/News/News/Article/2473420/guidance-details-dos-and-donts-for-participation-in-political-demonstrations/#:~:text=Per%20DOD%20Instruction%201325.06%2C%20Handling,under%20any%20of%20the%20following>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2020/02/06/signs-of-white-supremacy-extremism-up-again-in-poll-of-active-duty-troops/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.adl.org/education/references/hate-symbols/okay-hand-gesture>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.rollcall.com/2021/02/16/pentagon-report-reveals-inroads-white-supremacists-have-made-in-military/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://amendments-rules.house.gov/amendments/W6251909090595.pdf>

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Raul Ruiz".

Raul Ruiz, M.D.  
CHC Chair

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Nanette Diaz Barragán".

Nanette Barragán  
CHC First Vice-Chair

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Adriano Espaillat".

Adriano Espaillat  
CHC Second Vice-Chair

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CHC Whip

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Teresa Leger Fernández  
CHC Freshman Representative