

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 27, 2025

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Secretary Hegseth:

Recent reporting that you intend to convene commanders in grade O7 through O10 and their senior enlisted advisors from around the world for an in-person meeting at Marine Corps Base Quantico next week—on short notice, supposedly to hear you make a speech about the “warrior ethos”—raises profound concerns about security, cost and operational impacts. It comes amid a pattern of deeply troubling decisions under your tenure, including continued abuse of the military in American cities for political purposes; the abrupt removal of highly qualified senior leaders without justification, sometimes at the behest of a far-right social media influencer and conspiracy theorist; and your own humiliating mishandling of classified operational information in unclassified, unsecured group chats with your wife, brother and, stunningly, the editor-in-chief of the *Atlantic*.

If reports are accurate, this gathering would represent an unprecedented concentration of senior military leadership in one location simply to hear you speak about standards and ethos at significant cost and with potentially serious security implications. This includes both the personal security of all individuals assembling—and creating a rich target for any malign actor—and national security, given that our adversaries will know that many of our most senior commanders from around the world are tied up together with some portion of the highest level of the civilian chain of command.

Very few commanders at the specified grades are stationed in the National Capital Region, meaning that this order could potentially require over 1,000 uniformed servicemembers, between commanders, their senior enlisted advisors and support staff, to travel at the taxpayer’s expense, interrupting their planned duties in their areas of responsibility. For an administration obsessed with rooting out waste, this abrupt, time and resource-intensive meeting of our military’s top commanders, all of whom have earned their positions through superior performance over decades of service, to reportedly hear you, the least qualified Secretary of Defense in living memory, lecture about military standards and warfighting is absurd.

To our knowledge, no Secretary of Defense in modern history has convened an in-person gathering of this scale, involving general and flag officer commanders worldwide, without a publicly stated agenda or declared crisis. Even during periods of acute national emergency, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Gulf War or the immediate aftermath of the September 11 attacks, senior military leaders were summoned only in smaller, mission-specific groups, and always with a clear operational or strategic purpose. Regularly scheduled events such as the Unified Commanders Conference involve far fewer participants, are planned well in advance and

are conducted with a defined, operational purpose and full transparency. The reported Quantico meeting departs dramatically from these precedents.

Given the exceedingly costly nature of this meeting and our lack of confidence in your judgement when it comes to operational security on account of your well-publicized failures in this regard, we require detailed responses to the following questions:

1. What is the estimated total cost of this gathering, including:
 - a. Estimated number of flight hours required for military aircraft, fixed wing and rotary wing, and the cost per flight hour;
 - b. Estimated number of commercial roundtrip airline tickets required for commanders, senior enlisted advisors and support staff and the estimated total cost of commercial airfare;
 - c. Estimated number of hotel rooms required and estimated total lodging costs for all travelers, including commanders, senior enlisted advisors and support staff;
 - d. Estimated total per diem for all travelers, including commanders, senior enlisted advisors and support staff;
 - e. Estimated total cost of ground transportation, to include rental and contract vehicles, fuel and mileage reimbursements;
 - f. Estimated total cost of extra security measures required at Marine Corps Base Quantico and throughout the wider National Capital Region.
2. What accounts are being used to fund these costs?
3. If there is a lapse in annual appropriations starting at midnight the night of this meeting, how will it impact meeting participants' ability to return to their duty stations?
4. Was a cost-benefit analysis conducted prior to deciding on an in-person format?
5. Why was a secure virtual alternative not considered sufficient?
6. Is public reporting that the purpose of this meeting is to deliver a speech accurate? Are there any other objectives planned for this meeting?
7. What force protection measures are being implemented at Marine Corps Base Quantico during the meeting?
8. Has the Department conducted a risk assessment of concentrating much of the operational chain of command in one location?

9. What contingency plans are in place in the event of a security breach during the meeting?
10. Has the Department coordinated with the intelligence community to assess risks to the senior leadership gathering or broader national security?
11. What is the impact on command and control in each combatant command during the absence of its senior leadership?
12. Are there any ongoing or anticipated operations that could be affected by this absence?
13. What are the anticipated impacts to personnel and operations at Marine Corps Base Quantico in preparation for this meeting, on the day of this meeting and following the conclusion of the meeting?
 - a. What installation resources are being used in support of this meeting?
 - b. How many installation personnel are being detailed to support this meeting?
 - c. How many personnel are being directed to not report to their duty station on the day of the meeting?
 - d. What restrictions are being placed on families or individuals living on base and how are base services impacted?
14. What are the anticipated impacts to personnel and operations at other installations in the National Capital Region in preparation for this meeting, on the day of this meeting and following the conclusion of the meeting? For each impacted installation, detail:
 - a. What installation resources are being used in support of this meeting?
 - b. How many installation personnel are being detailed to support this meeting?
15. Has this gathering disrupted any other scheduled operations, training or interagency coordination?
16. Why has the Department not publicly disclosed the purpose of this meeting?
17. Has the President directed this gathering? If not, was the President briefed on or otherwise aware of the gathering before it was reported?
18. Has any previous Secretary of Defense convened a similar gathering under comparable circumstances?
19. How does the Department justify the urgency of this meeting in the absence of a declared crisis?

Secretary Hegseth, we write with particular concern on account of your consistent prioritization of political theater and distraction over warfighting and blatant disregard for operational security. Given the reported scale and sensitivity of this reported gathering, we require a briefing or written response to answer these questions no later than Monday September 29, 2025. If any of the information requested is classified, we are prepared to receive a briefing in an appropriate setting.

Sincerely,



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator