

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4304
February 6, 2023

Committee on Armed Services
Military Personnel
Cyber, Innovative Technologies and
Information Systems
Committee on Oversight and Reform
Environment

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Austin,

We write to you today to share our concerns over the recent mistreatment of service members who are forced to repay signing bonuses after being involuntarily separated from the military for failing to receive a COVID-19 vaccine.


From the start, the decision to punish service members for failure to comply with this order was completely misguided and wrong. While nobody could have predicted the impacts the pandemic would have in the Spring of 2020, this was nothing more than a knee-jerk reaction based on fear. It is abundantly clear now that the coronavirus is not the existential threat some once thought it was.

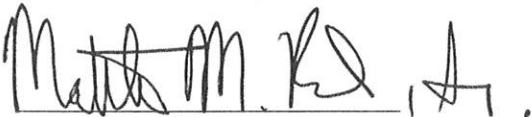
Since the Department of Defense mandated the COVID-19 vaccine, 8,453 individuals have been separated from military service. At a time when each of the services faces historic recruiting challenges and shortfalls, this is a self-inflicted wound that will jeopardize our national security. The blame for this rests solely on your shoulders.

As if this were not enough, reports have emerged that service members must now pay back enlistment bonuses and entitlements after their forced separation! To be clear, we completely understand Department policy for those who fail to meet their contractual obligations and agree with this under normal circumstances. However, these actions are disingenuous, if not predatory, in this particular instance. With this in mind, we urge you in the strongest terms possible to immediately direct each service secretary to end this practice and stop forcing servicemembers to repay their signing bonuses.

In the FY 2023 National Defense Authorization Act, Congress rightfully directed you to end these separations. We will not rest until service members' rights are restored and given a pathway back to active service. We thank you for your attention to this matter and eagerly await your response.

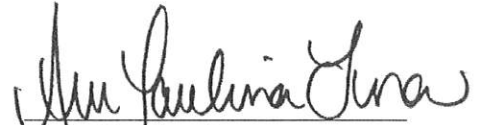
Sincerely,


Pat Fallon
Member of Congress

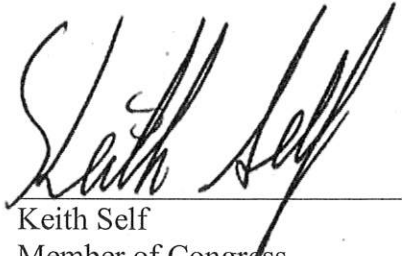

Matt Rosendale
Member of Congress



Kat Cammack
Member of Congress



Anna Paulina Luna
Member of Congress



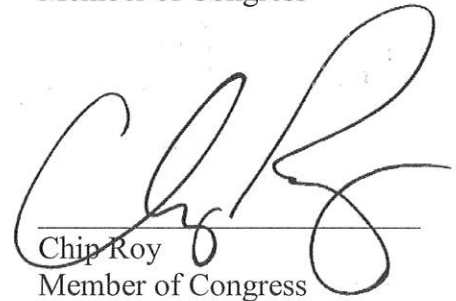
Keith Self
Member of Congress



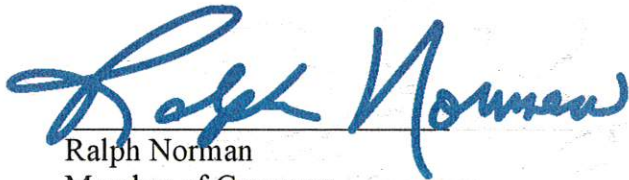
Andy Biggs
Member of Congress



Ben Cline
Member of Congress



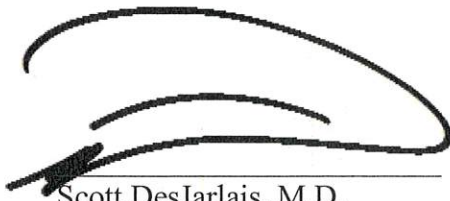
Chip Roy
Member of Congress



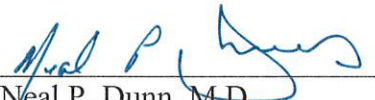
Ralph Norman
Member of Congress



Bill Posey
Member of Congress



Scott DesJarlais, M.D.
Member of Congress



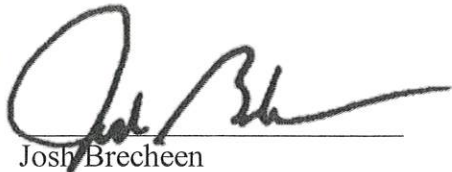
Neal P. Dunn, M.D.
Member of Congress




Rich McCormick, M.D., M.B.A.
Member of Congress



Ronny L. Jackson
Member of Congress



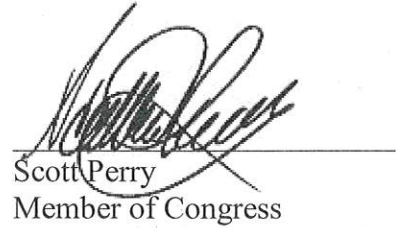
Josh Brecheen
Member of Congress



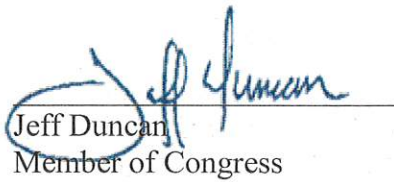
Lauren Boebert
Member of Congress



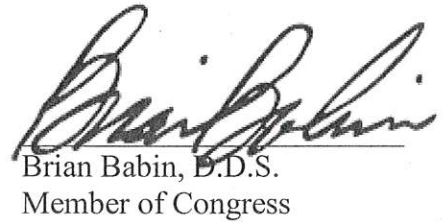
Matt Gaetz
Member of Congress



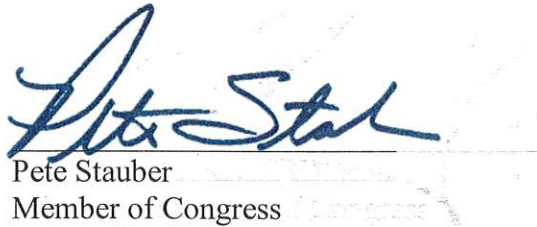
Scott Perry
Member of Congress



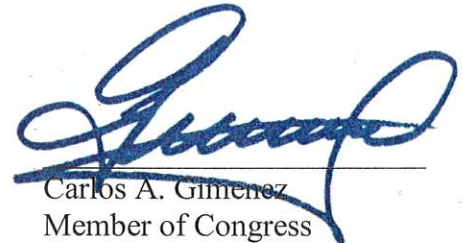
Jeff Duncan
Member of Congress



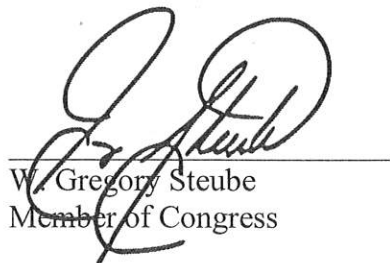
Brian Babin, B.D.S.
Member of Congress



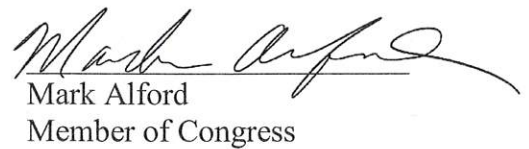
Pete Stauber
Member of Congress



Carlos A. Gimenez
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W. Gregory Steube
Member of Congress



Mark Alford
Member of Congress