

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 20, 2023

The Honorable Carlos Del Toro
Secretary of the Navy
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Del Toro,

In February, we wrote to Secretary Lloyd Austin to share our concern about recent actions taken by the services to recoup signing bonuses from service members who had been discharged for failure to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. We wholeheartedly believe that this policy is and remains unethical and wrong.

In a reply to our letter, dated May 15, 2023, Mr. Gilbert Cisneros, Jr., the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, he stated that per 37 U.S.C. § 373, “the Secretaries of the Military Departments have the authority on a case-by-case basis to grant an exception to such repayment if the Secretary of the Military Department concerned determines that the imposition of repayment would be contrary to the personnel policy or management objective, against equity or good conscience, or contrary to the best interests of the United States.”

We believe that seeking repayment of signing bonuses from those who were discharged against their will qualifies for an exemption under each of these categories. We urge you to take immediate action to end this practice, allow service members to retain their bonuses, and establish a streamlined pathway back to active service for these individuals.

From the start, the decision to punish service members for failure to comply with this order was completely misguided and wrong. Since this policy has been rescinded in accordance with Section 525 of the James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, further pursuing this repayment is then contrary to the personnel policy and management objectives.

It is abundantly clear now that the coronavirus is not the existential threat some once thought it was. There is no longer any argument for readiness that can be made to justify this policy. Pursuing such an agenda would be purely political in nature. Therefore, continuing to force back pay is a violation against equity and good conscience.

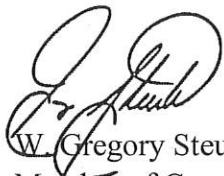
Since the DoD mandated the COVID-19 vaccine, 8,453 individuals have been separated from military service. At a time when each of the services faces historic recruiting challenges and shortfalls, this is a self-inflicted wound that will jeopardize our national security. This clearly is not in the best interest of the United States.

With this in mind, we urge you, in the strongest terms possible, to immediately end this practice and exempt these service members from repayment of their signing bonuses. We thank you for your attention to this matter and eagerly await your response.

Sincerely,



Pat Fallon
Member of Congress



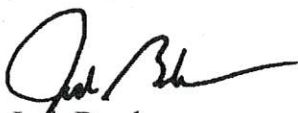
W. Gregory Steube
Member of Congress



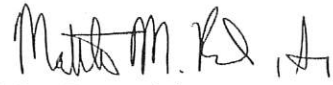
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