



November 11, 2023

The Honorable Amy Klobuchar
Senate Rule Committee, Chair
425 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Deb Fischer
Senate Rules Committee, Ranking Member
448 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Klobuchar and Fischer,

We write to express our strong support for Senate Resolution 444 "for the en bloc consideration of military nominations," the subject of the Committee on Rules and Administration hearing on November 11, 2023. Members of the Rules Committee have the opportunity to take a meaningful step in returning the military to normal order by promoting the highest-achieving military officers who are central to the defense of the United States. S.Res. 444 would expedite the confirmations of 452 outstanding military nominations that have been stalled since early this year.

Secure Families Initiative represents thousands of spouses, parents, siblings, and children of actively-serving military service members living across the country and stationed abroad.

Impacts of the Hold on Senior Military Leader Promotions

Let us paint you a picture of the detrimental impacts of one Senator holding our military nominations hostage. Since March, many of those in our membership have experienced direct impacts of this hold, and the entire military community is impacted by trickle-down effects: hurting military readiness; preventing scores of officers from moving to new jobs, either as nominees or staff members; positions left vacant; and military leaders balancing the duties of multiple positions. In addition to all direct impacts on the military, there are countless intangible side effects compounding the usual stress of military family life.

The impacts of this hold on military children are inexcusable and unforgivable. These children have made sacrifices their entire lives, and are now facing even more angst - all because of the actions of one Senator. Academically, military high school students are facing unprecedented uncertainty: where to register for PSAT/SATs, or whether their class credits will transfer because they don't know where they will live. And there are countless social impacts too. In an already disconnected world of teens filled with anxiety, these kids are faced with yet even more reason to feel isolated. As one spouse told us, "This uncertainty is tipping the scales in terms of my children's mental health."

Service member spouses are one of the highest unemployed demographics in the United States.¹ This hold is exasperating this challenge. Active-duty spouses have reported that they are turning down lucrative employment opportunities because of the uncertainty of where they will be stationed or living. Many nominated officers are trying to sell, or have sold, their current homes and are living in temporary housing - thus paying for storage out of pocket without any clarity on the length of time they will remain in this position until considered for confirmation. We are hearing from a few families that this pause happened mid-move, so they were forced to live in hotels with their children with no clear understanding of when - or where - they will find their next home. Of course, all of these financial implications are exacerbated because nominees are not receiving the significant pay increase that comes with a military promotion.

Recruiting and retaining the best talent for military service is an ongoing challenge, and this hold will have direct impacts on retention for years to come. In addition to the anecdotes we have heard from families that have been directly impacted, we have heard from many, many more enlisted families of the cascading effects to morale. Frustration will tip the scales to pursue a career outside of military service. As an enlisted spouse reported, "By targeting the military's leadership through this hold, it erodes the confidence we have in Washington to support us. We feel abandoned by our government when our leaders have become the scapegoats for their agendas."

Military families are extremely frustrated and offended that their lives have been upended for political gain. One spouse of a senior military leader whose confirmation has been delayed since May expressed the frustration felt by many:

I am at the point that I have always supported anything the Air Force asked of [my spouse]. Thirty plus years and to have Senators not working to remedy this situation as well as calling General Officers "woke" "paper pushers" and basically not needed makes me regret every single thing we have given up for him to serve. He could have gotten out a long time ago and become an airline pilot. We would have the fancy house, he would have an actual relationship with our daughter, we would have actual time together. We could be living large but instead he is being vilified and not supported by politicians. I used to be proud of [my spouse's] work ethic, willingness to put service before self, etc but now I am just mad that he isn't sticking up for himself and walking away when he already qualifies for over 75% of his pay in retirement.

¹ US Chamber of Commerce. September 15, 2022. Available online: <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/workforce/unemployment-and-underemployment-continue-plague-military-spouses-and-affect-financial>

Blocking Military Promotions is an Unacceptable and Inappropriate Tactic

Approving military nominations and promotions has long been one of the most bipartisan duties of the Senate. Senator Tuberville has been asked dozens of times to approve en bloc confirmations. He has been asked by his constituents, our national security leaders, and his Republican colleagues. In July, our organization delivered a petition to Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, and Senator Tuberville. This petition — now signed by 1,134 military spouses, family members, and veterans — urges Senator Tuberville and Senate leadership to expeditiously confirm all blocked promotions and fill existing vacancies. We have enclosed a copy of this petition.

We understand that members of the Senate do not want to change the rules, but Senator Tuberville has left no choice. If a Senator disagrees with DoD health care policy, they should settle it through normal legislative or administrative channels, not by holding military families hostage while demanding policy negotiations. As military families know all too well, service members and dependents do not choose where they live. This is why the DoD guarantees a health care package that provides paid time off and reimburses travel costs for comprehensive health services that a service member or dependent cannot access at certain duty stations. It is highly inappropriate and unpatriotic to wage a political battle by using military service members as pawns.

Conclusion

We know a change of Senate rules, even a temporary one, is a serious and consequential step. However, it is time for the Senate to take serious and consequential action to support the military community and its leaders. Unfortunately, Senator Tuberville's obstinance and unwillingness to listen to military leaders, military families, and even his own colleagues leave no other choice. Military families are hopeful for a solution to this disgraceful chapter. Thank you in advance for supporting S.R. 444.

Enclosure: Stop Playing Politics with the Military Petition

**Enclosure to Letter to
Senators Klobuchar and Fischer**

**Text of the Secure Families Initiative Petition “Stop Playing Politics with the Military”
Delivered to Leader Schumer, Leader McConnell and Senator Tuberville (July 2023)**

As military spouses, family members and veterans, we are appalled by the continued hold on essential military business.

One Senator has single handedly blocked military promotions since February 2023! He has stopped the confirmation of at least 270 service members, inflicted direct harm to these service members and caused confusion and frustration for the entire military community. Indeed, the first time in more than 150 years, the U.S. Marine Corps Commandant position is vacant. This political grandstanding is causing uncertainty for military families and directly threatens our national security.

It is widely known that the military is facing challenges to recruitment and retention. Politicizing and disrupting promotions and employment packages, attacking diversity and inclusion programs, and blatant politicization of military service policies compounds this problem and sends a message to female servicemembers (who make up over 17% of our active duty force) and servicemembers of color (who make up 40% of the active duty force) that they are not welcome. Gen. Charles Brown, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force who has been nominated to become Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, warned Senators that continuing to delay confirmations could result in junior officers leaving the military rather than risk having their careers stalled and families harmed.

Let us be clear: Senator Tuberville is playing politics with our military. Senator Tuberville disagrees with the Department of Defense's compensation package for active duty servicemembers and their families. As military families know all too well, service members and dependents do not choose where they live. This is why the DoD guarantees a health care package that provides paid time off and reimburses travel costs for comprehensive health services that a servicemember or dependent cannot access at certain duty stations. If a Senator disagrees with DoD health care policy, they should settle it through normal legislative or administrative channels. It is highly inappropriate and unpatriotic to wage a political battle by using military service members as pawns.

We call on Senate leadership to:

1. Reiterate to Senator Tuberville the dangers and ramifications of his political grandstanding;
2. Work together to resolve political and ideological disagreements outside the military space;
3. Expediently confirm all blocked promotions and fill existing vacancies.

No matter your political beliefs, we must agree that service members and military families will not be used as political leverage. It's time to end this political showmanship and recommit to respect the service and sacrifice of those who pledge to defend this nation.