

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 21, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

As members of the Congressional Black Caucus, we urge our House colleagues to vote in favor of granting the necessary legal waiver to Secretary of Defense designate Lloyd J. Austin III to serve as the United States' first Black Secretary of Defense.

Secretary-designate Austin is an exceptionally qualified individual, possessing all the skills and experience necessary to hit the ground running under the new Biden-Harris Administration. Born in Mobile, Alabama, Lloyd J. Austin III graduated the United States Military Academy at West Point and earned post-graduate degrees from Auburn University and Webster University. He began his 41-year career in the military as a Second Lieutenant with the 3rd Infantry Division. Quickly rising through the ranks, Austin commanded combat troops around the world, including in Operation Safe Haven, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation Enduring Freedom.

Secretary-designate Austin's career is filled with many groundbreaking achievements, which include serving as the first Black general to command an Army division in combat, the first Black vice chief of staff of the Army, and the first Black commander of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM). He is also highly decorated, receiving five Defense Distinguished Service Medals, three Distinguished Service Medals, the Silver Star, and two Legions of Merit. He is widely respected across the military and is uniquely qualified to lead our armed forces under the Biden-Harris Administration.

Because Secretary-designate Austin has not been separated from active duty military service for seven years, we are aware that he requires a legal waiver from Congress to serve as Secretary of Defense. We strongly agree that civilian control of the military is not only a tradition in the United States, but also a vital principle of our constitutional democracy. Moreover, we have full confidence that Secretary-designate Austin shares these deeply held values and will continue to promote and defend civilian control of the military.

At home, we face a historic pandemic that has disproportionately impacted communities of color. We are simultaneously grappling with an unprecedented rise of white supremacist and far right-wing domestic terrorist groups, fueled by a profusion of racist and anti-democratic rhetoric. Abroad, the global community has suffered for four years from a deficiency of American leadership. Our new Secretary of Defense will need to quickly correct course to restore America's standing as a force for good and push back on the rise of authoritarianism around the world. We believe that Secretary-designate Austin is up to the task. At a time of instability at home and abroad, we cannot afford to delay his confirmation.

We strongly support the nomination of Secretary-designate Austin to serve as the first African American Secretary of Defense in our nation's history and urge that a waiver be granted by Congress as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



Terri A. Sewell
Member of Congress



Joyce Beatty
Member of Congress

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Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.
Member of Congress

Colin Z. Allred
Member of Congress

Karen Bass
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Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.
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Anthony G. Brown
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G. K. Butterfield
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André Carson
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Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress

Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress

Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress

Val Butler Demings
Member of Congress

Dwight Evans
Member of Congress

Rep. Steven Horsford
Member of Congress

Hakeem Jeffries
Member of Congress

Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress

Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress

Brenda L. Lawrence
Member of Congress

Al Lawson
Member of Congress

Donald McEachin
Member of Congress

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

Donald M. Payne, Jr.
Member of Congress

Stacey E. Plaskett (VI)
Member of Congress

Marilyn Strickland
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Bennie Thompson
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Ritchie Torres
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Marc Veasey
Member of Congress

Bonnie Watson Coleman
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Frederica S Wilson
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