

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 15, 2026

Pete Hegseth  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Hegseth,

We write to express our great alarm about recent reports of political interference with the editorial independence of Stars and Stripes and restrictions placed on members of the Pentagon press corps.

A free and independent press is primary and indispensable to the functioning of our democracy. From the Civil War through today's military conflicts, Stars and Stripes has served as a trusted, nonpartisan source of news for servicemembers and their families around the world. Its huge reservoir of credibility rests on its editorial independence, protected by statute and longstanding Department of Defense policy. Congress created the position of Stars and Stripes ombudsman in the National Defense Authorization Act of 1991. The ombudsman is charged with safeguarding the editorial independence of the newspaper and reports directly to Congress, specifically to prevent interference from the Department.

The current ombudsman has forcefully denounced your Department's plans for Stars and Stripes in multiple interviews, raising the alarm about your announced changes and their consequences for the news organization. Any effort to censor, influence, control, or suppress the papers reporting raises profound constitutional and institutional problems.

Similarly, the Pentagon press corps plays a vital role in ensuring transparency and accountability within the Department of Defense. Limitations on press access, retaliation against journalists, and the imposition of viewpoint-based restrictions all undermine public trust and erode the principles of civilian oversight and democratic governance. These basic tenets of our democracy were reaffirmed by a federal judge who, on two separate occasions, found that your Department's draconian restrictions on the Pentagon press corps were unlawful. Your subsequent decision to defy the spirit of the court's rulings displays tremendous contempt for the rule of law and further raises doubts about this Administration's commitment to the basic Constitutional principles that Americans live by.

The First Amendment does not stop at the doors of the Pentagon. While operational security and the safety of our troops must always be safeguarded, these imperatives cannot be used as a

pretext for suppressing lawful journalism or discouraging critical reporting, especially during a time of war.

Accordingly, we ask that you provide clear and complete responses to the following questions and requests:

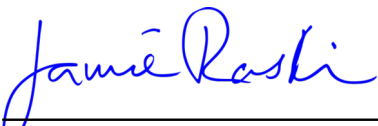
1. What is the process by which specific articles are altered, suppressed, or delayed by Stars and Stripes? Please provide documentation for every instance where articles have been altered, suppressed, or delayed.
2. What measures is the Department taking to come into full compliance with the court rulings affecting the Pentagon press corps, if any?
3. Please provide Congress with a copy of the March 9 memo that was issued by the Department regarding editorial oversight and content restrictions for Stars and Stripes.

Congress has a solemn responsibility to conduct oversight of the Department of Defense, and a free press is an essential partner in that effort. We urge you to reaffirm your commitment to transparency, accountability, and the free speech and free press principles that guide our nation.

We request a written response to these questions no later than May 11, 2026, and we are prepared to pursue further oversight measures as is necessary.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Very truly yours,



Jamie Raskin  
Member of Congress



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



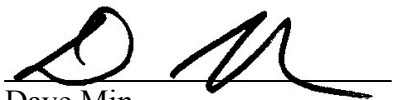
Andre Carson  
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress



Joe Neguse  
Member of Congress



Dave Min  
Member of Congress



---

Maggie Goodlander  
Member of Congress



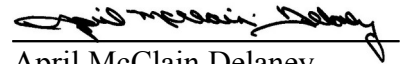
---

Ro Khanna  
Member of Congress



---

Veronica Escobar  
Member of Congress



---

April McClain Delaney  
Member of Congress



---

Danny K. Davis  
Member of Congress



---

Chrissy Houlahan  
Member of Congress



---

Chris Deluzio  
Member of Congress



---

Jasmine Crockett  
Member of Congress



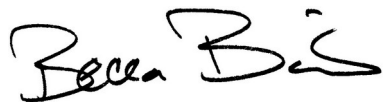
---

George Latimer  
Member of Congress



---

Steve Cohen  
Member of Congress



---

Becca Balint  
Member of Congress



---

Pramila Jayapal  
Member of Congress



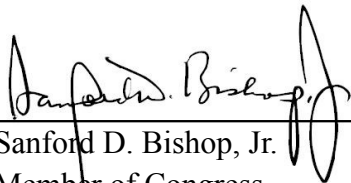
---

Susie Lee  
Member of Congress



---

Eugene Simon Vindman  
Member of Congress



---

Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.  
Member of Congress



---

Jason Crow  
Member of Congress



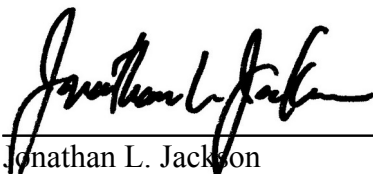
---

Maxine Dexter  
Member of Congress



---

Ted W. Lieu  
Member of Congress



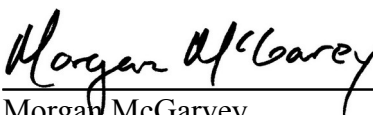
---

Jonathan L. Jackson  
Member of Congress



---

Stephen F. Lynch  
Member of Congress



---

Morgan McGarvey  
Member of Congress



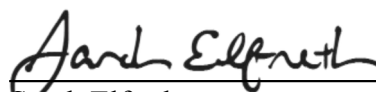
---

Melanie Stansbury  
Member of Congress



---

Marc A. Veasey  
Member of Congress



---

Sarah Elfreth  
Member of Congress



---

Sylvia R. Garcia  
Member of Congress



---

Jim Tokuda  
Member of Congress



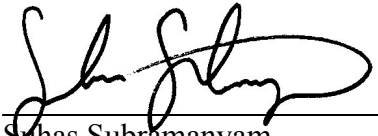
---

Lois Frankel  
Member of Congress



---

Dina Titus  
Member of Congress



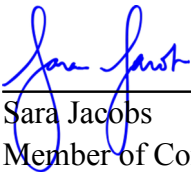
---

Suhas Subramanyam  
Member of Congress



---

Mark DeSaulnier  
Member of Congress



---

Sara Jacobs  
Member of Congress



---

Diana DeGette  
Member of Congress



---

Sean Casten  
Member of Congress