

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 2, 2020

The Honorable Dr. Mark T. Esper
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Esper,

We write to express our concern about your decision to discontinue support for *Stars and Stripes*. The \$15.5 million currently allocated for the publication of *Stars and Stripes* is a only a tiny fraction of your Department's annual budget, and cutting it would have a significantly negative impact on military families and a negligible impact on the Department's bottom line.

Stars and Stripes is a historically significant publication in our country. It originated during the Civil War and has been published continuously since World War II to provide independent, nonpartisan, and award-winning journalism to more than 1.4 million readers among our active duty forces, veterans, civilians, and their families.

It was *Stars and Stripes* that revealed the Defense Department's use of public relations firms that profiled reporters and steered them toward favorable coverage of the war in Afghanistan. Most recently, the paper brought to light the failure of schools on U.S. military installations to shut down during the pandemic, despite Japanese public schools doing so. These stories illustrate why *Stars and Stripes* is essential: they report on stories that no one else covers.

We understand that DoD plans to cease publication of *Stars and Stripes* on September 30, 2020 and completely dissolve the organization by January 31, 2021 as a result of the proposed termination of funding in the fiscal year 2021 President's budget. We urge you to take steps to preserve the funding prerogatives of Congress before allowing any such disruption to take place, for the following reasons.

First, the House-passed version of the Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2021, contains additional funding not requested by the Administration to continue operating *Stars and Stripes*. Second, the Senate has not yet released a defense appropriations bill, nor had an opportunity to conference with the House position, leaving it as a real possibility that Congress may not agree with the proposal to eliminate this funding. Third, the standard text of a continuing resolution – that funds are provided “at a rate of operations... for continuing projects and activities” as provided for in the previous year's Department of Defense Appropriations Act – places a legal obligation on the Department to not act on a termination of a program until a full-year appropriations bill is enacted. We seek your written assurance that the Department will comply with this obligation and avoid steps that would preempt the funding prerogatives of Congress.

Stars and Stripes is an essential part of our nation's freedom of the press that serves the very population charged with defending that freedom. Therefore, we respectfully request that you rescind your decision to discontinue support for *Stars and Stripes* and that you reinstate the funding necessary for it to continue operations. We appreciate your attention to this important matter and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



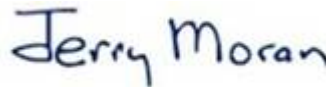
Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



John Boozman
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Jerry Moran
United States Senator



Patty Murray
United States Senator



Shelley Capito
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

/s/Chris Van Hollen

Christopher Van Hollen
United States Senator



Doug Jones
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Jon Tester
United States Senator



Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator

Cc: Colonel Paul R. Haverstick, Jr., Acting Director, Defense Media Activity