

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074
MINORITY (202) 225-5051
<https://oversight.house.gov>

February 24, 2025

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of Defense
United States Department of Defense
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Hegseth,

We write to condemn and express grave concern about the abrupt firing of multiple senior leaders in the military, including the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Charles Q. Brown, Jr.¹ These sudden terminations appear plainly political and unrelated to any performance or capability standards, and threaten to fundamentally undermine military readiness, morale, and national security. As members of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, we request information regarding the circumstances of these firings and transparency into the rationale for the Trump Administration's actions.

At 7:30 p.m. on Friday, February 21, 2025, President Trump announced through a post on TruthSocial that General Brown had been terminated from his post as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.² Shortly thereafter, you issued a press release indicating that five other senior military officers had been dismissed: Admiral Lisa Franchetti, chief of Naval Operations and the highest-ranking officer in the Navy; General James Slife, vice chief of staff and second in command of the Air Force; and the top lawyers for the Air Force, Army, and Navy.³ Neither President Trump's social media post nor your press release contained any basis or rationale for these brazen firings, let alone an indication that the actions were taken based on any standard of performance. These terminations follow the abrupt firing of Admiral Linda Fagan from her role as commandant of the Coast Guard on President Trump's second day in office.⁴

¹ *Trump Fires Joint Chiefs Chairman Amid Flurry of Dismissals at Pentagon*, New York Times (Feb. 21, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/2025/02/21/us/politics/trump-fires-cq-brown-pentagon.html).

² Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), TruthSocial (Feb. 21, 2025) (online at <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/114044712489265353>).

³ Department of Defense, *Press Release: Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth Statement on General Officer Nominations* (Feb. 21, 2025) (online at www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/4074482/secretary-of-defense-pete-hegseth-statement-on-general-officer-nominations/).

⁴ *Trump Fires 4-Star Coast Guard Chief*, Politico (Jan. 21, 2025) (online at www.politico.com/news/2025/01/21/coast-guard-commandant-removed-from-post-00199637).

This Friday night massacre of seasoned military officers, who have earned bipartisan support, instantly wipes away decades of military experience and “could create a cascade of hasty promotions down the ranks that impact U.S. leadership across the globe.”⁵ The firing of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs defies longstanding precedent, as the chairman traditionally remains in place as administrations change, regardless of the incoming president’s political party.⁶ This mass termination of military leadership raises serious concerns about an effort to weaponize the armed forces to serve overtly partisan objectives. The mass termination is also consistent with a broader pattern observed during the Trump Administration, where institutions typically regarded as nonpartisan have been increasingly politicized.⁷ In particular, the termination of the top lawyers for the Air Force, Army, and Navy appear to be an attempt to install loyalist officers who may disregard laws and regulations governing military protocol at President Trump’s direction.

The unjustified termination of these senior officers comes in the midst of reports that you and President Trump are working to eradicate diversity initiatives throughout the military, despite the fact that diversity among our armed forces is widely recognized as a strategic strength.⁸ Reporting has also shown that you hold particular disdain for any officer supportive of military diversity—regardless of their warfighting capabilities or strategic expertise. You previously called on General Brown to be fired because of his “woke” ideology, and shockingly stated “Take it to the racist bank: black troops, at all levels, will be promoted simply based on their race. Some will be qualified; some will not be.”⁹

The Administration’s predisposal to terminating senior officers without concern for their experience or capability undermines the ability of the military to execute its mission effectively and broadcasts weakness to our global adversaries. To understand the full nature and rationale of the abrupt firings, as well as plans of succession to preserve military readiness, and to explore whether legislation is necessary to address these actions, we request written responses to the following no later than **March 10, 2025**.

⁵ *Trump Fires Top Military Leaders in Unprecedented Shakeup*, Politico (Feb. 21, 2025) (online at www.politico.com/news/2025/02/21/cq-brown-trump-fired-joint-chiefs-general-00205593).

⁶ *Trump Fires Joint Chiefs Chairman Amid Flurry of Dismissals at Pentagon*, New York Times (Feb. 21, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/2025/02/21/us/politics/trump-fires-cq-brown-pentagon.html).

⁷ See Letter from Gerald E. Connolly, Ranking Member, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, to President Donald J. Trump (Feb. 5, 2025) (online at <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/democrats-oversight.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/2025-02-03.%20GEC%20et%20al.%20to%20Trump%20re.%20Purge%20on%20the%20Federal%20Workforce.pdf>); see also *Trump Ousts Joint Chiefs Chairman, Other Leaders in Major Pentagon Shake-Up*, Washington Post (Feb. 21, 2025) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2025/02/21/trump-joint-chiefs-of-staff-charles-brown-dan-caine/).

⁸ *Id.*; see also Department of Defense, *Diversity in U.S., Partner Militaries Is a Strategic Strength* (Sep. 21, 2022) (online at www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3166586/diversity-in-us-partner-militaries-is-a-strategic-strength/); *Diversity as Power*, War Room, U.S. Army War College (May 18, 2017) (online at <https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/articles/diversity-as-power/>).

⁹ *Trump Pentagon Pick Dismissed Military Diversity Drive, Demonized Islam*, Washington Post (Nov. 14, 2024) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2024/11/14/pete-hegseth-women-transgender-islam-trump/).

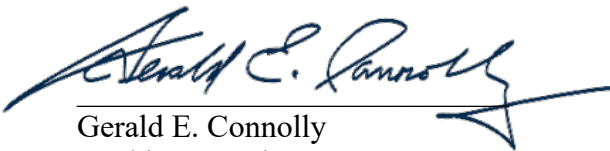
1. All communications and documents in the possession of the Department of Defense regarding the decision to terminate, remove, or reassign (1) the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Charles Q. Brown, Jr.; (2) Admiral Lisa Franchetti; (3) General James Slife; and (4) the judge advocates general for the Army, Navy and Air Force, from January 20, 2025, to the present.
2. All documents and records relating to the career military performance of (1) General Charles Q. Brown, Jr.; (2) Admiral Lisa Franchetti; (3) General James Slife; and (4) the judge advocates general for the Army, Navy and Air Force removed from their positions on February 21, 2025; and (5) Lieutenant General Dan Caine, including, but not limited to, records of military service, evaluations, commendations, and related information.

In addition, we request a briefing from DOD regarding the nature, details, and rationale for these terminations and removals, as well as the career military records of General C.Q. Brown; Admiral Lisa Franchetti; General James Slife; the judge advocates general for the Army, Navy and Air Force; and Lieutenant General Dan Caine no later than **Friday, February 28, 2025**.

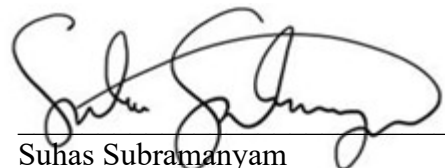
The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X.

If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Committee Democratic staff at (202) 225-5051.

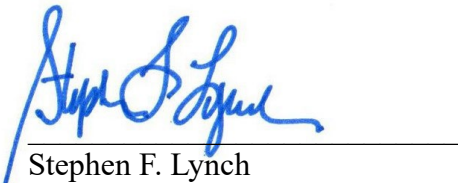
Sincerely,




Gerald E. Connolly
Ranking Member



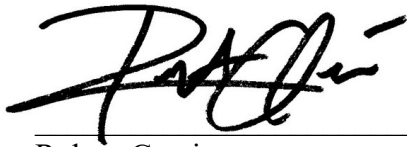
Suhas Subramanyam
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Military and
Foreign Affairs



Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



Kweisi Mfume
Member of Congress

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rob Garcia', positioned above a horizontal line.

Robert Garcia
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Greg Casar', positioned above a horizontal line.

Greg Casar
Member of Congress