



September 22, 2023

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Senate Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Senate Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Leaders Schumer and McConnell,

We are retired admirals and generals and former Service secretaries who have served both Democratic and Republican administrations. Our decades of service in and out of uniform have taught us that our military services and commands require full-time Senate-confirmed leaders to properly function. The now seven-month block on hundreds of military promotions and assignments directly impedes the critical functioning of our armed services. This is true notwithstanding the very limited movement this week on three nominations. We urge you to work together to quickly move all pending military appointments as has been customary.

The hold on military promotions inflicts cascading harms to our national security and will gradually weaken our military's capacity to defend our nation and to meet its global commitments. The holds leave critical leadership vacancies, meaning that for every unfilled position, another servicemember must step in to perform the duties of that office—but only in an acting capacity. That officer is limited in authority and unable to effectively prepare for the future or plan for and respond to today's complex threat environments. Acting officers are also limited by the demands of performing two full-time roles: their permanent positions and that of the vacant office. To perform both at full capacity is impossible. These limitations, amplified hundreds of times at the highest levels across the military, hamstring military readiness.

The ongoing vacancies also harm the morale, retention, and recruitment in our armed services at every level. Those serving in uniform, many in harm's way, see this lack of support from our political leaders as lack of respect for them. They question how our military credibility can command respect from our adversaries when headlines in our own nation communicate lack of respect from our own elected officials. When acting officers are unauthorized to direct long-term strategy or make other critical decisions, all servicemembers are left in limbo, unsure if and when they will change station, retire, or reunite with their families. This instability compounds the retention and recruitment crisis already facing our all-volunteer force. The livelihoods and lives of 1.4 million active-duty servicemembers and their families—Americans who have answered the call to defend our nation—should not be leveraged as a policy bargaining chip.

Each passing day exacerbates the harms unfilled military offices pose to our national security. Should the hold persist through the year's end, the existing backlog of over 300 vacancies will swell to over 650—leaving three-quarters of general and flag officer positions unfilled.

The Senate must fulfill its constitutional obligations and advance the routine appointment of military officers. Our servicemembers, their families, the American public, and our democracy deserve nothing less.

Sincerely,

**Co-chairs, Count Every Hero**

Adm. Steve Abbot, USN (ret.), former Acting Homeland Security Advisor to the President

Adm. Thad Allen, USCG (ret.), 23rd Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard

Secretary Louis Caldera, 17th Secretary of the U.S. Army

Gen. George Casey, USA (ret.), 36th Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army

Gen. Carlton Fulford, USMC (ret.), former Deputy Commander-in-Chief, U.S. European Command

Secretary Debbie Lee James, 23rd Secretary of the U.S. Air Force

Gen. John Jumper, USAF (ret.), 17th Chief of Staff of the U.S. Air Force

Gen. Craig McKinley, USAF (ret.), 26th Chief of the U.S. National Guard Bureau

Secretary Sean O'Keefe, 69th Secretary of the U.S. Navy

Count Every Hero is a nonpartisan initiative of retired admirals and generals and former service secretaries of the U.S. Armed Forces who have served under both Democratic and Republican administrations. Count Every Hero has three primary focus areas: promoting the understanding of the importance of a strong democracy to our national security; promoting civic literacy and civic participation; and protecting the voting rights of our active-duty servicemembers, our veterans, and their families.