



February 21, 2025

Senator Roger Wicker
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services
Russell Senate Building, Room 228
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Wicker and Members of the Committee,

We are members of Count Every Hero, a nonpartisan initiative of former secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force and retired four-star admirals and generals, and we write to express deep concern that Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth is dismissing senior military officers without due cause. Such actions threaten the strength and stability of our Armed Forces.

For 236 years, our military has accepted the principle of civilian control of the military. What may seem like an arcane principle to most Americans, is essential to the healthy civil-military relations that drive effective national security decision-making. Firing officers for following the directives of the previous civilian leadership of the Department of Defense would undermine that principle and place our military leaders in an untenable position—facing retribution for following the lawful orders of their civilian leaders. It is also completely unnecessary. If the Secretary of Defense wants change, he should change the policy, not the people.

The abrupt dismissal of general and flag officers without clear justification will disrupt the chain of command, diminish morale, and exacerbate the challenges facing our military at a time of significant turbulence in the international environment. Effective defense policy requires open, honest communication between senior military and civilian leadership. These unjustified firings will have a chilling effect on our senior military leadership, discouraging them from providing the candid military advice necessary for sound strategic decisions.

Preserving stability in military command is critical to maintaining our nation's security and ensuring our men and women in uniform have the support they need to protect our country. We strongly urge you to ensure that any changes in military leadership are based solely on the needs of the Armed Forces and national security priorities.

Very respectfully,

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 US Coast Guard

Secretary Louis Caldera, 17th Secretary of the Army

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

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.