

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 8, 2023

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1400

General Mark Milley
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
U.S. Department of Defense
9999 Joint Staff Pentagon
Washington, DC 20318-9999

Dear Secretary Austin and Chairman Milley,

On March 31st, 2023, I sent a letter to Secretary Austin and General Milley expressing concern and asking for more details about the “Drag Story Hour” held for children in 2021 at Malmstrom Air Force Base. After receiving a response that failed to answer my questions or address my concerns, I sent a follow-up letter on April 25th to Assistant Secretary Alex Wagner requesting more details. Since then, it has come to my attention that the promotion of drag queens is not merely an egregious error and abuse of taxpayer-funded resources at Malmstrom AFB, but seemingly a policy of the U.S. military broadly.

Several news outlets recently published stories detailing the U.S. Navy’s promotion of “drag queen influencer” Yeoman 2nd Class Joshua Kelley. Since YN2 Kelley announced that he is the Navy’s “Digital Ambassador” six months ago, he has amassed over 1.3 million likes on TikTok. Moreover, YN2 Kelley performed for service officers aboard the USS Reagan on at least one occasion. The U.S. Military’s promotion of drag queens raises several questions:

First: why would the military allow *any personnel* to use a Chinese-owned social media platform, especially for recruitment? It is well known that TikTok has been investigated for stealing Americans’ personal data. It shows a serious lapse in judgment that the Navy would not only allow, but promote a service member who uses the platform by appointing him Digital Ambassador.

Second: how can the military justify using taxpayer resources to promote drag queens? In response to my first letter, I was told that “no taxpayer funds were spent to host or facilitate” the drag story hour at Malmstrom AFB, though it very clearly took place in a taxpayer-funded facility and was promoted on Malmstrom’s Facebook page. Likewise, the Navy says that YN2 Kelley was not compensated for being a digital ambassador, but his performance aboard the USS Reagan clearly came at some cost, whether it was reserving the space, handing out flyers, or sending a notice to sailors. How is it possibly within the interest of the U.S. military to promote drag, especially at the expense of hardworking Americans?

Third: Is there any evidence that promoting drag queens on TikTok is helping the military recruit more qualified candidates? My district staff just returned from a training held by the Army where they were told that the military is struggling to recruit. Last year, the Army missed its active-duty soldier recruiting goal by 25% (sought 60,000 new recruits

but only enlisted 45,000) and the other branches barely met their recruiting goals. This year, the Navy, Air Force, and Army are all set to miss their 2023 recruiting goals. If promoting drag queen digital ambassadors like YN2 Kelley is going to help the military recruit qualified service members I would be curious to see the evidence. However, it seems that as drag queens and progressive gender ideology are promoted the military has only struggled to find highly qualified recruits.

Most importantly, the U.S. military is obligated to answer for itself and to the American people whether it should promote drag queens and progressive gender ideology regardless of the cost to taxpayers or effectiveness in recruiting. Congress established a standing military in its very first session in 1789. Since then, it has become the strongest in the world. The military is meant to train soldiers to defend America from her adversaries—many veterans credit military service with teaching them discipline, strength, and manliness. However, in recent years the military has shirked this obligation, instead teaching service members how to perform effeminate drag. America was certainly not founded on progressive gender ideology and our military should not promote it. While low recruitment numbers concern me, I hope that they will give military leadership the opportunity to seriously consider their purpose and aim. Likewise, I hope that the backlash for abusing taxpayer resources will result in more prudent spending.

I look forward to your response both to this letter and to my letter dated April 25, 2023.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matt M. Rosendale". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Matt Rosendale
Member of Congress

CC:

Alex Wagner
Assistant Secretary of the Air Force
U.S. Department of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1400