

September 8, 2023

Secretary Lloyd J. Austin
Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 22202

Dear Mr.¹ Secretary,

I write regarding the Department's decision to incorporate "gender neutral" language into decoration and award citations. Our military apparently will now use "themselves"—which is not even a word, I hasten to add—instead of "himself" or "herself" to describe heroic or distinguished actions. Here is the absurd model language:

"(Rank) First M. Last, Jr., United States (Military Service), distinguished *themselves* by superior meritorious service in a position of significant responsibility as (position and duty assignment), from (month year) to (month year)."

The previous guidance simply referred to servicemembers as "himself or herself." And, I want to stress, this language isn't referring to unspecified personnel in the abstract or large numbers of troops—it refers to a specific, named person whose "preferred gender" is presumably known.

On a related matter, by the way, the Secretary of the Army apparently disagrees with this gender-neutral approach because she—or should I say "xe" to be safe?—continues to man the ramparts against gender-neutral physical-fitness standards required by last year's defense bill.

The Department's embrace of far-left gender ideology doesn't merely subvert the English language in ways that would astonish George Orwell. Worse, it exemplifies a Pentagon leadership consumed by the fads of the faculty lounge at a time when the Army can't hit its recruiting goals, the Navy can't keep ships out of dry dock, and the Air Force can't find spare parts for planes.

Please answer the following questions no later than 5:00 p.m. on September 15, 2023:

1. Did you personally approve the inclusion of Change 5 in the Manual of Military Decorations and Awards? If not, when did you first learn of the change?
2. Under this updated guidance, may servicemembers request the use of the male or female pronoun on their award citations and at promotion and retirement ceremonies? How will those requests be treated?
3. What other official documentation within DoD requires gender-neutral language, such as the replacement of "himself" and "herself" with "themselves"?

I also would welcome a reply that this whole episode was just a practical joke, or a decision you immediately reversed when it came to your attention.

Sincerely,



Tom Cotton
United States Senator

¹ If I may be so bold as to assume your "preferred gender."