

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 16, 2026

The Honorable Pete Hegseth  
Secretary of Defense  
1300 Defense Pentagon, Room 3E970  
Washington, DC 20301-1300

Dear Secretary Hegseth,

We write to express our strong and unwavering support for the continued editorial independence of *Stars and Stripes*, a publication whose credibility rests on its ability to report freely and impartially on matters affecting the men and women of the United States Armed Forces. We are especially concerned about recent media reports that *Stars and Stripes* job applicants have been asked to explain how they would advance the President's policy priorities, as well as recent comments made by the Pentagon's top public affairs official that the Department plans to "refocus its [the newspaper's] content away from woke distractions that siphon morale."<sup>1</sup> These developments represent a troubling departure from the First Amendment principles that have governed the newspaper since its inception in 1861.

Any diminishing independence of *Stars and Stripes* is a blow to the public's legitimate need for information and disrespectful to our military. The paper's independence is essential to ensuring the American people understand what is happening in our armed forces, and to provide servicemembers with honest, credible reporting rather than filtered or politicized narratives.

Congress has been clear for decades that *Stars and Stripes* must be governed by First Amendment principles and insulated from political influence, regardless of which administration is in power. We urge you to immediately clarify that neither hiring practices nor editorial decisions at *Stars and Stripes* will be conditioned on ideological alignment or policy advocacy, and to reaffirm, publicly and unequivocally, the newspaper's statutory independence.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.stripes.com/theaters/us/2026-01-15/pentagon-refocus-stars-and-stripes-content-20415816.html>

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Angus S. King, Jr.

Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator

Tammy Duckworth

Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator

Elizabeth Warren

Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen

Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator

Tim Kaine

Tim Kaine  
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Mark Kelly

Mark Kelly  
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders

Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator

Ruben Gallego

Ruben Gallego  
United States Senator