



CONGRESSIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS 116TH CONGRESS

December 29, 2020

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Dear Secretary-Designate Austin,

On behalf of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC), we write to congratulate you on your historic nomination to lead the Department of Defense. We are excited to work closely with you as our nation faces an increasingly volatile international climate and works to bring a peaceful and honorable conclusion to multiple ongoing conflicts, all while maintaining and improving the readiness and lethality of America's military amidst a public health crisis and economic crisis. In these difficult times, ensuring that America's military is fully leveraging America's diversity is more crucial than ever. The Department of Defense dramatically impacts the lives of hundreds of thousands of Latino servicemembers and their families, while tasked with defending the freedom, lives, and interests of all Americans.

As our country faces unprecedented challenges, we have the rare opportunity to rebuild our country in a way that meets the needs of minority populations and reflects the image of our diverse American constituency. We are committed to helping you and the department you may lead toward this goal.

Latinos represent the largest and second-fastest growing ethnic group in the nation, making up nearly 20 percent of the U.S. population. However, Latinos remain the most underrepresented minority group in the federal workforce making up just 8 percent of personnel. As you work to assemble your own team at the Department of Defense, we hope the CHC can be a resource so you may develop a department which is representative of the population it serves and the diversity of the American military. It is imperative that Latinos account for about 20 percent of representation across all suites of federal government, including within each department and agency.

This is especially crucial in the Department of Defense. As you know, Latinos have a proud history of service in the armed forces, having fought in every American War since our nation's founding and on to today's wars in Afghanistan and elsewhere. In Latino communities across the country, the military is a respected path to better opportunity and the American Dream. Yet Latino servicemembers have also faced difficult histories of discrimination, both within the military and upon returning home. This difficult history continues to echo today, with recent events such as the tragic murder of U.S. Army soldier Vanessa Guillen reminding us that we have a long way to go to ensuring the needs of Latino communities are served within the military.

Therefore, we urge you to ensure that the lived experiences of Latinos be fairly represented in both uniformed and civilian roles at every level of the Department of Defense. Qualified Latino candidates should be considered for every role in the Department, and we urge you to move quickly to ensure the Department's workforce, at the Pentagon, throughout the nation, and throughout the world, reflects the diversity the American people they serve. We know you understand the importance of diversity and lived experience in decision-making. We also appreciate the unique history that African American servicemembers have experienced and know that you share our commitment to ending systemic racism. We therefore trust you will ensure Latinos are fairly represented at the Department of Defense.

We will continue to relay information we believe will be useful during this critical time. We remain committed to working with the President-Elect, you, and the full transition team to ensure a successful Biden administration.

Sincerely,

Chairman Joaquin Castro
Congressional Hispanic Caucus

Chairman-elect Raul Ruiz
Congressional Hispanic Caucus