



## Nearly 50 Members of Congress Call on Pentagon to End Military Vaccine Mandate

### Description

**USA: Nearly 50 Republican lawmakers, led by Rep. Mike Johnson (R-La.), have called on the Department of Defense (DOD) to withdraw its COVID-19 vaccine mandate for military members, citing concerns over the mandate's impact on the readiness of the U.S. Armed Forces.**

In a letter to Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin dated Sept. 15 ([pdf](#)), lawmakers, including Reps. Chip Roy (R-Texas) and Thomas Massie (R-Ky.), expressed their “grave concerns” over the impact of the mandate, particularly with regard to the U.S. Army.

“As a result of your mandate, eight percent of the Army’s approximately 1 million soldiers face expulsion, Army recruiters cannot meet their FY22 target, and the Army has cut its projected FY23 end strength by 12,000 soldiers,” they wrote.

Referring to Russia’s ongoing invasion of Ukraine, lawmakers noted that the U.S. military currently faces “a self-imposed readiness crisis.”

Citing “sparse” data from the Department of Army, they noted that “at least 40,000 National Guardsmen, 20,000 Army Reservists, and at least 15,000 Active Army Soldiers” have not yet received a COVID-19 shot and subsequently face being discharged from service.

“The Department of Defense’s own Covid response page indicates that approximately 900,000 soldiers are fully vaccinated out of the 1 million soldiers in the Army, Army Reserve, and Army National Guard,” they wrote.

Lawmakers pointed to testimony delivered in July by Vice Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. Joseph L. B. ... stated that “less ... , much less than



Johnson (R-La.) speaks during a hearing of the House Judiciary Committee on Capitol Hill in Washington, on July 14, 2022. (Tasos Katopodis/Getty Images)

## ‘Inquiries Remain Unanswered’

However, lawmakers in their letter to the DOD noted that the Army has not published official data pertaining to the number of unvaccinated service members in months.

“The opaqueness of the Department continues to frustrate Members of Congress attempting to perform oversight of the Executive Branch,” they wrote, noting that their “repeated inquiries remain unanswered.”

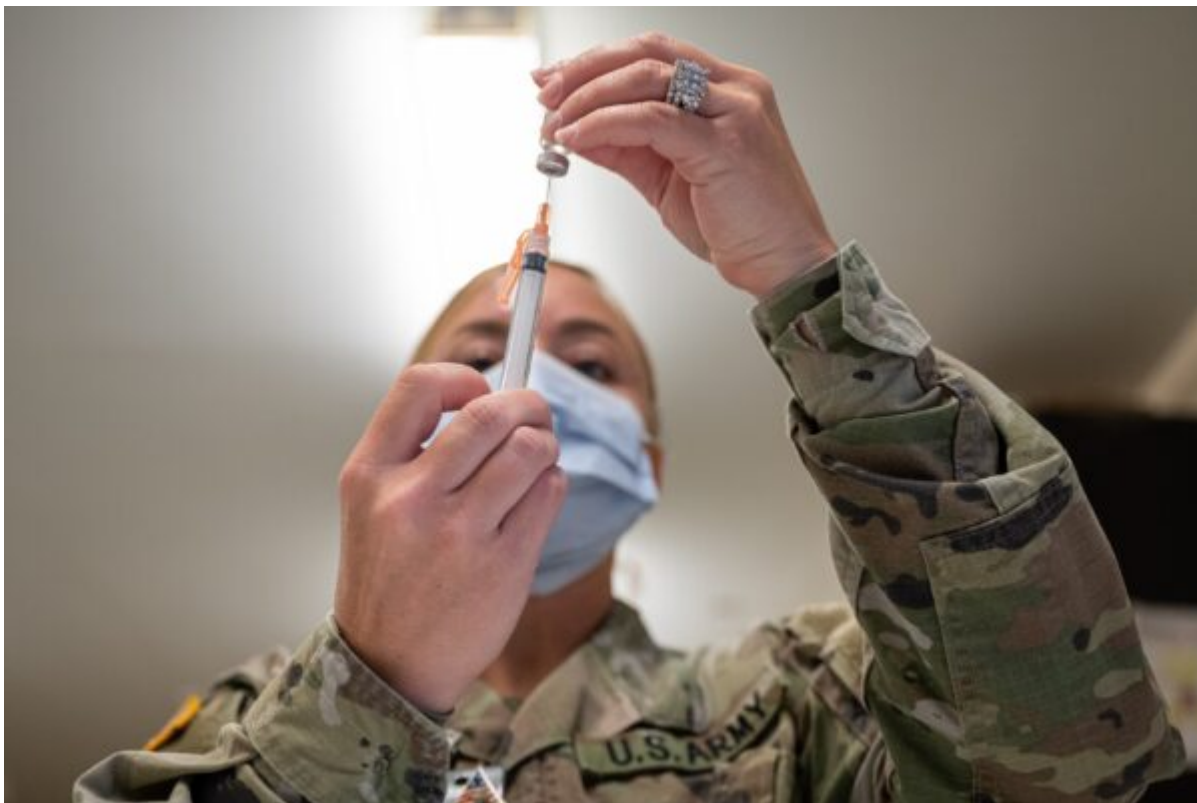
Republicans also pointed to the “thousands of servicemembers” that “have been left in limbo” while they await a formal judgment regarding their medical exemptions to the vaccine.

“Some have waited for nearly a year to learn if they will be forcibly discharged for their sincerely held religious beliefs or medical concerns,” lawmakers wrote.

“Furthermore, according to current Army policy, even those few soldiers who receive permanent exemptions will be treated as second-class soldiers for the rest of their careers—each of them requires approval from the Undersecretary of the Army to travel, change assignments, or even attend training courses away from their home station,” they wrote.

According to U.S Army fragmentary orders [published](#) by Fox News, the Army has barred unvaccinated soldiers from official travel unless they receive the undersecretary’s approval.

“The Department has abused the trust and good faith of loyal servicemembers by handling vaccine exemptions in a sluggish and disingenuous manner,” lawmakers said.



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A military member

prepares a COVID-19 vaccine in Fort Knox, Ky., on Sept. 9, 2021. (Jon Cherry/Getty Images)

## Service Member Shortfall

Citing Army Secretary Christine Wormuth's interview with NBC News earlier this year in which she noted that the Army has only met 52 percent of its recruiting goal for the fiscal year 2022, they asked, "How will it recruit another 75,000 troops beyond its annual target to account for vaccine-related discharges?"

In that same interview, Wormuth said she believes the Army would end up roughly 12,000 to 15,000 recruits short this year.

"The data is now clear. The Department of Defense's Covid vaccine mandate is deleterious to readiness and the military's ability to fight and win wars," lawmakers concluded. "The vaccine provides negligible benefit to the young, fit members of our Armed Forces, and the mandate's imposition is clearly affecting the Department's ability to sustain combat formations and recruit future talent."

"We urge you to immediately revoke your Covid-19 vaccine mandate for all servicemembers, civilian personnel, and contractors and re-instate those who have already been discharged."

As of July 1, 2022, under the Biden administration's vaccine mandate, members of the Army National Guard and U.S. Army Reserve who are not vaccinated and do not have an approved exemption are [unable to participate](#) in federally funded drills and training and will not receive pay or retirement credit.

Biden's COVID-19 vaccine mandate has been in place across the entire military since last year and the White House has defended the move, stating that mass vaccination will help stem the spread of the virus.

by Katabella Roberts

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