



Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-1403

May 4, 2023

The Honorable Lloyd Austin III  
Secretary  
Department of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Austin,

I write to you today over concerns about your testimony to Congress on March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2023, and recent revelations about the Navy Digital Ambassador program.

On March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2023, you testified before the House Armed Services Committee that “drag shows are not something that the Department of Defense supports or funds.” You repeated this claim multiple times. You made this statement after the Navy’s Office of Information initiated a Navy Digital Ambassador Pilot Program in October 2022 and subsequently appointed Yeoman 2nd Class Joshua Kelley to that position. The pilot Digital Ambassador program is part of the Navy’s Community Ambassador (NCA) Program, which was first established in 2021.

On November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022, Yeoman 2nd Class Joshua Kelley posted on social media that the Navy had appointed him to be the “first Navy Digital Ambassador!” On December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022, Kelley responded to a comment on his social media channel which asked, “[D]oes your command know you’re doing this?” with a video dressed in drag at what appears to be an official Navy holiday party. Earlier this week, a Navy spokesperson defended the Navy’s support of Yeoman 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Kelley and said the program was “designed to explore the digital environment to reach a wide range of potential candidates.”


Given your contradictory testimony, I request answers to the following questions by no later than May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023:

- Were you aware of the Navy’s Digital Ambassador program when you testified that “the Department of Defense does not support drag shows?”
- Given his relatively small digital following compared to potential alternatives, why was Yeoman 2nd Class Joshua Kelley appointed the first Navy Digital Ambassador?

- Who was the highest-ranking officer or civilian official to approve the appointment of Navy Digital Ambassadors?
- Do you believe that TikTok videos of sailors dressed in and performing in drag is the best use of the Navy's recruitment efforts?
- Do you believe that TikTok videos of sailors dressed in and performing in drag ultimately increases or decreases the Navy's overall recruitment?
- Do any of our foreign adversaries like China or Russia use similar recruitment techniques that promote drag shows?
- How many man-hours have been dedicated to the Navy Digital Ambassador program since its creation?
- What is the annual budget for the Navy Digital Ambassador program?
- What other service members were appointed Navy Digital Ambassadors?

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Banks". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

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Jim Banks  
Member of Congress