



## **Governor Sanders Condemns Biden's Department of Defense for Infringing on Service Members' Freedom of Religion**

**LITTLE ROCK, Ark.**— Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders sent the following letter to President Joe Biden and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin:

Dear President Biden and Secretary Austin,

As I expect you to be aware, on December 18, 2023, Colonel Dillon R. Patterson, Commander of the 188th Wing, announced his voluntary resignation from command of the 188th Wing of the Arkansas Air National Guard. Col. Patterson has served our country honorably for 22 years and earned numerous awards and decorations. With all Arkansans, I thank Col. Patterson for his dedicated service to our state and nation.

Unfortunately, Col. Patterson was forced to personally choose between either continuing his command or adhering to his sincerely held religious beliefs against abortion. Because he adhered first to his faith instead of overtly political mandates, he voluntarily resigned his command. I admire Col. Patterson for having the confidence of his convictions, but regret that our nation's military will suffer the loss of a dedicated airman, leader, and guardsman as a commander.

On June 24, 2022, the Supreme Court of the United States affirmed that states may protect the lives of unborn children by appropriately regulating the practice of abortion. Arkansas, like many other states, chose to do so—protecting unborn life by prohibiting abortions which are not medical necessities for the sake of the mother.

While half the country made the obvious determination that the killing of helpless, unborn children is contrary to the public interest, Secretary Austin declared that the U.S. Department of Defense (“DoD” or “Defense Department”) would subvert the actions of states like Arkansas by using taxpayer dollars to fund the travel, meals, and lodging associated with out-of-state servicemember travel for procurement of an abortion procedure. Maybe equally as egregious, the DoD now requires that commanding officers—regardless of any sincere and deeply held religious convictions to the contrary—are forced to approve such abortion leave.

Abortion is itself a barbaric practice. But it is apparently not enough for this administration that abortion be available in some states and regulated in others. Thus, the Defense Department must now apparently sacrifice lifelong personnel’s leadership in the name of military readiness—a laughable paradox if it were not so deeply offensive and damaging.

At a time when nearly every military branch has failed to meet recruiting thresholds, it is difficult to imagine a more irresponsible and shortsighted bureaucratic mandate. As relevant here, nationally, the Air National Guard missed its most recent recruiting goals by a shocking 40%.

It is unjustifiable to sacrifice the leadership of a lifetime of service for abortion or any other overtly political issue. Col. Patterson’s only fault was being a man of conviction led by senior Department of Defense leadership who had disregarded his service and abandoned his most fundamental constitutional rights in favor of more fashionable political and social experiments.

Rescind this policy immediately.

Sincerely,

Sarah Huckabee Sanders  
Governor of Arkansas

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