



POLITICS

Trump signs an order to revise the Pentagon's policy on transgender troops

1 of 12 | Pres. Donald Trump signed an executive order ordering the military to assess transgender forces. The order does not impose an immediate ban but directs the Pentagon to come up with a policy on their service in the armed forces

BY [TARA COPP](#) AND [LOLITA C. BALDOR](#)

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WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump signed an executive order directing Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth to revise the Pentagon's policy on transgender troops, likely setting in motion a future ban on their military service.

He also on Monday ordered troops to be reinstated who had left voluntarily or been booted for refusing COVID-19 vaccines, outlined new rollbacks in diversity programs and provided for the deployment of a space-based missile defense shield for the U.S. — all on [Hegseth](#)'s first day.

Trump and Hegseth had described parts of the anticipated orders throughout the day, but the exact language did not drop until late Monday.

Transgender order

A transgender ban had been widely expected, and Trump's order largely sets the stage for a future ban — but directs Hegseth to come up with how that would be implemented in policy.

In his order, Trump claimed that service by troops who identify as a gender other than their biological one "conflicts with a soldier's commitment to an honorable, truthful, and disciplined lifestyle, even in one's personal life" and is harmful to military readiness, requiring a revised policy to address the matter.

Trump had tried to ban transgender troops during his first term, but it was tangled up in the courts for years before being overturned by then-President Joe Biden shortly after he took office.

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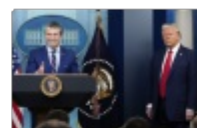
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Two groups, Lambda Legal and Human Rights Campaign, which represented transgender troops the first time, vowed to fight again.

"We have been here before and seven years ago were able to successfully block the earlier administration's effort," Lambda Legal attorney Sasha Buchert said. "Not only is such a move cruel, it compromises the safety and security of our country and is particularly dangerous and wrong. As we promised then, so do we now: we will sue."

Space-based missile defense

During his first presidency, Trump established U.S. Space Command and the U.S. Space Force, which just marked its fifth birthday. Space continues to be a priority for the president, who has now directed the Pentagon to begin to develop the capability to shoot down missiles from space.

For years, the U.S. has cautioned that China, Russia and others were weaponizing space. It has at times declassified information about both countries' efforts to create offensive weapons to disable critical U.S. satellites, including the capability to move satellites from orbit, temporarily blind them or potentially even destroy them.

The Space Force is building a low-orbit ring of redundant satellites that can more quickly track and detect potential missile launches.

But establishing a way to shoot missiles down from space is something the U.S. has not pursued since President Ronald Reagan announced the Strategic Defense Initiative — "Star Wars" as it was commonly known — in the 1980s. The system was never developed due to cost and technological limitations.

In his order called "an Iron Dome for America," Trump called for a multilayer missile defense system capable of countering an array of threats to the U.S., to include development and deployment of space-based interceptors.

COVID-19 vaccination

At least 8,200 troops were forced out of the military in 2021 for refusing to obey a lawful order when they declined to get the vaccine. Notices advising them they could return were sent out in 2023, but just 113 have reenlisted.

The reinstatement process for any who now want to return requires that they meet military entry standards. Trump and Hegseth have persistently stated that the military must not reduce standards.

"We will offer full reinstatement to any service member who was expelled from the armed forces due to the COVID vaccine mandate," Trump told a Republican crowd at the Trump National Doral Miami, a resort he owns. "And we will restore them to their former rank with full pay. "

In addition to troops forced out for refusing the shot, the order extends the same offer to anyone who signs a sworn statement saying they left the service voluntarily to avoid the vaccine.

The order isn't expected to have a major impact on the number of service members returning. But it could take a bite out of the budget if more do now, since it requires back pay.



AP AUDIO: Trump signs an order to revise the Pentagon's policy on transgender troops.

AP correspondent Ed Donahue reports on an order to ban transgender troops.

To return, all would have to meet weight, fitness, medical and other requirements, and they could be refused if they now have a criminal record or other disqualifying factor. Officers would have to get recommissioned, which is a simple appointment process.

According to the services, 3,748 Marines were discharged, and 25 have opted to re-enlist; 1,903 Army soldiers were discharged, and 73 returned; 1,878 sailors were discharged and two returned; 671 airmen were discharged and 13 returned.

The Pentagon [made the COVID-19 vaccine mandatory](#) in August 2021 for all service members, including the National Guard and Reserve. Then-Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said getting the vaccine was critical to maintaining a healthy, ready force that could be prepared to defend the nation.

The Pentagon formally dropped the mandate in January 2023.

Defense officials said then that many troops appeared to use the vaccine mandate as a way to quickly and easily to get out of their service obligations.

DEI initiatives

Trump also, as expected, issued a sweeping order to abolish all programs, initiatives and mentions of diversity, equity and inclusion across the Defense Department and the Coast Guard, which is governed by the Department of Homeland Security.

The order looks to scrub "any vestiges" of such initiatives that seek to "promote a race-based preferences system that subverts meritocracy, perpetuates unconstitutional discrimination, and

promotes divisive concepts or gender ideology."

It prohibits the departments from promoting or following "un-American" theories that suggest that America's founding documents are racist or sexist; that discuss gender ideology; and that promote "divisive concepts" such as "race or sex stereotyping."

The order says the defense and homeland security secretaries must issue guidance to implement the order in 30 days. It calls for a review to find any instances of actions taken in pursuit of DEI, which will be due to the defense secretary in 90 days.

The secretaries must submit a report to the White House in six months outlining their progress.

The Pentagon had already been taking steps to comply with Trump's initial action ending DEI programs across the U.S. government, and it has had far-reaching consequences. Without clearer direction, [agencies were taking a broad approach](#) to removing any content that seemed to run afoul of Trump's ban.

That temporarily included [videos of the storied Tuskegee Airmen](#) and World War II Women's Airforce Service Pilots, or WASPs, which were part of DEI training courses for the Air Force's basic military training. Videos on both the Tuskegee Airmen and WASPs were removed as the courses were taken down last week, causing an uproar.

WASPs were vital in ferrying warplanes for the military. The Tuskegee Airmen were the nation's [first Black military pilots](#), serving in a segregated WWII unit, and their all-Black 332nd Fighter Group had one of the lowest loss records of all the bomber escorts in the war.

On Sunday, the Air Force clarified that the DEI courses had been removed to be edited but that the Tuskegee Airmen and WASP content would continue to be taught.

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