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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

February 8, 2022

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary
Department of Defense

Dear Secretary Austin:

On January 24, 2022, I sent you a letter requesting that you preserve all records referring, relating, or reported to the Defense Medical Epidemiology Database (DMED).¹ To date, the Department of Defense (DoD) has refused to confirm whether it has complied with this record preservation request.

I was disappointed to see that instead of immediately responding to the American people through their elected representative, DoD apparently decided to prioritize a response to *PolitiFact* about allegations relating to the same database. On January 31, 2022, a week after I sent my letter to you, DoD responded to reports about increased diagnoses of medical conditions in DMED in 2021 compared to the previous five years. Specifically, a DoD spokesperson reportedly told *PolitiFact* that the data in DMED “was incorrect for the years 2016-2020.”²

In addition to responding to *PolitiFact* before responding to a U.S. Senator, DoD also made a concerning statement about its current handling of DMED records. DoD’s spokesperson reportedly said that the DMED system is now offline to “identify and correct the root-cause of the data corruption.”³

Let me be clear, any attempt to alter data contained within DMED without preserving all records before and after these changes are made to the database will completely undermine my preservation request and will be considered an active effort to mislead Congress.

¹ Letter from Ron Johnson, Ranking Member, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, to Lloyd Austin, Secretary, U.S. Dep’t of Defense, Jan. 24, 2022. “Records” include any written, recorded, or graphic material of any kind, including letters, memoranda, reports, notes, electronic data (emails, email attachments, and any other electronically-created or stored information), calendar entries, inter-office communications, meeting minutes, phone/voice mail or recordings/records of verbal communications, and drafts (whether or not they resulted in final documents).

² The “Our Sources” section of the *PolitiFact* article noted that the interview with the DoD spokesperson occurred over email on Jan. 31, 2022. Jeff Cercone, *Numbers were based on faulty data, military spokesperson says*, *PolitiFact*, Jan. 31, 2022, <https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2022/jan/31/instagram-posts/numbers-were-based-faulty-data-military-spokespers/>.

³ *Id.*

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I demand you immediately respond to my January 24, 2022 letter by no later than February 10, 2022, and explain what steps you have taken to preserve all records before and after DMED was taken offline referring, relating, and reported to that database. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Ron Johnson
Ranking Member
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations

cc: The Honorable Jon Ossoff
Chairman
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations