


GOP senator unloads on Pentagon's 'obsession' with equity agenda: 'Totem pole of grievances'

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Pentagon

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GOP senators dismissed attempts to downplay how DEI agenda is hurting recruiting efforts

'Woke' Defense Dept. DEI education official's books now in one third of Pentagon schools: gov't watchdog

Adam Andrzejewski, CEO and founder of OpenTheBooks.com, says controversial books co-authored or contributed to by Kelisa Wing – chief equity, diversity and inclusion officer at the Department of Defense Education Activity – are in 49 Pentagon schools.

Sen. Eric Schmitt on Wednesday tore into Pentagon leaders for defending an agenda that stresses issues like diversity and inclusion, which he warned is dividing warfighters and politicizing the world's greatest military force.

"The offspring of identity politics, which is incredibly divisive, has now made its way through DEI trainings in these branches," Schmitt, R-Mo., said at a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, referring to the Pentagon's diversity, equity and inclusion agenda. "It is naive to believe that this is not divisive among recruits or people in the military."

"We have heard from members of the military who have said that they resent being subjected to this," he added. "This totem pole of grievances, this oppressor vs. oppressed."

Schmitt spoke after a handful of military witnesses downplayed complaints about a "woke" agenda at the Pentagon, which Republicans said is contributing to the difficult recruiting environment for all service branches.

"The Department of Defense (DOD) must put at least as much effort into solving the recruiting crisis as it has into other initiatives like extremism, diversity, equity and inclusion and abortion," said Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., the top Republican on the committee. "These initiatives are at best a distraction. At worst, they dissuade young people from enlisting."

WOKE PENTAGON WOULD LOSE CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICER UNDER BILL FROM RUBIO, OTHER GOP SENATORS



Sen. Eric Schmitt, R-Mo., rejected claims from military officials that the Pentagon's DEI agenda is having no effect on recruits or morale. (Tom Williams/CQ-Roll Call Inc. via Getty Images)

Democrats and Biden administration witnesses rejected these GOP assertions and cited other factors, such as record-low unemployment that make it harder to fill the volunteer ranks, rising obesity rates and lower test scores that are lowering the number of qualified recruits, and a general lack of interest among younger Americans in serving.

Committee Chairman Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., cited a Pentagon survey that said only 5% of respondents were worried about "woke" policies in the military.

"Diversity and inclusion strengthen our military," Reed said. "By every measure, America's military is more lethal and ready than it has ever been. It is also more diverse and inclusive than ever before. And this is not a coincidence."

But Schmitt and other Republicans rejected the idea that pursuing a social agenda somehow leads to more lethality and said the stream of social policy dictates and extremism "stand-downs" are dividing service members and destroying the military's capability, not enhancing it.

"This obsession with the equity agenda that you all are defending today with just sort of a word salad is divisive. I don't know what 'develop initiatives that have measurable outcome metrics based on equity' means," Schmitt said. "And by chasing this, it's driving a wedge in the military."

WOKE PENTAGON: 'CLIMATE LITERACY' POLL DISTRIBUTED TO SERVICE MEMBERS, CIVILIAN DEFENSE WORKERS



Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, left, and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Mark Milley have been accused by Republicans of worrying too much about social policies and not enough about recruiting and warfighting. (Alex Wong / Getty Images)

"Can anybody tell me what the metrics are for equity? What is it that we're measuring?" he asked.

"For the Navy and Marine Corps, the ultimate measure of how we are doing is our ability to deter and fight and win wars," Under Secretary of the Navy Erik Raven replied. "And in close consultation with both service leadership of the Navy and Marine Corps, we have heard that developing diverse, capable teams is essential to developing warfighting capability."

Schmitt replied by citing reports from 2022 that Andersen Air Force Base in Guam had released a memo that urged service members not to use "him" and "her" pronouns.

"How does that help us be a better fighting force by not referring to a man as 'him' or 'her' in a memo?" Schmitt asked. "How does that help us? How does that make us a more lethal fighting force?"

Wicker argued at the hearing that the constant drumbeat of DEI and extremism is incorrectly telling Americans that the U.S. military is filled with social cohesion problems, when it is not. And he said this is effectively warning young Americans against signing up.

HERE'S WHAT DOD WANTS TO KNOW ABOUT RACE, DIVERSITY, EXTREMISM IN THE MILITARY: READ THE SURVEY



Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., argued Wednesday that the focus on social issues is sending the message that the military is filled with social cohesion problems, when it isn't. (Anna MoneyMaker / Getty Images)

"They suggest to the American people that the military has a problem with diversity and extremism," Wicker said. "In truth, the military is the greatest civil rights program in the history of the world."

Wicker said the Biden administration's fight against extremism in the ranks was especially troubling as the Pentagon itself later agreed that fewer than 100 service members across all branches exhibited potentially troubling extremist behaviors or had connections to extremist groups. He said the DOD also created a Defense Equity Team that published a "DEIA strategic plan," but Wicker said the military doesn't show nearly as much interest in fixing the recruiting problem.

"I just wonder: Where is the same urgency in the Department of Defense when it comes to the very real recruiting crisis?" he asked. "Where is the recruiting strategic plan?"

"The national media, and unfortunately some in the administration after Jan. 6, started trotting out this narrative that we have all these extremists in the military," added Sen. Dan Sullivan, R-Alaska. "The Washington Post used to write this about once a week. By the way, it was ridiculous."

"Don't you think that that impacts recruiting, that for the last year we've been saying that we have all these 'extremists' in the military?" he asked the witnesses.

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Undersecretary of the Army Gabe Camarillo said he hasn't seen "any evidence" that this message has hurt recruiting. But he and other witnesses agreed that there is no rampant extremism in the military.

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