

## Biden Defense Officials Defend Diversity, Equity, Inclusion in the Military

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*Jacquelyn Martin/AP/Bloomberg via Getty Images*

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Biden Pentagon officials in charge of military personnel policy defended pushing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in the United States military during a House hearing on Thursday, arguing that it would make the military stronger, not more divided. However, they were short on data to back up their arguments.

Gil Cisneros, the undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness, argued, “Diversity, equity and inclusion are essential to unit cohesion and trust.”

The Army's Assistant Secretary for Manpower and Reserve Affairs Agnes Schaefer argued, "A diverse and talented force of trained and cohesive teams is the most important indicator of our readiness."

The Navy's Assistant Secretary for Manpower and Reserve Affairs Franklin Parker argued that diversity would increase "our military readiness and maritime dominance by accessing the full range of our nation's talent."

The Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Manpower and Reserve Affairs Alex Wagner insisted, "Our diversity and inclusion initiatives [are] informed by science and business best practices, congressional mandates, data-focused policy reviews and assessments, and the lived experiences of Airmen and Guardians."



In this Dec. 18, 2019, file photo, Rep. Gil Cisneros (D-CA) speaks as the House of Representatives debate the articles of impeachment against President Donald Trump at the Capitol in Washington. Cisneros is facing a challenge from Young Kim for California's 39th Congressional District. (House Television via AP, File)

Yet, as House Armed Services Subcommittee for Military Personnel Chairman Jim Banks (R-IN) noted, the officials did not provide any data to back up their statements. Banks, who is a Navy reservist, stated at the end of the hearing:

The [Department of Defense] expended 5,359,311 man-hours for [Defense Secretary Lloyd] Austin's extremism stand-down and an additional 529,711 man hours for DEI-specific training ... None of you today have defended with any empirical evidence, any studies at all that defends a single man hour [or] over 6 million man hours of DEI training in the United States military.

"That's why this hearing matters," he added. "What's the justification for that giant investment?"

Wagner, the Air Force official, during his opening statement shared a personal anecdote as a DEI success story.

He said at his prior job, his team was preparing to present a report at a technology festival and to garner interest, decided to give out branded socks. He said they planned give out crew socks until a woman on his team privately pulled him aside and told him that women do not wear crew socks, but instead ankle socks. He said they decided to give out both crew socks and ankle socks and that the ankle socks were a hit.

He argued that this showed the value of DEI in the military. "We need every tool available to defend the nation," he said.

And while each Biden official said emphatically that DEI was a "positive" thing for military recruitment, there was a moment of awkward silence when Rep. Jack Bergman asked why then the military was struggling with recruitment.

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.@RepJackBergman asked civilian officials for the DOD and each service whether DEI is a positive or negative for military recruitment. Each one said "positive" or "very positive."

Bergman asks why the military is underwater with recruiting then.

Awkward silence...

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Bergman then told them he would like to see actual figures to back up their statements to prove that it was not just “posturing.”

Cisneros, who is also the Department of Defense (DOD)’s chief DEI officer, was also short on answers to basic questions asked by Republican lawmakers.

Banks asked Cisneros how much the DOD was spending on DEI initiatives and how many DOD employees were dedicated to DEI. Cisneros said he did not have the figures in front of him and suggested he did not know because he also had another job as the undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness.

House GOP Conference Chair Elise Stefanik (R-NY) slammed the DOD for responding only three hours before the hearing to her query about the former DEI chief for the DOD schools, Kelisa Wing, whom the DOD investigated and reassigned to another position after she was caught denigrating white people in several tweets.

Cisneros apologized to Stefanik for the overdue response but still would not commit to providing her information about what the DOD found in its investigation.

Cisneros also said he had not read Wing’s books on “white privilege,” defunding the police, and the Black Lives Matters movement, and could not say whether or not her books were available in DOD school libraries.

“Well they are,” Stefanik fired back. “I’m informing you [that] you should know the answer that they are available.”

“You seem to not know a lot of what’s happening in the department,” she added. “This is absolutely unacceptable.”

Similarly, Cisneros could not answer basic questions about Wing from Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-FL), despite multiple reports citing a Pentagon spokesperson who said Cisneros’s office would conduct a 30-day investigation into her actions.



Congressman Matt Gaetz attends the 1st day of CPAC (Conservative Political Action Conference) Washington, DC, conference at Gaylord National Harbor Resort & Convention. (Photo by Lev Radin/Pacific Press/LightRocket via Getty Images)

Cisneros inexplicably told Gaetz, “I did not do the investigation,” and that it was a “misstatement” that he was conducting the investigation.

Gaetz tore into the DOD for not firing her and slammed the double standard of Wing still being employed at \$160,000 a year even after racist tweets, while targeting white service members who post about the Second Amendment and being on a “white supremacy snipe hunt.”

“If you just fired racist people then maybe you wouldn’t have to go through this,” Gaetz told Cisneros.

Meanwhile, Democrats on the committee defended DEI in the military.

Rep. Steven Horsford (D-NV) claimed that veterans’ participation in the January 6, 2021, Capitol protests, proved that DEI was needed in the military — despite there not being any clear connection between the protests and racism.

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.@RepHorsford cites a University of Maryland study that said 17% of those charged in connection to January 6 "appeared to have a connection to the military."

Adds: "That is why diversity, equity, and inclusion is important in the military, in the private sector, in non-profits,..."

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Several Democrats also complained about the tone of the hearing and several said they were “embarrassed.”

But House Armed Services Subcommittee for Military Readiness Chairman Mike Waltz (R-FL), a National Guard Green Beret colonel, said if it were not for troops coming to them with complaints about the DEI training, they would not be looking into the matter.

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.@michaelgwaltz says Republican lawmakers wouldn't be talking about DEI in the military if soldiers, cadets, family members, and their networks weren't coming to them upset and concerned. "This isn't coming from us," he says.

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Rep. Cory Mills (R-FL), another veteran on the committee, argued the military was already diverse, and DEI training only divided troops:

I'm a very proud United States Army combat veteran, spent of a lot of my time overseas — happily spent a lot of that in Fort Bragg in the 82nd Airborne Division where I served with a Cambodian gentleman who was born in Cambodia and lived in Los Angeles. I served with a black gentleman who was born in Brooklyn. I served with a Caucasian gentleman who was born in Lombard, Illinois.

There was quite a bit of diversity. We came from different walks of life. But what brought us together was not DEI and critical race theory-based training. It was cohesive training and understanding what it was to have increased lethality and bring us together knowing that we would be there to fight and protect one another.

“Diversity in our military is a good thing, and we can all agreed to that,” he concluded.

“Allocating additional training time and starting to identify and ensure that we drive a wedge as opposed to cohesiveness is not a good thing.”