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U.S. House of Representatives

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BRIAN GARRETT, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

April 4, 2025

The Honorable Gary A. Ashworth  
Acting Secretary of the Air Force  
Department of the Air Force  
1690 Air Force Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20330

Dear Secretary Ashworth,

We write to you with grave concern regarding recent reports that Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth ordered the United States Naval Academy to remove books from circulation in Nimitz Library that advance “gender ideology” or “discriminatory equity ideology” pursuant to the January 29, 2025 Executive Order “*Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling.*” It was also reported that 900 books were identified for potential removal<sup>1</sup> and that 400 books are currently being purged from the Nimitz Library.<sup>2</sup>

If true, this is a blatant attack on the First Amendment and a clear effort to suppress academic freedom and rigor at the United States Naval Academy. Moreover, this reported book ban—or any similar efforts that may be ongoing at the United States Air Force Academy—evinces an alarming return to McCarthy-era censorship.

As Lieutenant General Tony Bauernfeind, Superintendent of the United States Air Force Academy, recently testified before the Senate Armed Services’ Subcommittee on Personnel, the military service academies endeavor to teach future leaders of our diverse armed forces “*how to think, and not what to think.*” To develop the next generation of Air Force and Space Force officers, the United States Air Force Academy must remain committed to intellectual freedom by ensuring the Cadet Wing can access, explore, and express ideas freely without restriction or interference. Any effort to censor books within the United States Air Force Academy’s libraries directly undermines the academy’s mission to develop leaders of character who live honorably, lift others and elevate performance.

Thus, in the interests of congressional oversight and transparency, we request answers to the following questions:

1. Was the United States Air Force Academy directed to initiate a review and removal of books within its libraries? If so, by whom?

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/28/us/politics/naval-academy-diversity-affirmative-action.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/military-academies-dei-hegseth-trump-ba9731f24b4eb4bd9c02b568209f97af>

2. Is the United States Air Force Academy conducting a review of books in its libraries for potential removal?
3. If so:
  - a. What books have been identified for potential removal and how were they identified?
  - b. Have books already been removed from circulation? If so, what books have been or will be removed?

We appreciate your attention to these questions.

Sincerely,



Adam Smith  
Ranking Member  
House Armed Services Committee



Chrissy Houlahan  
Ranking Member  
Military Personnel Subcommittee