

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

September 24, 2020

The Honorable Jim Inhofe
Chairman
Senate Armed Services Committee
205 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Senate Armed Services Committee
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Adam Smith
Chairman
House Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Ranking Member
House Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairmen Inhofe and Smith, Ranking Members Reed and Thornberry, and Conferees:

As you begin conference negotiations on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), we write to urge the preservation of the Chief Management Officer (CMO) position, which Section 901 of the House-passed bill and Section 911 of the Senate-passed bill seek to prematurely terminate. Despite these provisions, the CMO has broad bipartisan and bicameral support.

The CMO position has the vital task of reforming the Department of Defense (DoD) to improve performance and increase accountability, key tenets of the National Defense Strategy (NDS). As Members of Congress we all have a responsibility to the American taxpayers to work to achieve the objectives of the NDS as efficiently as possible, and the CMO position is essential to accomplishing that goal.

In 2018, more than fifteen years after the Government Accountability Office (GAO) initially recommended the establishment of a standalone CMO position, the Fiscal Year 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) finally authorized the creation of a CMO as third-in-command at DoD to ensure that they would have requisite resources to do their job. Congress approved this structure because all previous efforts undertaken by DoD had failed to achieve the transformational business reform necessary to improve readiness and our ability to respond to rapidly developing threats. Alarming, both the House and Senate-passed FY21 NDAA bills would abruptly terminate the CMO position and transfer those responsibilities back to the Deputy Secretary of Defense. We already tried that in 2007. It did not work.

The fundamental problem plaguing the CMO position is a lack of authority and resources. Rather than further eroding the limited authority that currently exists, we should come together to demonstrate the broad, bipartisan support that exists for this important position. Congress should reaffirm our mandate for cost savings from the DoD by requiring the Secretary of Defense to issue an official charter for the position of CMO to codify that position's authority within the hierarchy of the Department. The DoD has already concurred with this recommendation. Let us come together – Democrats and Republicans – to give DoD the resources it needs to get the job done.

Our current CMO, Lisa Hershman, was only confirmed to the position by the Senate on December 19, 2019. The initial 2005 GAO study that recommended the establishment of this position recommended a lengthy tenure of 5-7 years. This period of time would allow the CMO to overcome the learning curve of entering the DoD from the outside, have multiple budget cycles to correct mistakes and make systemic reforms, as well as bridge presidential terms to reduce the influence of politics on the position. Let us at least give Ms. Hershman a fighting chance, and come together to adopt the changes needed to make this position work. The U.S. taxpayers that we represent deserve that.

The retention of the CMO position not only has bipartisan support in both the House and Senate, it is endorsed by outside organizations such as the Heritage Foundation, FreedomWorks, Citizens Against Government Waste, and the Center for American Progress. We commend you on your leadership and commitment to our Servicemembers, and we look forward to working with you to protect and preserve the CMO position within DoD to better support our men and women in uniform and increase our ability to respond effectively to rapidly developing threats.

Warmest Regards,



Joe Manchin III
United States Senator



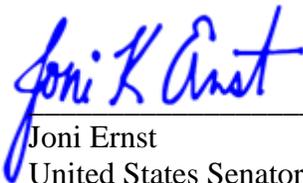
Todd Young
United States Senator



Filemon Vela
Member of Congress



Gary Palmer
Member of Congress



Joni Ernst
United States Senator



Kevin Cramer
United States Senator



Mike Braun
United States Senator



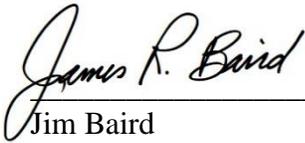
Ted Cruz
United States Senator



Doug Jones
United States Senator



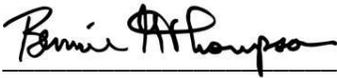
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Jim Baird
Member of Congress



Andy Biggs
Member of Congress



Bennie Thompson
Member of Congress