

DEOMI NEWS LINKS 26 FEBRUARY 2021

HIGHLIGHTS

[House Passes The Equality Act: Here's What It Would Do](#) [Danielle Kurtzleben, *NPR*, 25 February 2021]

The House of Representatives voted on Thursday to pass the [Equality Act](#), a bill that would ban discrimination against people based on sexual orientation and gender identity. It would also substantially expand the areas to which those discrimination protections apply. The bill now goes to the Senate, where its fate is unclear. When House Democrats introduced the bill last week, Biden reiterated his support in a statement: "I urge Congress to swiftly pass this historic legislation," he wrote. "Every person should be treated with dignity and respect, and this bill represents a critical step toward ensuring that America lives up to our foundational values of equality and freedom for all." But it's also controversial—while the Equality Act has broad support among Democrats, many Republicans oppose it, fearing that it would infringe upon religious objections. [SEE ALSO [1](#), [2](#)]

[Pentagon commission on sexual assault to be announced by end of week](#) [Christen McCurdy, *United Press International*, 23 February 2021]

Defense secretary Lloyd Austin will formally announce the formation, makeup and start of military's 90-day commission on sexual assault by the end of the week. Pentagon press secretary John Kirby told reporters at a Monday-afternoon press conference that Austin has already met with Pentagon leaders to give them his feedback on their inputs for addressing sexual assault in the services. He also said Austin will not wait until the end of the commission's 90 days to act on recommendations he feels would be helpful, and that defense officials will consult with congressional leaders as the commission comes together. Earlier this month the [Government Accountability Office released a report](#) saying the Department of Defense needs to issue guidance for tracking reports of sexual assault and harassment, as well as the results of those reports.

[Pentagon wades into political minefield in hunt for extremists](#) [Bryan Bender, *Politico*, 24 February 2021]

The Pentagon is launching an unprecedented campaign to root out extremists in the ranks after dozens of military veterans took part in the Jan. 6 Capitol riot. But confronting White nationalism and other far-right ideologies is proving to be a political minefield for an institution that prides itself on staying out of the nation's partisan wars. There's a growing sense of anxiety within the Pentagon that this push could feed the perception that it is policing political thought, favoring one political party over another, or muzzling free speech. The Pentagon has not yet disclosed all the training materials it is providing commanders, but that hasn't stopped lawmakers and right-wing commentators from accusing the Defense Department of initiating a witch hunt on behalf of the Biden administration to purge political opponents. While there is no evidence to support a politicization of this effort, there are concerns among the top brass and senior retired officers that it could backfire if the Pentagon doesn't clearly define exactly what "extremism" means.

SPECIAL: EXTREMISM

[The Army doesn't know how many extremists it has booted](#) [Kyle Rempfer, *Army Times*, 19 February 2021]

The Army can't say how many soldiers have been kicked out for extremism in recent years, largely because those incidents are filed under the broad category of "misconduct" discharges, according to the service's response to a Freedom of Information Act request. Army officials at the Pentagon did not have data that could shed light on the issue either. "Currently, extremism behavior is not identified by a separate code for discharges," said Army spokesman Lt. Col. Gabriel J. Ramirez. "As we await further DOD guidance on extremism, we are conducting stand downs across the force and exploring options on ways to further combat this corrosive issue. But the number of administrative separation boards that dealt with extremism can't be looked at separately, according to Human Resources Command's FOIA office. "The information being sought is not tracked or broken down as requested. The discharge information would fall under a separation code that is inclusive of all 'Misconduct' discharges," reads the command's response to a FOIA request. "This command does not have a separation code for just extremist activities."

[Extremism in Military a Top Concern for Key Defense Lawmaker](#) [Roxana Tiron and Anthony Capaccio, *Bloomberg*, 22 February 2021]

Mandatory Pentagon reports will give U.S. congressional overseers more insight into the threat and prevalence of extremism in the military after the Capitol attack on Jan. 6, the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee said. Senator Jack Reed, the Rhode Island Democrat who leads the high-profile panel, said he's "concerned" about the potential for extremism in the U.S. military—even if relatively few military members are gravitating toward the fringe. The Capitol assault included active-duty and former service members. The fiscal 2021 defense authorization bill (PL 116-283) mandates an oversight report on extremist activity in the military due on Dec. 1, said Reed. The legislation also created a new deputy inspector general's position to carry out audits, investigations and evaluations of military personnel policies, programs and systems to ensure they address diversity priorities. The new watchdog will also have a role in responding to White supremacist and criminal gang activity by military personnel.

[Extremism in the ranks is a "threat," but the Pentagon's not sure how to address it](#) [Todd South, *Military Times*, 21 February 2021]

The sea of protesters-turned-rioters massing near the Capitol on Jan. 6 carried with them pro-Trump signs, American flags and an array of political banners. Also among the crowd were many emblems of the military community: Some waved Marine Corps flags, many sported military tactical gear, even specific unit patches signifying their time in service. Not all of those who stormed the Capitol that day were military or veterans, but so far, authorities estimate that 1 in 5 of those who've been charged criminally were either currently serving in the military or had once worn the uniform. For decades, domestic extremists have flaunted ties to the U.S. military, seeking to claim the status, credibility and effective tactical training that military service entails. Military leaders note, correctly, that the effort to tackle the problem aggressively is fraught, because the Constitution protects freedom of speech and the law prohibits criminalizing affiliations that may be deemed fundamentally political in nature rather than a threat to harm the

public. But others who study the problem say much more can be done, and the military's ability to enforce standards for good order and discipline gives commanders and senior leaders powerful tools to send a message and remove or punish service members who are identified as a problem.

[Marine veteran, an ex NYPD cop, charged in violent Capitol attack](#) [Larry Neumeister and Tom Hays, *The Associated Press*, 23 February 2021]

A retired New York Police Department officer and former U.S. Marine was deemed a danger to the community and ordered held without bail Tuesday after his arrest on charges that he attacked a police officer during the Capitol attack in early January. Thomas Webster, 54, who runs a landscaping business, will remain jailed after surrendering to the FBI and appearing in White Plains federal court, where Assistant U.S. Attorney Benjamin Gianforti said video footage at the Jan. 6 events showed Webster “clear as day” attacking an officer. Webster’s lawyer, James Monroe, said his client will plead not guilty to charges including assaulting or resisting officers with a dangerous weapon, obstruction of law enforcement during civil disorder, engaging in physical violence in a restricted building or grounds with a deadly or dangerous weapon, among other charges. The prosecutor said Monroe used an aluminum pole that had carried a U.S. Marines Corp flag against an officer on Jan. 6 in an attack captured on multiple video feeds, including bodycam footage from the officer.

[Navy says “liking” or sharing extremists’ posts on social media can get you in trouble](#) [Diana Stancy Correll, *Navy Times*, 22 February 2021]

Sailors engaging with an offensive post regarding White supremacy on social media could themselves be viewed as contributing to extremism in the service, according to Chief of Naval Personnel Vice Adm. John Nowell Jr. “Just by posting, retweeting, or liking an offensive post on social media—you could be participating in extremism,” Nowell said in a [new video shared on Facebook](#). “You may not personally know any shipmates with extremist beliefs,” Nowell said. “But I assure you that those forces of darkness are among us.” The video coincides with the release of a [new naval administrative message](#) that directs commanders and commanding officers to conduct a stand-down, before April 2, to address extremism in the service, in accordance with a directive from the Pentagon issued earlier this month. Commanders and commanding officers will be provided materials including a discussion guide, supplementary slides and other resources to facilitate discussions as part of the stand-down, the NAVADMIN said. Although leaders have the flexibility to customize the training, the stand-down must reaffirm and cover the meaning of the oath of office/enlistment, behaviors that violate the oath, Uniform Code of Military Justice direction on extremist activities, what is acceptable behavior on social media, and the duty to report cases of extremism.

[Navy Will Make All Sailors Reaffirm Oath to the Constitution in Extremism Stand-Down](#) [Gina Harkins, *Military.com*, 22 February 2021]

When the Navy holds its daylong stand-downs to address the extremist ideologies that leaders say have infiltrated the military ranks, sailors across the fleet will be required to reaffirm the oath they took to the U.S. Constitution. All Navy personnel—uniformed and civilian—will have to repeat the oath of enlistment or office and discuss what actions betray that promise during the virtual or in-person learning sessions that must be held by April 6. The stand-downs will focus on

the “damaging effects of extremism” and how to eliminate it, Chief of Naval Personnel Vice Adm. John Nowell wrote in a service-wide message. “As public servants, we took an oath to the Constitution and we will not tolerate those who participate in actions that go against the fundamental principles of the oath we share, particularly actions associated with extremist or dissident ideologies,” Nowell wrote. The Navy is the first military service to reveal what leaders will cover during the military’s upcoming stand-downs.

[Pentagon report reveals disturbing details about White supremacists in the ranks](#) [Ellie Kaufman and Oren Liebermann, CNN, 24 February 2021]

A Pentagon report on extremism obtained by CNN gives disturbing insight into how White supremacists are active in the military and offers recommendations to better identify domestic extremists and prevent them from serving. It details an instance of a former National Guardsman who is a member of a dangerous neo-Nazi group bragging about openly discussing extremist views while serving and separately describes service members describing how they recognize fellow White supremacists by their fascist tattoos and T-shirt logos. While the report, commissioned by Congress and dated October 2020, concluded that extremist views were not widespread and identified “a low number of cases in absolute terms,” it underlines the urgency of the problem because “individuals with extremist affiliations and military experience are a concern to U.S. national security because of their proven ability to execute high-impact events.”

[SecDef Austin to Troops: If You’ve Seen Extremism in the Ranks, Tell Your Commander](#)

[Stephen Losey, Military.com, 23 February 2021]

Troops who have encountered extremism from their fellow service members should share those experiences with their leaders, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in a [video posted Friday](#). In the video, Austin said the military needs troops’ help to stamp out extremism and extremist ideologies, or “views and conduct that run counter to everything that we believe in, and which can actually tear at the fabric of who we are as an institution.” And when troops report examples of extremism in the military, Austin said their leaders need to listen to their stories, as well as any ideas on how to eradicate “the dangerous conduct that this ideology inspires.” Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby told reporters Monday that the video, which is part of the military’s broader effort to crack down on extremist ideologies in the ranks, will be shown to troops, along with other training materials, during stand-downs to address the problem.

[Soldier Indicted for Conspiring With Neo-Nazi Group Seeks Dismissal Because Grand Jury Wasn’t Racially Diverse](#) [Chad Garland, Stars and Stripes, 22 February 2021]

A soldier indicted on federal charges of conspiring with neo-Nazis to ambush his own unit wants his case dismissed because the grand jury didn’t include enough Black and Hispanic members. Pvt. Ethan Melzer’s attorneys say the lack of diversity in the jury pool violated their client’s rights to an impartial jury and due process. But prosecutors say they adhered to the Constitution and federal law. The two sides met Monday with U.S. District Judge Gregory H. Woods over the phone to discuss the case and set deadlines for upcoming motions, pending a decision on the defense motion to dismiss, which was filed in November. Melzer, 22, was arrested last spring in Italy, where he served with the 173rd Airborne Brigade, and pleaded not guilty in September to eight charges, including conspiracy to kill U.S. nationals, and conspiring and attempting to

murder U.S. service members, as well as providing support to terrorists. Prosecutors accused him of using an encrypted app to send sensitive details about his unit's locations, movements and security to members of the extremist groups Order of the Nine Angles, or O9A, and the neo-Nazi "RapeWaffen Division." They say he sought to plot an ambush on his unit during a planned deployment to Turkey.

[USAF Leaders Send Videos, Instructions to Units for Extremism Stand Down](#) [Brian W. Everstine, *Air Force Magazine*, 25 February 2021]

Department of the Air Force leadership has distributed videos and instructions for how local commanders can hold their Defense Department-ordered one-day stand down to focus on extremism, with the goal of small group discussions about core values in service. Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr., speaking to reporters during the Air Force Association's virtual Aerospace Warfare Symposium, said the headquarters sent four videos "to give some situations and allow me to talk about extremism." Commanders will schedule small groups to talk about the dangers of extremism, and how to create "the environment where all your members can reach your full potential," Brown said. While the U.S. Navy reportedly will have its members reaffirm their oath as part of the stand down, Airmen will not be forced to do the same. However, Brown said he wants the discussion to focus on what the oath means and the importance of USAF's core values.

[Why it's so difficult for the military to weed out extremists](#) [Jeff Schogol, *Task & Purpose*, 19 February 2021]

The Pentagon knows it has a problem on its hands, but as its report to Congress makes clear, extremists are hard to track online and have their own obscure subculture that allows them to form invisible bonds. And the current security clearance process has gaping holes that can allow extremists to slip through the cracks. While the problem isn't new, revelations that several rioters involved in the Jan. 6 insurrection on Capitol Hill had military ties has put a spotlight on the Pentagon, which has vowed to finally eliminate extremists from within the ranks. That won't be easy. Recruiters need to get enough people to sign a contract each year so that the military branches can say they have met their enlistment targets. At the same time, they are supposed to look for any signs that potential recruits could have a criminal history or be affiliated with a gang or extremist group. But recruiters are not omniscient and there are plenty of ways potential recruits can hide ties to White supremacist groups like Identity Evropa, Atomwaffen Division, and the Boogaloo movement, according to the report. These days, nearly everyone has a presence online, but that does not make the job of finding extremists any easier for recruiters, the report says. Even if a potential recruit posts racist content on social media, that doesn't mean recruiters are going to see it.

[Why So Many Veterans Find the Path to Extremism](#) [Eric Golnick, *Military.com*, 25 February 2021] [OPINION]

A substantial number of former military members were involved in the Jan. 6 capitol riots and subsequently charged with related crimes; nearly 1 in 5 defendants served in the military, according to an early NPR tally. And Air Force veteran Ashli Babbitt was killed by law enforcement after breaking through a barricade. As someone who currently works to prevent

suicide and address substance use among service members and veterans, I wanted to understand why a disproportionate number of those who took part had military experience. Like many veterans who had issues relating to civilian life, I turned to online veteran communities to chat, commiserate and find camaraderie. Finally, I was part of something again, with people who understood me. My weekends were consumed by drinking, going to events and engaging various veteran groups online. Much of it was harmless enough—some interservice rivalry and dark humor. When things got serious, and someone talked about dealing with Post Traumatic Stress (PTS) or suicide, we all tried to help bring them back from the brink. I felt that these online friendships were a necessary lifeline.

CULTURE

[Army tests fitness benefits of yoga and meditation in basic training](#) [Chad Garland, *Stars and Stripes*, 23 February 2021]

The Army is studying whether the warrior pose could make better warriors after putting hundreds of new recruits through daily yoga and meditation regimens in basic training. The 10-week pilot program was designed to evaluate possible military benefits of the practices rooted in ancient eastern pacifist philosophies, as the service seeks to address declining fitness among military recruits. Soldiers in 20 basic training platoons at Fort Jackson, S.C., practiced yoga and meditation daily to assess their effects on factors like physical performance, mental toughness, soldier discipline, injury rates, stress management and graduation rates. “We realized there’s growing scientific evidence that mindfulness and yoga have positive effects on individual holistic health and fitness,” said Maj. Kimberley Jordan, a doctor of physical therapy and the officer overseeing the program.

[Bust of Black hero of Lewis & Clark trip goes up in Portland](#) [Andrew Selsky, *The Associated Press*, 24 February 2021]

Last year, protesters against racial injustice toppled numerous statues around the country. Now, one of the first works of art to emerge in their place depicts an unsung hero of the Lewis and Clark expedition. A huge bust of York, a Black man who was enslaved by William Clark and who was the first African-American to cross the continent and reach the Pacific Ocean, is sitting atop a pedestal amid a lushly forested park in Portland, Oregon. It was placed there in the dead of night last weekend by persons unknown. People have flocked to the bust, which seems to be at least four feet tall, in Mount Tabor Park. The artist’s depiction of York shows him seemingly deep in thought or even sad, his eyes cast downward. York hadn’t been painted contemporaneously so how his face really looked is unknown.

[Historic marker honors Black cemetery erased during construction of MacDill AFB](#) [Paul Guzzo, *The Tampa Bay Times*, 23 February 2021]

“Everyone in any culture expects that you would be able to come see your loved ones” in a cemetery, Hillsborough Circuit Judge Lisa Campbell said Tuesday on MacDill Air Force Base. “In this case, that didn’t happen and hasn’t happened since 1938, 1939 when the base began to

be built.” The cemetery was erased during MacDill’s construction in those years. The headstones were removed, but the bodies remained under still-undeveloped land that is part of the base near the corner of Interbay Boulevard and Manhattan Avenue. Campbell spoke at a ceremony at MacDill to dedicate a historic marker that marks the spot where Port Tampa Cemetery was located. MacDill’s marker is part an ongoing effort throughout the Tampa Bay area to memorialize Black cemeteries that were erased as historic Black communities were redeveloped during the early- through mid-20th century.

[\[REPRINT\]](#)

[History-Making U-2 Pilot Puts Her Toughness to the Test in CBS Reality Show “Tough as Nails”](#)

[Oriana Pawlyk, *Military.com*, 21 February 2021]

The first and only Black woman to fly the U-2 Dragon Lady reconnaissance aircraft has a starring role in a CBS reality show highlighting “everyday Americans” who use their physical and mental toughness to overcome challenges. The second season of “Tough as Nails,” which began airing Feb. 10, is far from Merryl Tengesdal’s first time testing her grit, though. “I don’t think it’s for everyone,” Tengesdal, who retired as an Air Force colonel in 2017, said in an interview Monday about flying the impressive U-2. “I joke about the community—in a good way—[when I say] that you have to be a little bit not quite right to want to fly this aircraft, because it’s difficult ... You come back from a 10-hour mission. You’re tired. You’re sweaty. So for a lot of people, they’re like, ‘Thanks but no thanks.’”

[Interior Department Applauds UNESCO Designation of Fort Monroe as Slave Route Site of Memory](#) [U.S. Department of the Interior News Service, 19 February 2021]

The Department of the Interior today applauded the designation of Fort Monroe in Virginia as a Site of Memory Associated to the Slave Route by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Located where the first enslaved Africans arrived in English North America in 1619, Fort Monroe is one of approximately 50 sites related to the history of the transatlantic slave trade to receive this designation. “National parks like Fort Monroe weave together the history and legacies of our shared heritage – including painful chapters such as the Atlantic Slave Trade and its legacies,” said Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, Shannon Estenoz. “The UNESCO recognition reinforces our commitment to continuously research, preserve, protect, and interpret the full history of slavery and freedom in the cultural landscape.” The UNESCO designation links Fort Monroe to a global community of historic sites, organizations, and partners committed to civic dialogue and reconciliation.

[A mister no more: Mr. Potato Head goes gender neutral](#) [Joseph Pisani, *The Associated Press*, 25 February 2021]

*Hasbro, the company that’s made the potato-shaped plastic toy for nearly 70 years, is giving the spud a gender neutral new name: Potato Head. The change will appear on boxes this year. Many toymakers have been updating their classic brands in recent years, hoping to relate to today’s kids and reflect more modern families. “It’s a potato,” said Ali Mierzejewski, editor in chief at toy review site *The Toy Insider*. “But kids like to see themselves in the toys they are playing with.” Barbie, for example, has tried to shed its blonde image and now comes in multiple skin tones and body shapes. The Thomas the Tank Engine toy line added more girl characters. And*

American Girl is now selling a boy doll. As part of the rebranding, Hasbro will release a new Potato Head playset this fall that will let kids create their own type of families, including two moms or two dads.

[The Muppet Show: Disney adds content warning over “negative stereotypes”](#) [BBC News, 22 February 2021]

Disney Plus has added a content warning to the beginning of 18 episodes of The Muppet Show, which started streaming on the platform on Friday. “This program includes negative depictions and/or mistreatment of people or cultures,” it reads. “These stereotypes were wrong then and are wrong now.” The disclaimer has been added to each of the episodes for different reasons, including one where Johnny Cash sings in front of the Confederate flag. The Confederacy was the group of southern states that fought to keep slavery during the US Civil War and the flag is seen as a symbol of racism by many. Disney’s disclaimer added: “Rather than remove this content, we want to acknowledge its harmful impact, learn from it and spark conversation to create a more inclusive future together.”

DISCRIMINATION

[At least 36 anti-LGBTQ+ religious freedom measures have been filed this year, many tucked in COVID church bills](#) [Kate Sosin, *The 19th*, 19 February 2021]

At first, advocates wondered if it wasn’t a mistake. South Dakota’s Senate Bill 124 aimed to give churches leeway to operate during the pandemic, but it contained four lines that, in advocates’ generous reading, were vague, too broad, or perhaps just poorly written. In another interpretation, those same lines were a revival of language used to discriminate against LGBTQ+ people. If passed, SB 124 would allow churches to hold indoor services despite COVID-19 restrictions. The bill states that the government would not be able to “substantially burden a person’s exercise of religion” without “compelling government interest.” That language echoed the Religious Freedom and Restoration Act, also known as RFRA, a federal law passed 27 years ago. The law, once intended to protect minority religions and Indigenous people, has since been copied by state legislatures and used to discriminate against LGBTQ+ people and people trying to access reproductive health care, advocates said.

[Covid Vaccine Websites Violate Disability Laws, Create Inequity for the Blind](#) [Lauren Weber and Hannah Recht, *Kaiser Health News*, 25 February 2021]

Many covid vaccination registration and information websites at the federal, state and local levels violate disability rights laws, hindering the ability of blind people to sign up for a potentially lifesaving vaccine, a KHN investigation has found. Across the country, people who use special software to make the web accessible have been unable to sign up for the vaccines or obtain vital information about covid-19 because many government websites lack required accessibility features. At least 7.6 million people in the U.S. over age 16 have a visual disability. WebAIM, a nonprofit web accessibility organization, checked covid vaccine websites gathered by KHN from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. On Jan. 27, it found accessibility issues on nearly all of 94 webpages, which included general vaccine information, lists of vaccine providers and registration forms.

[Department of the Air Force launches second disparity review, focusing on women, Hispanics and other minorities](#) [Kent Miller, *Air Force Times*, 19 February 2021]

The Department of the Air Force Inspector General's Office is launching the second phase of its review of racial, ethnic and gender disparities in the Air Force and Space Force, this time focusing on women, Hispanics, Asians, American Indian/Alaskan natives and Hawaiian and other Pacific islanders. And once again it is looking to airmen and Space Force guardians to provide crucial input on any problems they have experienced or seen. The review follows the department's 2020 Racial Disparity Review, released in December, which focused on Black airmen. "The IG team has already begun to gather information contained in a wide array of previous reports, studies and various databases across the Department of the Air Force," acting Secretary of the Air Force John Roth said in a release. "Although the data is helpful, the most important information will come directly from our Airmen and Guardians.

[\[SEE ALSO\]](#)

[Judge dismisses Georgia lawsuit by transgender fire chief](#) [Russ Bynum, *The Associated Press*, 18 February 2021]

A federal judge has dismissed a discrimination lawsuit by a transgender fire chief who led a rural Georgia city's fire department for more than a decade, then got fired 18 months after first coming to work as a woman. U.S. District Court Judge Tilman E. Self III didn't rule on the merits of Rachel Mosby's discrimination claims. Instead, the judge decided Mosby had no legal standing to sue because of a technical flaw with the initial complaint she filed with the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. City officials in Byron fired Mosby in June 2019, citing poor job performance. She filed suit last April, saying her termination was instead "based on her sex, gender identity, and notions of sex stereotyping." Mosby, who had led Byron's fire department since 2008, said being fired not only cost her wages and financial benefits, but also tarnished her reputation. Mayor Michael Chidester and other Byron city officials denied Mosby was fired because of her transition.

[Native American nominee's grilling raises questions on bias](#) [Felicia Fonseca and Matthew Brown, *The Associated Press*, 26 February 2021]

When Wyoming U.S. Sen. John Barrasso snapped at Deb Haaland during her confirmation hearing, many in Indian Country were incensed. The exchange, coupled with descriptions of the Interior secretary nominee as "radical"—by other White, male Republicans—left some feeling Haaland is being treated differently because she is a Native American woman. "If it was any other person, they would not be subjected to being held accountable for their ethnicity," said Cheryl Andrews-Maltais, chairwoman of the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head Aquinnah in Massachusetts. At Wednesday's hearing, Barrasso wanted assurance that Haaland would follow the law when it comes to imperiled species. Before the congresswoman finished her response, Barrasso shouted, "I'm talking about the law!" Among Haaland supporters across the nation who tuned in virtually, it was infuriating. "It was horrible. It was disrespectful," said Rebecca Ortega of Santa Clara Pueblo in Haaland's home state of New Mexico. "I just feel like if it would have been a White man or a White woman, he would never have yelled like that."

[Oversight Agency Reaches 5 Settlements With Federal Employees for Hatch Act Violations](#)

[Courtney Bubl , GovExec, 23 February 2021]

The independent agency that oversees civil service law announced on Monday it reached settlements with five federal employees who violated the Hatch Act. The Office of Special Counsel said the violations occurred with employees at the Veterans Affairs Department, Federal Aviation Administration and Agriculture Department, from summer 2018 to October 2020. The Hatch Act limits the political activity of government employees while on the job. In each of the situations the employees admitted to violating the act. “At OSC, we take the Hatch Act seriously and expect federal employees to understand their obligations under the law,” said Special Counsel Henry Kerner in a statement to Government Executive. “Federal employees can reach out to OSC’s Hatch Act Unit at any time for advice about how they can stay in compliance.”

[Rachel Levine faces transphobia in historic U.S. Senate confirmation hearing](#) [Candy Woodall, USA TODAY, 25 February 2021]

Pennsylvania prepared Dr. Rachel Levine for this moment. Not the moment when she would have to offer her medical expertise as former state health secretary and professor of pediatrics and psychiatry at Penn State University. It was the moment when she faced transphobia from a Republican lawmaker. Levine is on track to become the first out transgender federal official to be confirmed by the U.S. Senate after being chosen last month by President Joe Biden to serve as the assistant secretary of health in his administration. But Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., didn’t ask about her years of experience as Pennsylvania’s top health official who oversaw an opioid epidemic and coronavirus pandemic—two public health crises that continue to grip the nation. Instead, he questioned her support of gender reassignment surgery and hormone therapy for minors, comparing transgender medicine to “genital mutilation.”

[Why We Need to Focus on Pay Equity in Government](#) [Howard Risher, GovExec, 22 February 2021] [COMMENTARY]

Support for equity and the elimination of bias or discrimination is virtually universal, especially in the public sector. But it's also clear the debate remains an issue in every sector including the federal government. Last year the Government Accountability Office reported that men and women now have, on average, the same years of federal experience, but women are still paid less. For women, it started as the demand for “comparable worth” in the 1970s when the focus was on the difference in pay for “men’s jobs” and “women’s jobs.” It was then that the courts confirmed that male and female jobs requiring “equal skill, effort, and responsibility, and which are performed under similar working conditions” have to be paid the same. The Black-White pay gap actually widened over the four decades by roughly 10% for both Black men and Black women. The ratio for Black men fell from 80% to 70%; for women the decline was from 95% to 82%. The change in the Black-White ratio highlights an important issue—the lack of meaningful data. The Bureau of Labor Statistics refers to the puzzling trend as “unexplainable.” Simple ratios can be damning but tell us little.

DIVERSITY

[Biden administration suggests it will add “X” gender markers to federal documents](#) [Kate Sosin, *The 19th*, 19 February 2021]

After years of lobbying and lawsuits, nonbinary and intersex people may finally be getting passports that reflect who they are: LGBTQ+ advocates have been in talks with the Biden administration about executive action to add “X” gender markers to all federal documents, including passports and social security cards, according to the ACLU. The White House declined to offer a timeline for the rollout or comment on how the policy might be implemented. But Matt Hill, a spokesperson at the White House, said President Joe Biden remains committed to issuing nonbinary IDs, a promise he made during his campaign. “President Biden remains committed to advancing state and federal efforts that allow transgender and non-binary Americans to update their identification documents to accurately reflect their gender identity, especially as transgender and non-binary people continue to face harassment or are denied access to services because their identifications documents don’t affirm their identity,” Hill said in a statement to The 19th.

[Biden’s Cabinet of Many Women Shows Other World Leaders that U.S. Takes Gender Equality Seriously](#) [John Scherperreel, Melinda Adams and Suraj Jacob, *The Conversation*, 22 February 2021]

President Joe Biden’s Cabinet is the most diverse in U.S. history. It has five women, including the first female treasury secretary, Janet Yellen, and Deb Haaland, who will become the first Native American Cabinet member if confirmed as interior secretary. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg is the first openly gay man to win Senate confirmation and lead a Cabinet department. Four of Biden’s 15 Cabinet nominees identify as Latino or Black. They also span generations, ranging in age from 39 to 74. Getting more women into government leadership has merits beyond the obvious value of gender equality. Countries with more women’s political representation tend to experience less civil conflict, international war and gender-based violence.

[EXCLUSIVE: New research underway to revolutionise support for \[UK\] LGBT+ veterans](#) [Kris Jepson, *ITV News*, (Tyne Tees, UK), 23 February 2021]

Northumbria University has joined forces with the charity, [Fighting with Pride](#), to carry out the first ever research into the health and social needs of LGBT+ veterans. It will particularly focus on those veterans who were discharged from the military under a ban, which was only lifted 21 years ago, to assess the impacts it had on their lives. Under the ban, anyone found to be gay, lesbian, bi-sexual or transgender would be discharged from the Army, Royal Air Force or Royal Navy, lose their pensions and have their service medals confiscated. Some even faced being criminalised. It is hoped this new research will not only establish data on where the main support areas need transforming, but could also provide a “body of evidence”, potentially supporting [Fighting with Pride](#)’s calls for reparations for thousands of LGBT+ veterans. So far the government has compensated 157 veterans.

[How an early promotion kept a young Black Marine on the path to become a general](#) John Vandiver, *Stars and Stripes*, 26 February 2021]

When Maj. Gen. Michael Langley was up and coming in the 1980s, corporate recruiters had their eyes on the young Black Marine lieutenant. The lure of a well-paid management job in the private

sector competed with dreams of a longer career with the Corps, Langley recalled. But then the commander of the 10th Marine Regiment made an offer he couldn't refuse: battery commander, a position normally reserved for captains. "A lieutenant taking a battery here in 10th Marines, the largest artillery regiment in the free world, this hasn't happened since Vietnam," the colonel told Langley. "That was a defining moment in my career. I could tell corporate to shove it." Langley, who assumed command of U.S. Marine Corps Forces Europe and Africa in November after his predecessor was removed amid allegations of using a racial slur for African Americans in front of troops, said the decision to stick with the Corps was based on trust won that day more than 30 years ago.

[How USAF and the Space Force Can Move Forward on Diversity and Inclusion](#) [Jennifer-Leigh Ophory, *Air Force Magazine*, 24 February 2021]

The Department of the Air Force's new Office of Diversity and Inclusion is using the findings of the Air Force Inspector General's 2020 Independent Racial Disparity Review and the framework the office used during its time as a task force to mold its future efforts, the office's boss and Acting Senior Advisor on Diversity and Inclusion Tawanda R. Rooney said at the Air Force Association's 2021 virtual Aerospace Warfare Symposium. Rooney said D&I is crucial for the department to maintain "innovative and technological" superiority over its adversaries in today's "increasingly ... complex global security environment." "We have to be able to attract talent from our communities, compete for those skills, and provide professionals that are committed to our nation," she said. The Department of the Air Force announced after the vAWS panel was recorded that it is undertaking a [second disparity review](#)—this time, focused on additional races, as well as ethnicity and gender.

["I'm still here": Transgender troops begin new era of open military service](#) [Devin Dwyer, *ABC News*, 23 February 2021]

For years under Trump's policy, imposed abruptly by tweet, openly transgender service members were sidelined, effectively forced from the ranks or denied enlistment. Late last month, President Joe Biden lifted the ban. "The biggest myth is that we're something other than an ordinary sailor who is just here to do a job," said Navy Chief Petty Officer Melody Stachour of Virginia. "Trans people in the military are here to do a job. They want to do it well." The Pentagon had maintained that trans Americans could serve the country but only if they suppressed their identity, assuming the gender role of their assigned sex at birth. Biden's reversal, which was widely expected, begins a new era of open military service for Americans regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation. "If you're fit and you're qualified to serve, and you can maintain the standards, you should be allowed to serve," said new Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin in announcing the change. But many trans service members and their allies are wondering whether and how quickly tolerance will take hold throughout the ranks—and whether the official policy of inclusion will be permanent.

[Longtime NYC educator Meisha Ross Porter to be first Black woman leading nation's largest public school district](#) [Ryan W. Miller, *USA TODAY*, 26 February 2021]

Richard Carranza, the current New York City's Schools Chancellor announced his resignation Friday and said Meisha Ross Porter will be taking the role. Porter will be will become the first

Black woman to lead the nation's largest school district. "This is the great privilege of my life at this moment," Porter said in a press conference. Porter, who has been a teacher, assistant principal, principal and school founder, is currently the Bronx Executive Superintendent and the daughter of a teacher growing up in Queens.

[More Americans are identifying as LGBTQ than ever before, poll finds](#) [Maria Morava and Scottie Andrew, CNN, 24 February 2021]

A [new poll](#) shows that an unprecedented number of U.S. adults identify as LGBTQ—and that young people, especially Generation Z, are driving the increase. Gallup reported a jump from 4.5% to 5.6% of Americans who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer since its last poll in 2017. The finding proves a steady rise in LGBTQ identification since the analytics company began tracking in 2012, and constitutes, based on the U.S. Census Bureau's most recent population count, nearly 18 million Americans. Alphonso David, president of the Human Rights Campaign, told CNN that the data confirms what advocates have long suspected: There are more LGBTQ people in the U.S. than statistics reflect. "We've always had LGBTQ people in this country," he said. "The question is whether they identify as LGBTQ—meaning the label itself—and whether they're comfortable publicly identifying."

[Nearly 1,000 girls become first female Eagle Scouts](#) [Nora O'Donnell, CBS News, 23 February 2021]

Becoming an Eagle Scout is a rare honor. But they don't just give it out—a Scout has to earn it. Two years after girls were first allowed into the Boy Scouts, almost 1,000 of them rose to the top rank of Eagle Scout. CBS News spoke with some of the first young women who can call themselves Eagle Scouts. "I don't think any of us really thought this day would come," said Kendall Jackson. "For me to be a part of that first class and say that I did it, I'm really proud of myself." Only 6% of Scouts ever make it to the top. It takes at least 21 merit badges, a large service project and a commitment to leadership. Some of the girls were set on proving that they were just as capable of doing everything that boys could accomplish. "As a girl, when I stepped up to leadership positions I was often called bossy, which is a terrible thing to tell any young girl who is stepping up and trying to help out a group. Scouting taught me how to be a great leader," Isabella Tunney said.

[This new program aims to make it easier for Marines to be moms and warriors](#) [Philip Athey, Marine Corps Times, 23 February 2021]

The 1st Marine Logistics Group has launched a new program that hopes to make it easier for a Marine to be both a mom and a warrior. The new [Artemis program](#) will allow Marines on Camp Pendleton, California, where the Marine logistics group is located, to join Artemis groups and work with an Artemis mentor, with the specific goal of making it easier for pregnant and postpartum Marines to receive base resources and know they are not alone. "Over the past year we have recognized that there were a lot of great programs to help with our pregnant and postpartum Marines," Brig. Gen. Roberta Shea told Marine Corps Times in a phone interview. "We thought there's probably a need for a rallying point where Marines and their leader could in a more centralized place, get information about these programs that were available, get support

from one another and see how we could help these Marines sustain their readiness during their pregnancy,” she added.

HUMAN RELATIONS

[Four Causes of “Zoom Fatigue” and What You Can Do About It](#) [Stanford University, *Route Fifty*, 25 February 2021]

*A new study looks at the psychological consequences of spending hours per day on these platforms. In the [first peer-reviewed article](#) that systematically deconstructs Zoom fatigue from a psychological perspective, Jeremy Bailenson, communications professor and founding director of the Virtual Human Interaction Lab (VHIL) at Stanford University, took the medium apart and assessed Zoom on its individual technical aspects. The paper appears in *Technology, Mind and Behavior*. The research identifies four consequences of prolonged video chats that Bailenson says contribute to the feeling commonly known as “Zoom fatigue.”*

[How do you mend a broken heart? It usually fixes itself](#) [Military Health System Communications Office, 23 February 2021]

After Americans recently celebrated a COVID-19 version of Valentine’s Day, with its accompanying isolation, video dating, and physical distancing, it’s no wonder that the subject and the science of Broken Heart Syndrome is receiving renewed attention. From a military readiness perspective, love and matters of the heart may seem trivial. But heart healthiness is not just about solid nutrition and enough exercise. It also goes to the Total Force Fitness (TFF) domains of spiritual, social, and ideological fitness—that is, the beliefs and practices that strengthen one’s connectedness with sources of hope, meaning, purpose, and even love. The heart is not just a powerful red symbol of our inner selves. Our emotions connect directly to our entire health, head to heel. Haigney remembers the first case of Broken Heart Syndrome that he ever saw, sometime in the late 1990s. It was a woman in her 40s getting a breast biopsy, when suddenly her blood pressure dropped, and the anesthesiologist had to give her a large dose of adrenaline. Her electrocardiogram (EKG) had changed drastically.

MISCELLANEOUS

[Biden Rescinds Memo Granting Defense Secretary Authority to Ban Unions](#) [Erich Wagner, *GovExec*, 25 February 2021]

*President Biden on Wednesday evening rescinded one of former President Trump’s more controversial, albeit unimplemented, workforce initiatives, stripping Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin of the authority to strip Pentagon employees of the right to unionize. Last year, in a memo first reported by *Government Executive*, Trump delegated his authority to exempt certain national security jobs from federal labor law to the secretary of defense, citing the need for “flexibility.” The decision drew immediate and bipartisan outcry from federal employee unions and members of Congress, particularly since it appeared to follow through on a proposal from former presidential advisor James Sherk to sign an executive order “eliminating employee unions at the Defense Department on the basis of national security.”*

[Bloody Sunday memorial to honor late civil rights giants](#) [*The Associated Press*, 22 February 2021]

Rev. Joseph Lowery, C.T. Vivian, attorney Bruce Boynton and Lewis will be honored during the 56th annual commemoration of Bloody Sunday, the day in 1965 that civil rights marchers were brutally beaten on Selma's Edmund Pettus Bridge. The four will be honored during the Martin & Coretta King Unity Breakfast on March 7 in Selma. The breakfast will be held as a drive-in, and people will remain in their cars during the breakfast while speakers will address the crowd from a stage. Footage of the Bloody Sunday beatings helped galvanize support for passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. This year's commemoration comes as some states seek to roll back expanded early and mail-in voting access and efforts have been unsuccessful to restore a key section of the Voting Rights Act that required states with a history of discrimination to get federal approval for any changes to voting procedures.

[The U.S. deported a 95-year-old former Nazi concentration camp guard](#) [Dakin Andone, *CNN*, 20 February 2021]

A Tennessee resident who was a guard at a Nazi concentration camp during World War II has been deported to Germany, the U.S. Justice Department said in a statement Friday. Friedrich Karl Berger, a 95-year-old German citizen, was ordered removed from the U.S. in February 2020, when a U.S. immigration judge determined his "willing service" as a guard of concentration camp prisoners "constituted assistance in Nazi-sponsored persecution," the Justice Department said. Berger was eligible for removal from the U.S. under the [Holtzman Amendment](#), which prohibits anyone who participated in Nazi persecution from living in the U.S. The Board of Immigration Appeals upheld the ruling in November 2020. The Justice Department said Berger was the 70th Nazi persecutor removed from the United States.

MISCONDUCT

[Navy Officer Who Lived with Prostitutes in Bahrain Has Sentence Partly Overturned by Appeals Court](#) [Hope Hodge Seck, *Military.com*, 24 February 2021]

A Navy lieutenant commander who was convicted in connection with a Bahrain-based sex-trafficking ring in 2019 was given an unduly heavy sentence, the military's top appeals court decided this month. Lt. Cmdr. Joseph Nelson, formerly a Reserve officer at Naval Operational Support Center in New York, had been found guilty of unauthorized absence terminated by apprehension; conduct unbecoming an officer; and patronizing prostitutes. The only officer to be charged among at least nine sailors accused of sex crimes and human trafficking during a 2017-2018 deployment to Bahrain, Nelson was sentenced to forfeiture of \$7,596 pay per month for four months and dismissal from the Navy. But an opinion from the Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces, or CAAF, published Feb. 8, found that Nelson was wrongly convicted and sentenced on one charge: conduct unbecoming. The document also provides new details in the bizarre and dramatic case.

RACISM

[Attacks on Asian Americans during pandemic renew criticism that U.S. undercounts hate crimes](#)

[David Nakamura, *The Washington Post*, 22 February 2021]

A spate of high-profile assaults on Asian Americans has renewed long-standing criticism from Democrats and civil rights groups that the U.S. government is vastly undercounting hate crimes, a problem that they say has grown more acute amid rising White nationalism and deepening racial strife. The attacks—including several in Northern California over the past month that attracted national attention—followed months of warnings from advocates that anti-China rhetoric from former president Donald Trump over the coronavirus pandemic was contributing to a surge in anti-Asian slurs and violence. Although President Biden last month signed an executive action banning the federal government from employing the sort of “inflammatory and xenophobic” language Trump used to describe the virus—such as “China plague” and “kung flu”—Asian American leaders said the recent attacks demonstrate a need for greater urgency in dealing with such threats.

[Calls to Military Law Enforcement Reveal Racial Disparities, Army General Says](#) [Matthew Cox, *Military.com*, 26 February 2021]

Army Maj. Gen. Donna Martin is trying to figure out why military police respond more to alleged criminal offenses involving people of color. As the Provost Marshal General of the Army and head of Criminal Investigation Command, Martin is conducting an assessment of how the service investigates and adjudicates military justice under [Project Inclusion](#), a sweeping effort to promote diversity in the force. The data collected in the assessment shows “a little bit of disparity as we respond to crime on our installations,” Martin told reporters Thursday, describing the effort as looking at everything from initial law enforcement response to final adjudication. Martin’s command has sent out an anonymous survey to military communities on installations asking “very specific questions about how they feel about the safety on the installation, and it also very candidly asks them if they believe ... people of color commit more crimes than non-minority people,” she said.

[One Of LAPD’s 1st Black Officers Reinstated More Than 120 Years After His Firing](#) [Braktkon Booker, *NPR*, 24 February 2021]

*Seeking to correct an injustice from more than a century ago, the Los Angeles Police Commission voted to posthumously reinstate and honor one of LAPD’s first Black police officers. Robert Stewart spent 11 years on the force before he was unjustly fired, the commission said. Fred Booker, a special assistant to LAPD Chief Michel Moore, said Stewart was born into slavery in Kentucky in 1850 and eventually came to Los Angeles where he was one of two Black officers to join the department in 1889, according the Los Angeles Times. The police department hired both Stewart and another Black officer, Joseph Henry Green, the same year, as there was pressure to diversify their ranks, *Spectrum News* reported. Both officers were relegated to custodial duties, such as cleaning the station. They were also assigned to direct traffic. During his career, “almost any story that mentioned Stewart, even when it praised him, had some racist dig,” Los Angeles historian Mike Davison told *Spectrum*.*

[Shea: Racism a “stain on law enforcement’s history”](#) [*The Associated Press*, 24 February 2021]

New York Police Department Commissioner Dermot Shea on Tuesday acknowledged the NYPD's "historical role at times in the mistreatment of communities of color." Speaking at an event with the Greater Harlem Chamber of Commerce, Shea said he was sorry for that history. He called for "a hard, honest moment of truth" that recognized the role law enforcement had played in the country's racial history, from going after runaway slaves to enforcing laws on segregation. He said the NYPD was committed to "just, transparent, accountable policing."

[She sued her enslaver for reparations and won. Her descendants never knew.](#) [Sydney Trent, *The Washington Post*, 24 February 2021]

Years would pass before David Blackman would learn about the indomitable woman who would turn out to be his great-great-grandmother. After the Civil War, Henrietta Wood sued for reparations for her enslavement, becoming the recipient of the largest sum known to have been awarded by the U.S. courts as restitution for slavery. Her case has fresh resonance in 2021, as Congress debates forming a commission to examine the nation's support for slavery, and the brutal racial oppression that followed, and propose reparations for its enduring consequences. In 1870, Wood's reparations lawsuit was "about more than Wood alone," wrote Rice University professor W. Caleb McDaniel in his Pulitzer Prize-winning book about the case, "Sweet Taste of Liberty: A True Story of Slavery and Restitution." "It was about what former slaves were owed ... as well about the real differences restitution could make."

RELIGION

[Southern Baptists oust 2 churches over LGBTQ inclusion](#) [David Crary, *The Associated Press*, 24 February 2021]

*The Southern Baptist Convention's executive committee voted Tuesday to oust four of its churches, two over policies deemed to be too inclusive of LGBTQ people and two more for employing pastors convicted of sex offenses. The actions were announced at a meeting marked by warnings from two top leaders that the SBC, the largest Protestant denomination in the United States, was damaging itself with divisions over several critical issues including race. "We should mourn when closet racists and neo-Confederates feel more at home in our churches than do many of our people of color," said the SBC's president, J.D. Greear, in his opening speech. The two churches expelled for LGBTQ inclusion were St. Matthews Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky, and Towne View Baptist Church, in Kennesaw, Georgia. Towne View's pastor, the Rev. Jim Conrad, told *The Associated Press* last week that he would not appeal the ouster and plans to affiliate his church, at least temporarily, with The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, which lets churches set their own LGBTQ policies. Towne View began admitting LGBTQ worshippers as members in October 2019 after a same-sex couple with three adopted children asked Conrad if they could attend, a decision he defends as the right thing to do.*

[\[SEE ALSO\]](#)

SEXISM

[Pioneering Female Ranger School Grad: Lowering Fitness Standards for Women Is a Bad Idea](#) [Stephen Losey, *Military.com*, 25 February 2021]

The Army's first female infantry officer is urging the service not to revert to separate fitness standards for men and women. In an [essay](#) [With Equal Opportunity Come Equal Responsibility: Lowering Fitness Standards to Accommodate Women Will Hurt the Army-And Women] posted online Thursday by West Point's Modern War Institute, Capt. Kristen Griest said that evaluating women based on lower fitness standards would not only hurt the effectiveness of combat arms units, it also would hurt women in the Army. Griest's thoughts on the hotly debated issue of physical fitness standards for women in combat jobs are particularly notable due to her trailblazing status. A West Point graduate, she became one of the first three women to earn the coveted Ranger tab in 2015.

[Yes, There Is a "Pink Tax" on Women's Military Uniforms, Report Finds](#) [Hope Hodge Seck, *Military.com*, 25 February 2021]

A new congressionally ordered report into the out-of-pocket costs incurred by service members for uniform items confirms the long-held suspicion of many female troops that they're paying more than their male counterparts -- and shows that sometimes the difference is dramatic. The [52-page report](#), released Thursday by the Government Accountability Office, outlines the realities of what some have called the "pink tax:" the higher cost of female uniform items, often not fully covered by clothing allowances. The report finds, among other things, that the costs of essentials not included in the allowance calculations are significantly higher for women than men in every service; that female officers have been disproportionately burdened by numerous uniform changes over the past decades requiring the purchase of new items; and that out-of-pocket uniform costs for enlisted women can add up to \$8,000 or more over a career, while some men report pocketing allowance overages.

SEXUAL ASSAULT/HARASSMENT

[The Army's sexual assault prevention program is broken. These soldiers have ideas on how to fix it](#) [Haley Britzky, *Task & Purpose*, 22 February 2021]

The Army is finally doing what it perhaps should have done all along to prevent sexual assault and harassment: Asking soldiers for their ideas about what will actually work. As a part of the next installment of the 18th Airborne Corps' Innovation Challenge, a "Shark Tank"-esque competition that solicits ideas from the force on how to improve the Army, soldiers presented their ideas to revamp the Army's Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP) program. Among the pitches heard on Monday: using virtual reality, recruiting top film schools to help improve training, and—get this—actually holding leaders accountable. And fixes for the program can't come soon enough. As former Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy detailed in a blunt assessment of the program in November, SHARP "hasn't achieved its mandate" to eliminate sex crimes and the Army had "significant work to do to regain our soldiers' trust" in the program. There were more than 3,200 reports of sexual assault for the Army in 2019, a 2 percent increase from 2018.

[Defense secretary promises to take steps against sexual assault in military.](#) [Missy Ryan and Dan Lamothe, *The Washington Post*, 19 February 2021]

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Friday vowed to take stronger action against sexual crimes in the military after a Marine said in a viral video that the service had failed to punish her “perpetrator,” whom defense officials described as a colleague accused of disseminating private imagery of her without her consent. Calling the video “deeply disturbing,” Austin acknowledged in his first media briefing as Pentagon chief that the Defense Department needed to do more to curb a problem that has persisted despite years of campaigns, training and high-level promises to contain it. “We have been looking at this for a long time in earnest, but we haven’t gotten it right,” Austin, a retired four-star Army general, said. “My commitment to my soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines, and dependents is we’re going to do everything in our power to get it right.”

[Fort Bliss Commander Wants Leaders in Barracks More Often to Stop Sexual Harassment, Assault](#) [Matthew Cox, *Military.com*, 25 February 2021]

The commander of Fort Bliss, Texas, has launched a new effort to eliminate “corrosive” behaviors such as sexual assault and harassment, including a policy that requires unit leaders to have an increased presence in soldier barracks. “Operation Ironclad” comes two months after the public release of an independent review of Fort Hood, Texas, that found the command climate allowed a permissive culture of sexual assault and harassment to fester on the post. The review was ordered after a public outcry erupted in response to the disappearance and murder of Spc. Vanessa Guillen. “Sexual harassment and sexual assault must stop,” Maj. Gen. Sean Bernabe said in an [Army video](#) released Wednesday evening.

[Kadena airman pleads guilty to recording, distributing lewd video without subject's consent](#) [Erica Earl, *Stars and Stripes*, 23 February 2021]

*An airman stationed at Kadena Air Base on Okinawa pleaded guilty and another is scheduled for a court-martial on charges of making and distributing indecent recordings without the subject’s consent. Senior Airman Dante Torello of the 353rd Special Operations Group pleaded guilty Feb. 3 to videoing his victim’s genitalia without consent and distributing the recording, according to the court docket. A photo of Torello released in June 2019 by Kadena’s 18th Wing described him as a loadmaster for the group’s 1st Special Operations Squadron. A tenant unit on both Kadena and Yokota air bases, the 353rd Special Operations Group is required to provide annual and quarterly sexual assault response and prevention training, 1st Lt. Josh Thompson, a spokesman for the 353rd, said in an email to *Stars and Stripes* Feb. 19.*

[Marine from viral video on military sex crimes says her perpetrator was a platoon sergeant and victim advocate](#) [Caitlin M. Keeney, *Stars and Stripes*, 24 February 2021]

The female Marine whose distressing video about another Marine’s sexual misconduct against her said Wednesday that her perpetrator was her unit’s platoon sergeant and a uniformed victim advocate. “I am not a one in a million story. I am lucky I have been able to stay safe,” she said in a [statement](#) published by Protect Our Defenders, an advocacy organization that works to end sexual violence in the military. “My name is Dalina, I am not a martyr, I am a sergeant in the Marines who has served honorably.” Dalina was deployed in October 2019 when she reported her coworker, a platoon sergeant and a uniformed victim advocate, for sexual misconduct, according to her statement. A uniformed victim advocate is a service member who provides

information and support to people who have been sexually assaulted. He was removed from the base after a military protective order was put in place, but she was kept in the dark for months by her former command about what actions were taken against him, according to her statement. Dalina later found out that he had faced administrative punishment and not a court martial. [SEE ALSO [1](#), [2](#), [3](#)]

[Military academies sex assault numbers were steady, then COVID hit](#) [Todd South, *Military Times*, 25 February 2021]

The number of sexual assaults at the military service academies was lower than the previous academic year, but it likely would have been at least at the same level had schools not sent students home in the fourth quarter due to the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a new report. The [annual report](#), released Thursday, showed 88 incidents reported by cadets or midshipmen at the academies for the academic year 2019 to 2020. That is lower than the 122 reported cases for the previous academic year of 2018 to 2019. But a quarter-by-quarter breakdown of reports showed the recent report's numbers mirroring the previous year's, with the two diverging when students were sent home in spring 2020. The reporting for the 2018–2019 school year was the highest it had been since numbers were closely tracked in the current anonymous scientific survey method, begun in 2005. Maj. Gen. Clement S. Coward, director of the Pentagon's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, or SAPRO, noted that the academies are providing care for victims of sexual assault and have seen improvement in training and education, but much remains to be done.

[Plan to remove handling of military sexual misconduct from chain of command sees new momentum](#) [Leo Shane III, *Military Times*, 24 February 2021]

The chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee said he is considering plans to establish an independent prosecutor to handle all sex crimes in the military, a potentially major change to the Uniform Code of Military Justice stemming from years of frustration over the Defense Department's handling of the issue. "Over a decade or more we have tried different approaches to limiting sexual assault, sexual harassment and also retaliation, and we haven't seen the progress that we hoped," Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., told reporters in a roundtable event Wednesday morning. "And so I think the idea of separation is once again on the table." Advocacy groups and several congressional Democrats have pushed for the move for years, arguing that military commanders are inclined to overlook accusations of sexual misconduct in favor of keeping personnel in place. They say an independent prosecutor experienced in those cases would be more likely to file and pursue charges, especially in cases of repeat offenders.

[Sexual Assault Against Boys Is a Crisis: It's far more common than we think. Here's why we don't talk about it.](#) [Emma Brown, *The Washington Post*, 22 February 2021]

Boys learn that they're supposed to be tough and strong and sexually dominant, according to a massive [study](#) of gender attitudes among 10- to 14-year-olds in the United States and countries across four other continents. Girls learn that they're supposed to be attractive and submissive, according to the study, led by researchers at Johns Hopkins University. The global script clearly harms girls, who face disproportionate levels of sexual violence, not to mention greater risk of early pregnancy and leaving school. But Robert Blum, a physician who has studied adolescents

for 40 years and is one of the Johns Hopkins scholars leading the study, wants people to understand that it also hurts boys. “The story about boys has yet to be told, and I think it’s a really important story,” Blum explained to me. “Our data suggest that the myth that boys are advantaged and girls are disadvantaged simply isn’t true.” The movement for gender equality has often focused on empowering girls. But as Blum sees it, achieving gender equality also requires attention for boys. They too need to know they are not circumscribed by ideas about who and how they should be.

[Tricare Launches Mental Health Services for Sexual Trauma Victims](#) [Jim Absher, *Military.com*, 24 February 2021]

Tricare has announced the opening of a pilot program offering mental health treatment for victims of sexual trauma. The [Sexual Trauma Intensive Outpatient Program](#), or IOP, is designed to help active-duty service members who have mental health conditions related to sexual trauma. The trauma need not be related to one’s military service. Participants must have a diagnosis from a Tricare-authorized or military mental health provider, a pre-authorization and referral, and live within daily travel distance of one of the locations where treatment will be provided.

[Former U.S. Olympics coach dies by suicide after being charged](#) [Frank Pingue, *Reuters*, 25 February 2021]

Former U.S. Olympic gymnastics coach John Geddert, who had ties to disgraced team doctor Larry Nassar and was charged earlier on Thursday with human trafficking and sexual assault, has since died by suicide, authorities said. According to court documents filed in Eaton County, Geddert was charged with 20 counts of human trafficking, one count of first-degree sexual assault, one count of second-degree sexual assault, criminal enterprise and lying to a police officer. “My office has been notified that the body of John Geddert was found late this afternoon after taking his own life. This is a tragic end to a tragic story for everyone involved,” Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel said in a statement.

SUICIDE

[Air Force tests suicide prevention training with virtual reality system](#) [Ed Adamczyk, *United Press International*, 22 February 2021]

A suicide prevention training program, using virtual reality, was tested last week at Travis Air Force Base, Calif., the U.S. Air Force said on Monday. Members of the 60th Air Mobility Wing, using virtual reality headsets, participated in a 30-minute training scenario in which they encounter an emotionally distressed individual. Asking the proper questions, and urging the individual to seek help, are the goals of the exercise, according to Air Force officials. “The unique part of this VR training is that it’s voice-activated, so you’re required to say things out loud that maybe you’ve never had to say before,” MSgt. Shawn Dougherty, a program facilitator, said in a press release. “[You’ll need to actually say] phrases to Airmen in distress like ‘Do you have a gun in the house?’ or ‘Are you thinking about harming yourself?’” “This module is an Airman-to-Airman scenario,” Dougherty added. “The training gives you an opportunity to be face-to-face with another Airman, in an Airman’s perspective with someone that’s in distress. You are trying to talk them down, resolve the situation, figure out what is going on with him and

find out the best scenario to get him to safety.”

[Marine Corps Looks for Insider Threat Monitoring Capability. And another Marine Corps application addressing a specific kind of insider threat—suicidal ideation—will be established as a system of records.](#) [Mila Jasper, Nextgov, 19 February 2021]

The Marine Corps is looking for a user monitoring and auditing capability for its enterprise networks in support of a pilot program meant to foster a better understanding of unauthorized disclosures and exfiltration of sensitive data on Defense Department networks. This sources sought notice comes as another Marine Corps capability built to address that last point—suicidal ideation—comes online. The Command Individual Risk and Resiliency Assessment System application, known as CIRRAS, is set to be established as a System of Record, according to a document filed on the [Federal Register](#) Friday. The document will be published Feb. 22. CIRRAS holds a host of biographical information to help commanders understand overall wellness and troop readiness, according to notice. “CIRRAS is a system built by the Marine Corps for the Marine,” Mary Feltis, the project officer for CIRRAS, said in a [Feb. 11 news release](#). The application was developed after an “unprecedented amount of suicides among Marines in 2009,” according to the release. In response, USMC created a monthly review by commanders to monitor well-being. But until CIRRAS, information about force well-being was stored in spreadsheets and word processing applications, which lacked adequate security, according to the release.

[Seeking the Military Suicide Solution Podcast, Episode 49: Chris Jachimiec—Listener Response to STMSS Series](#) [Military Times, 22 February 2021]

Chris Jachimiec is a recently retired member of the United States Air Force. Over the course of his 20-year career he served in multiple military leadership roles in Nevada, Germany and Korea, and is a veteran of the war in Afghanistan. He was named the Air Combat Command First Sergeant of the Year in 2016. In July 2017, he lost his brother, Lance Cpl. Adam Jachimiec, United States Marine Corps, to suicide after a courageous battle with post-traumatic stress. As a wounded warrior himself, Jachimiec dedicates his life to finding and utilizing multiple pathways to recovery from mental health issues, grief and trauma. Jachimiec is a Warrior Games athlete and distinguished member of the governor’s and mayor’s challenge teams in Nevada and Las Vegas. He has recently been named the first PREVENTS ambassador for Nevada and is working with Sen. Jacky Rosen on legislation for veterans issues.

[\[LISTEN\]](#)

[Some combat experiences—like ambushes or killing a civilian—more closely linked to suicide, study finds](#)

Though research has found that most service members who die by suicide have never deployed to combat, that doesn’t show the whole picture. A [recent military study](#) found that some combat experiences, especially when coupled with PTSD or depression, are a risk factor in suicide attempts. Combat in general didn’t translate to more attempts, the Naval Health Research Center found, but high-intensity situations like ambushes, or inadvertently killing a non-combatant, were more linked to suicidal ideation. “This study suggests that deployed service members who experience high levels of combat or are exposed to certain types of combat experiences (involving

unexpected events or those that challenge moral or ethical norms) may be at an increased risk of a suicide attempt, either directly or mediated through a mental disorder,” according to the report. A decade of research and tracking of military suicides has created a stereotype of service members who die by suicide: young, male, White, typically on his first enlistment and with no deployments, going through some type of financial or relationship distress.

VETERANS

[McDonough Orders Review of VA Policies to Ensure Inclusion of LGBT Vets, Employees](#)

[Patricia Kime, *Military.com*, 23 February 2021]

Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough has ordered a top-down review of department policies to ensure they comply with a presidential executive order designed to combat discrimination on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation. In his first news conference since taking office, McDonough said Tuesday that he has directed a department-wide policy review to ensure the VA is a “welcoming and inclusive environment for LGBT vets and employees.” On Inauguration Day, President Joe Biden signed an order directing every federal agency to review all regulations, guidance documents, policies and programs to ensure that they prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, gender identity and sexual orientation. McDonough said the review, expected to be completed by March 30, follows the order and seeks to “increase alignment between VA and the Department of Defense,” particularly in the areas of medical services and treatment for veterans.

[Measure would allow VA to give coronavirus vaccine to any veteran and most caregivers](#) [Leo Shane III, *Military Times*, 24 February 2021]

Any veteran or their caregiver would be eligible to receive a coronavirus vaccine at Veterans Affairs medical centers under a new bipartisan proposal unveiled Wednesday. But the plan doesn't guarantee enough vaccines will be available at VA facilities for every veteran in America, which may limit its effectiveness. The legislation, introduced by House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Mark Takano, D-Calif., and ranking member Mike Bost, R-Ill., would close a loophole in current rules which prohibit VA officials from administering the vaccine to anyone except individuals already registered in department medical care programs. “If we want to defeat this pandemic, we must vaccinate as many Americans as possible, and do it quickly,” Takano said in a statement. “VA is already well on its way to fully vaccinate more than one million veterans, but under its current authorities, millions more are still unable to receive life-saving vaccines from VA. VA should not have to turn away any veteran who walks through its doors to get a vaccine, regardless of whether they're enrolled in or eligible for other VA healthcare services.”