



## CONGRESSIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS 116<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS

### LEADERSHIP

Rep. Joaquin Castro (TX-20)  
Chair

September 17, 2020

Rep. Ruben Gallego (AZ-07)  
First Vice-Chair

The Honorable Mark T. Esper  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20301

Rep. Nanette Diaz Barragán (CA-44)  
Second Vice-Chair

Rep. Adriano Espaillat (NY-13)  
Whip

Dear Secretary Esper:

Rep. Veronica Escobar (TX-16)  
Freshman Representative

We write to express our support and appreciation for your commitment to advancing diversity and inclusion within the armed forces. In particular, we are closely watching the formation of the Defense Advisory Committee on Diversity and Inclusion in the Armed Forces (the Committee) that you announced in a June 19, 2020, memorandum<sup>1</sup> with sincere hope that the committee will help identify specific and concrete actions to improve diversity, inclusion, and equal opportunity for all servicemembers. As members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC), we want to take this opportunity to reinforce our commitment to advancing Hispanic representation in leadership positions in our U.S. Armed Forces. We strongly urge you to appoint experienced and competitive leaders of Hispanic descent to the Committee, such as Lt. Col. (Ret.) Alfredo A Sandoval and Col. (Ret.) James Saenz.

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Rep. Nydia M. Velázquez (NY-07)

Despite progress in recent decades – racial and ethnic minorities comprised 25 percent of the active-duty military in 1990, but now make up approximately 40 percent of the force – more work needs to be done. Although overall diversity has increased, racial diversity among senior leadership positions and the officer corps do not reflect the diversity of the enlisted troops they lead, nor the overall demographics of our country. According to the Defense Manpower Data Center, racial and ethnic minorities make up less than 25 percent of all officers across the Armed Forces and less than 15 percent of officers O-7 and above.<sup>2</sup>

The problem is particularly acute among those of Hispanic descent. For example, those of Hispanic origin account for approximately 18 percent of enlisted personnel, but only about 8 percent of the officer corps and 2 percent of General/Flag officers. To ensure the recruitment, retention, employment, integration, well-being, and treatment of Hispanics in the U.S. Armed Forces

<sup>1</sup> [Memorandum: Actions for Improving Diversity and Inclusion in the Department of Defense](#)

<sup>2</sup> Officer and Enlisted figures are as reported by the Defense Manpower Data Center, May 2018.

there needs to be increased Hispanic representation among leadership at the Department of Defense.

To ensure the Committee fully understands and is able to present solutions to address the unique challenges Hispanic servicemembers may face in securing leadership positions, we believe the Committee should include ample, proportional representation of Hispanics in your appointments. For the Committee to develop policies and guidance that reflect the Department of Defense and the United States, it is only appropriate that the Committee represent the diversity and inclusiveness it seeks to promote.

To this end, we are aware of two individuals under your consideration that exemplify the type of candidate we would like to see on the Committee.

- **Lt. Col. (Ret.) Alfredo A Sandoval:** An Air Force Academy graduate, he had a highly distinguished over 20-year career with the U.S. Air Force Reserve. He recently completed the longest term in history as the Chairman of the Air Force Academy Board of Visitors, providing executive leadership and guidance to the Academy for approximately seven years.
- **Col. (Ret.) James Saenz:** A West Point graduate, he recently completed a highly distinguished 30-year career with the U.S. Army. He has experience developing strategies that advance diversity and inclusion across many fronts at the national level.

We wholeheartedly support the full and fair consideration of all Hispanic candidates for the Committee under your review. We commend your commitment to our servicemembers and your efforts for progress on these issues.

Sincerely,



Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr.  
*Member of Congress*



Raul Ruiz, M.D.  
*Member of Congress*



Joaquin Castro  
*CHC Chair*



Tony Cárdenas  
*Co-Chair*  
*CHC Diversity Task Force*



J. Luis Correa  
*Chair*  
*CHC Veterans and*  
*Armed Services Task Force*