

EXCLUSIVE INVESTIGATIONS

U.S. ready to cut support to Scouts, accusing them of attacking 'boy-friendly spaces'

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HEARD ON ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

By Graham Smith, Tom Bowman



Audio will be available later today.



FILE - Merit badges and a rainbow-colored neckerchief slider are affixed on a Boy Scout uniform. The U.S. organization, which now welcomes girls into the program and allows them to work toward the coveted Eagle Scout rank, announced May 7, 2024, that it would change its name to Scouting America as it focuses on inclusion.

Ted S. Warren/AP

The century-old partnership between the U.S. military and Scouting could be coming to an end.

U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth is planning for the military to sever all ties with Scouting America, saying the group once known as the Boy Scouts is no

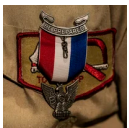
longer a meritocracy and has become an organization designed to "attack boy-friendly spaces," according to documents reviewed by NPR.

In a draft memo to Congress, which sources shared with NPR but which has not yet been sent, Hegseth criticizes Scouting for being "genderless" and for promoting diversity, equity and inclusion.

Sponsor Message

The military has provided support to the Scouts for more than 100 years, assistance that was formalized in 1937. But in one memo, Hegseth says, "The organization once endorsed by President Theodore Roosevelt no longer supports the future of American boys."

The proposal calls for the Pentagon to no longer provide medical and logistical aid to the National Jamboree, which brings in as many as 20,000 scouts to a remote site in West Virginia. It also states that the military will no longer allow Scout troops to meet at military installations in the U.S. and abroad, where many bases have active Scout programs.



NATIONAL

After years of scandal, Boy Scouts of America changes its name to Scouting America

A source told NPR the documents were being prepared at the Pentagon to communicate Hegseth's decision to Congress, but that they had not been sent yet. The source requested anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the documents.

In response to an inquiry from NPR, the Pentagon sent a statement attributed to "a War Department official" saying they wouldn't comment on "leaked documents that we cannot authenticate and that may be pre-decisional."

Scouting America released a statement saying the organization is proud of its long affiliation with the military and will work to continue it.

"Scouting is and has always been a nonpartisan organization," the statement read. "Over more than a century, we've worked constructively with every U.S.

presidential administration — Democratic and Republican — focusing on our common goal of building future leaders grounded in integrity, responsibility, and community service."

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Congress requires the Pentagon to support the scouting program's Jamboree, a gathering of thousands of young scouts held every three or four years. The U.S. military lends trucks, ambulances and medical teams, and puts on aviation and skydiving demonstrations, all at no cost to the Scouts. For the military, it's both a training exercise and an opportunity to recruit highly motivated, civic-minded kids.

But the law includes an exemption: the Secretary of Defense can withhold support if he determines providing it would be "detrimental to national security."

Drafts of a report to Congress obtained by NPR show Hegseth invoking that clause — accusing Scouting America of fostering "gender confusion."

His memo to the House and Senate Armed Services committees argues the Scouts have strayed from their mission to "cultivate masculine values." It also claims that with international conflicts and a tight budget, sending troops, doctors and vehicles to a 10-day youth event would harm national security by diverting resources from border operations and protecting U.S. territory.



President Trump waves to the crowd after his speech during the National Boy Scout Jamboree in 2017.

Saul Loeb/AFP/Getty Images

President Trump, the honorary leader of Scouting America by nature of his elected office, praised the crowd at the Jamboree in West Virginia in 2017. "The United States has no better citizens than its Boy Scouts. No better," the president told the crowd. He pointed out that 10 of his cabinet members were former Scouts.



THE TWO-WAY

Boy Scouts Chief Apologizes For 'Political Rhetoric' In Trump's Speech

Hegseth was never a Boy Scout, and has said he grew up in a church-based youth group that focuses on memorizing Bible verses. Last year, as a Fox News host, he complained about the Scouts changing their name and admitting girls back in 2018.

"The Boy Scouts has been cratering itself for quite some time," Hegseth said. "This is an institution the left didn't control. They didn't want to improve it. They wanted to destroy it or dilute it into something that stood for nothing."

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What Hegseth says about the Scouts echoes his moves at the Pentagon, cutting DEI programs and firing some senior female and African-American officers, while suggesting diversity hires weaken the organization.

A draft memo to top Pentagon leaders about Scouting America, which was also shared with NPR, picked up on that theme. "Scouting America has undergone a significant transformation," the memo states. "It is no longer a meritocracy which holds its members accountable to meet high standards."

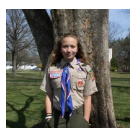
NBC first reported in April that the Pentagon was considering breaking with Scouting America, citing sources familiar with the move. In a statement to NBC, Sean Parnell, the Pentagon's chief spokesman, said, "Secretary Hegseth and his Public Affairs team thoroughly review partnerships and engagements to ensure they align with the President's agenda and advance our mission."

Banning Scout troops from meeting on military bases in the U.S. and overseas troubles Kenny Green. He's a retired Army Staff Sergeant who served as a sniper in Iraq and is the parent of three Scouts — two girls and a boy. Because of his military service, his family has moved frequently.

"We went from Louisiana to Alaska. From Alaska to Germany. From Germany to Texas," he said. But at every military base there was a Scout troop that could help ease the transition to a new home. "We don't have to say a word to them, let them go see the other kids, and they'll be immediately integrated in."

Green was surprised by the proposal to cut all Pentagon ties with the Scouts.

"It's gonna be kind of harsh the way I say this... It's kind of like they don't care about us more than they care about their perceived message. Scouting... It probably is not a perfect organization, but ... I can't even say how vast their benefits are, especially for military families."



NATIONAL

'I Earned This': One Girl's Journey To Becoming An Eagle Scout

Scouting has long been a part of military recruiting efforts. As many as 20 percent of cadets and midshipmen at the service academies are Eagle Scouts, according to statistics from Scouting America. Moreover, enlistees who've earned Eagle get advanced military rank and better pay. That practice would end.

The potential impact is causing friction at the Pentagon. In one memo sent to the department's Undersecretary for Policy Elbridge Colby, Navy Secretary John Phelan warns the proposed new policy might be "too restrictive." Up to a third of the Navy's officers in training, he writes, have some scouting background.

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"Passive support to Scouting America through access to military installations and educational opportunities aboard said installations serve as a crucial recruiting and community engagement tool for the [Navy]," Phelan wrote in the memo, which NPR also viewed. "Prohibition of access could be detrimental to recruitment and accession efforts across the department."

Whether Hegseth's argument — that supporting the Jamboree and allowing Scout troops on military bases harms national security — will pass muster with Congress is unclear. But the statute also requires the report be submitted "in a timely manner." Planning for next summer's Jamboree is already well underway.

Included in the documents NPR reviewed is a draft letter to the head of Scouting America, informing him that the Secretary has disapproved the use of DoD personnel and equipment for the Jamboree — detailing what will not be available. It concludes, "You have our best wishes for a safe and successful National Scout Jamboree."

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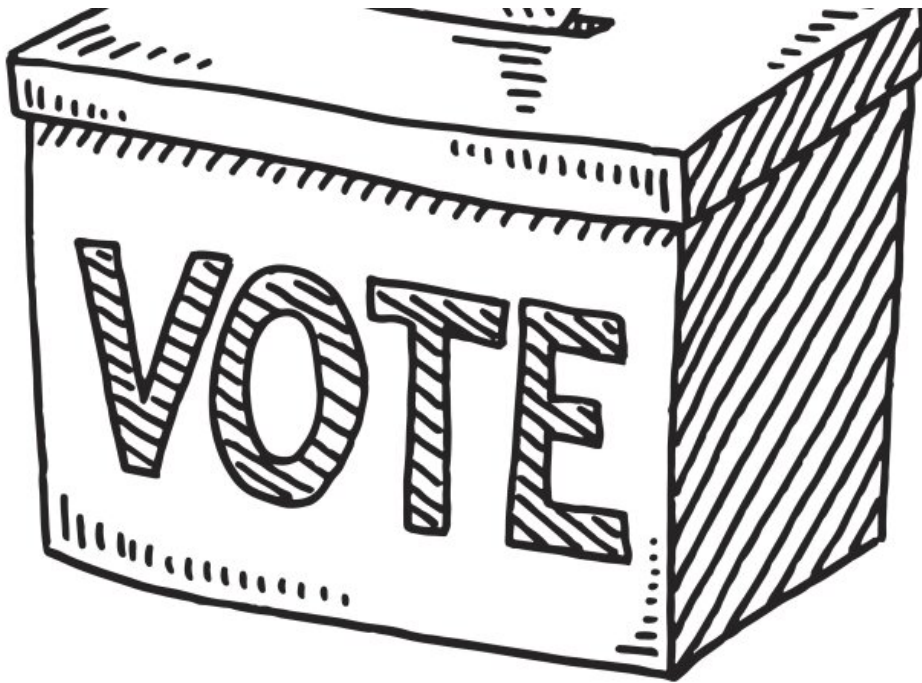
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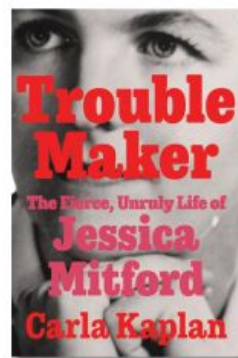
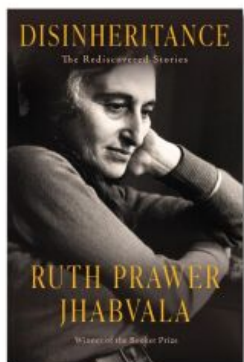
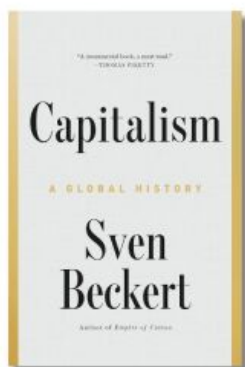
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