

Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of the waiver for General Lloyd J. Austin, III to become our next Secretary of Defense. However, I want to be clear that this vote should not be seen as supporting a precedent for routine granting of waivers for future non-civilian nominees to lead the Department of Defense. We must keep the waiver requirement in place, and waivers should be reserved for the most extreme circumstances.

I strongly support civilian leadership of the military, and the waiver requirement was created to protect this important principle. That being said, our country is facing the simultaneous threats of a global pandemic, unprecedented cyberattacks on our government, and the recent departure of a president who attempted to enlist military personnel to disrupt civilian protest. Considering these extraordinary circumstances, we need a qualified Secretary of Defense in place immediately.

Under normal circumstances, a public hearing before the House Armed Services Committee would be an important part of the waiver process. Unfortunately, because the House Armed Services Committee is not fully set up, the committee cannot hold public hearings on the waiver yet. However, unlike the Trump Administration, the Biden Administration has made General Austin readily available to Congress, and he has demonstrated that he understands the importance of civilian leadership of the Pentagon.

With these assurances, I express my support for General Austin's waiver to move forward in this confirmation process. However, I reiterate to my colleagues that this vote cannot be seen to support a precedent to grant future waivers of the cooling-off period for non-civilian Secretaries of Defense.