

U.S. Rep. Gallagher: Demands clarification on Navy's officer selection board policies

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Rep. Mike Gallagher (R-WI), Ranking Member of the House Armed Services Committee’s Subcommittee on Military Personnel, recently led his colleagues in calling on Vice Admiral Nowell to clarify comments that suggested he supports reversing policy guidance that prohibits the Navy from using official pictures in officer selection boards. In July of 2020, former Secretary of Defense Mark Esper banned official photos from being used in the selection board process to prevent discrimination and ensure officers were selected based on their own merit. The letter, first reported [by the Daily Caller](#), was signed by Reps. Stephanie Bice (R-OK), Lisa McClain (R-MI), Ronny Jackson (R-TX), Jerry Carl (R-AL), and Pat Fallon (R-TX). In part, the lawmakers write, “We are concerned that the back and forth on this issue may be causing officers in the ranks to question whether the Navy’s true goal aspires to meritocratic values or whether these values may be juxtaposed against the political vicissitudes of the day. We were also not sure if you were thinking out loud when you made your statements at the symposium or were signaling future intent as a senior Navy leader. As Members of the Military Personnel Subcommittee, we would like clarification on the Navy’s latest policy regarding photographs on officer selection boards.”

The full letter can be found [HERE](#) or read below:

Dear Vice Admiral Nowell:

We are writing to you as Members of the House Armed Services Committee’s Military Personnel Subcommittee, related to comments you recently made at the Navy League’s 2021 Sea-Air-Space Exposition, regarding the Navy’s position on the inclusion of pictures on officer selection boards. We recognize in 2018, the Navy issued policy guidance on Naval Administrative message 265/18, that reinstated the requirement to display an official photograph for all officer selection boards. Our understanding was this policy change was the result of selection board feedback received within the Navy indicating that the photographs aid the selection board’s ability to assess the Title 10 requirements of an officer’s ability to perform the duties of the next higher grade.

We also understand roughly a year ago, the Navy issued policy guidance via Naval Administrative message 247/20, reversing this decision citing a Secretary of Defense prohibition on the use of official photographs for all officer promotion selection boards and selection board processes pertaining to assignment, training, education, and command.

Then recently at the Navy League’s 2021 Sea-Air-Space Exposition, you made comments stating, “I think we should consider reinstating photos in selection boards,” and then another statement indicating, “we look at, for instance, the one-star board over the last five years, and we can show you where, as you look at diversity, it went down with photos removed.” Yet, our understanding is that promotion selection boards are supposed to be devoid of bias and by their very nature, represent meritocratic values that ensure the most qualified officers are selected to lead our Navy.

We are concerned that the back and forth on this issue may be causing officers in the ranks to question whether the Navy’s true goal aspires to meritocratic values or whether these values may be juxtaposed against the political vicissitudes of the day. We were also not sure if you were thinking out loud when you made your statements at the symposium or were signaling future intent as a senior Navy leader. As Members of the Military Personnel Subcommittee, we would like clarification on the Navy’s latest policy regarding photographs on officer selection boards.

Sincerely,

Rep. Mike Gallagher (R-WI)

Rep. Stephanie Bice (R-OK)

Rep. Lisa McClain (R-MI)

Rep. Ronny Jackson (R-TX)

Rep. Jerry Carl (R-AL)

Rep. Pat Fallon (R-TX)