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Republicans

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Republican demands Congress vote on Pentagon abortion policy: 'We are not a communist country'

Tommy Tuberville aims to block policy offering aid to service members and dependents forced to travel for abortions



Tommy Tuberville at the Capitol on Tuesday. He said of his refusal to back down: 'I think they're starting to believe that I meant what I said.' Photograph: Jacquelyn Martin/AP

Defending his blocking promotions that has left hundreds of military officers in limbo and the US army, navy and marines without Senate-confirmed leaders, the Alabama Republican Tommy Tuberville demanded a congressional vote on Pentagon abortion policy.

He added: "We are not a communist country."

In return, one Democrat invoked a Republican president revered for standing up to communism, and said Ronald Reagan was "rolling in his grave".

Tuberville explained his stance to Bloomberg TV, saying: "I got a briefing about a year ago, what they were gonna do with the new abortion policy. We didn't need one ... Joe Biden and the Democrats ... just decided to change it."

The policy offers aid to service members and dependents forced to travel for abortions because they are based in a state which restricts it, as many Republican-run states have since the US supreme court removed the right last year.

Tuberville continued: "They voted [Pentagon abortion policy] through Congress in 1984, but in 2023 they want to change it with a memo from the White House.

"We're not a communist country. Everything that makes policy and law goes through Congress. And I told them, 'If you change it, I'm gonna block your admirals and generals.' At that time there was one or two. Now we're up to 300. I think they're starting to believe that I meant what I said."

At the top of the US military, the chair of the joint chiefs of staff, Gen Mark Milley, is due to step down this month. His replacement, Gen CQ Brown, is in the queue held up.

Officials have pointed to the plight of lower-ranked officers. In a Washington Post column, the secretaries of the army, navy and air force said: "We know officers who ... are facing genuine financial stress because they have had to relocate their families or unexpectedly maintain two residences.

"Military spouses who have worked to build careers of their own are unable to look for jobs because they don't know when or if they will move. Children haven't known where they will go to school, which is particularly hard given how frequently military children change schools already."

Tuberville, who coached the Auburn University football team before entering politics, has been criticised for not having served. He told Bloomberg he was a "military brat" whose father "died on active duty".

Critics also say Tuberville is affecting preparedness to face national security threats.

Martin Pengelly in Washington

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Mark Warner, a Democratic senator from Virginia, told Bloomberg Radio: "Ronald Reagan has to be rolling over in his grave. These kinds of political antics are making our military less strong and our country more weak by playing politics on this issue. I hope and pray that that my Republican colleagues, a lot of whom have expressed concerns to me privately ... will put ... pressure on."

The Maine Republican Susan Collins said Tuberville should limit his holds to "only those individuals who have policy responsibilities".

Tuberville said Democrats who control the Senate "can be clearing these nominations one at a time, two hours each. They don't want to do that."

That would be extremely time-consuming. So far, more pressure has built on Tuberville than on the majority leader, Chuck Schumer of New York.

Tuberville said: "We're not gonna have any movement on my side unless they change this [policy] back. Let's vote on it. And if it passes, it passes. Done is done."

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