



October 29, 2026

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

James D. Freeman II
Advisory Committee Management Officer
Department of Defense
1950 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

The Honorable Emil Michael
U.S. Under Secretary of Defense
for Research and Engineering
Chief Technology Officer
Department of Defense
3030 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Subject: Request for Appointment to Project Meridian

Dear Secretary Hegseth, Under Secretary Michael, and Mr. Freeman:

I write on behalf of the Project On Government Oversight (POGO) to request that a representative from POGO be appointed to Project Meridian. POGO is a nonpartisan, independent watchdog that investigates, exposes, and champions reforms on systemic corruption, abuse of power, and waste. For more than 40 years, we have advocated for effective national security policy and a responsible Pentagon that protects our nation and the service members who fight for it. The national security experts at POGO provide a critical perspective that must be included as Project Meridian advises on “The Future of Warfare.”¹

Secretary Hegseth commissioned Project Meridian to “study the battlefields of the future [and] identify which weapons and technologies warfighters will need to harness to dominate in these environments.”² To do so, he tasked the committee with “drawing upon a group of top technologists, innovators, business leaders, policy makers, and national security experts.”³ Given its current participants, however, Project Meridian is failing at that goal. Currently, the project lacks representation from national security experts focused on government accountability in the use of taxpayer resources and preventing undue influence by defense contractors.

¹ Memorandum from Pete Hegseth, Secretary of Defense, to Pentagon leadership, Commanders of the Combatant Commands, Defense Agency and DOW Field Activity Directors, about “Commissioning of Project Meridian: The Future of Warfare,” September 30, 2026, <https://media.defense.gov/2026/Sep/30/2004009287/-1/-1/1/COMMISSIONING-OF-PROJECT-MERIDIAN.PDF>.

² See note 1.

³ See note 1.

Based on the memorandum commissioning it, Project Meridian constitutes an advisory committee subject to the requirements of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA).⁴ Under FACA, advisory committees are required to be “fairly balanced in terms of the points of view represented and the functions to be performed by the advisory committee.”⁵ Public information on current participants, however, shows Project Meridian’s membership is imbalanced, in violation of FACA. Nearly all of the committee’s 21 members work in the private sector.⁶ The majority of those members appear to run, work for, or maintain financial ties to the defense industry. Currently, Project Meridian lacks representation from a public interest organization dedicated to government accountability and the effective use of taxpayer resources.

Appointing a representative from POGO will provide a critical counterweight to the numerous defense contractor representatives on Project Meridian. Since its inception, POGO has advocated for the Pentagon to invest taxpayer dollars in technologies that are proven, effective, necessary, and that deliver value to the public. We have advocated against the wasteful spending on ineffective new technologies at exorbitant costs. Through our Center for Defense Information, POGO has worked for years with champions from both sides of the aisle to monitor Pentagon procurement and acquisitions and identify opportunities for more accountable spending that delivers meaningful results for service members and taxpayers.⁷ Today, POGO employs a team of experts in defense policy and contracting, any of whom could provide the balance Project Meridian needs.⁸

We believe that Project Meridian would particularly benefit from the appointment of POGO Principal Advisor William D. Hartung as a participant. Mr. Hartung is a leading expert on the United States defense budget and the arms industry, with specialized expertise in proliferation, the economics of military spending, and alternative approaches to national security strategy. He has authored three books on defense contracting and routinely publishes articles in national newspapers.⁹ Over the course of his career, Mr. Hartung has directed arms policy projects at the Center for International Policy, the New America Foundation, and the World Policy Institute.

To bring Project Meridian into compliance with FACA’s “fairly balanced” requirement, we request that Mr. Hartung, or another POGO advisor, be appointed to Project Meridian immediately. Project Meridian must not meet until it has included participants, like Mr. Hartung, with expertise sufficient to balance that of current committee membership. If Project Meridian continues to operate without fair balance, POGO is obligated to take legal action to ensure DOD is complying with the law.

⁴ Federal Advisory Committees, 5 U.S.C. §§ 1001-1014 (2026), <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/5/part-1/chapter-10>.

⁵ 5 U.S.C. § 1004(b)(2) (2026), <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/5/1004>; 5 C.F.R. § 102-3.60(a)(3) and (b) (2026), <https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/41/102-3.60>; Kathleen E. Marchsteiner and Megan M. Stuessy, Congressional Research Service, *The Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA): Overview and Considerations for Congress*, R47984 (March 26, 2024), 2, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R47984>.

⁶ “Project Meridian,” MITRE, last modified October 2, 2026, <https://perma.cc/R54J-BRVB>.

⁷ Nick Schwellenbach and Neil Gordon, “\$1.5 Trillion Pentagon Budget Benefits Top Contractors,” *POGO Investigates*, July 2, 2026, <https://www.pogo.org/investigates/top-military-contractors-poised-to-profit-from-1-5-trillion-pentagon-budget>.

⁸ “Our Team,” POGO, accessed October 27, 2026, <https://www.pogo.org/about/our-team>.

⁹ “William D. Hartung,” POGO, accessed October 27, 2026, <https://www.pogo.org/about/people/william-d-hartung>.

We request a response to this request by no later than Friday, October 30, 2026. We appreciate your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Isabel Munilla
Interim Executive Director