

Marines say they're being 'crushed' over vaccine refusal: 'A political purge'

Zero religious exemptions for the COVID-19 vaccine have been granted to date, Marine Corps spokesman says.

EXCLUSIVE: U.S. Marines are being "crushed" by President Biden's COVID-19 vaccine mandate as thousands face dismissal for their continued refusal to get the shot, several active-duty Marines told Fox News Digital.

To date, 169 Marines have been discharged for refusing the vaccine, and thousands more face the same fate after the Department of Defense's mandate on all active-duty service members went into effect for the Marine Corps on Nov. 28.

COVID-19 VACCINE MANDATE: MILITARY BEGINS DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS AGAINST REFUSERS

<https://www.foxnews.com/health/covid-vaccine-mandate-military-disciplinary-actions-refusers>

Marines are allowed to apply for a religious exemption, but so far not a single application regarding the COVID-19 vaccine, or any vaccine for that matter, has been approved, a Marine Corps spokesman told Fox News.

Several Marines who refuse to get the shot were granted anonymity by Fox News Digital, so they could speak freely. They said they are witnessing a "political purge" by the Biden administration that is forcing out the military's "best and brightest" over deeply held beliefs they say are protected by the First Amendment.

"There's something fundamentally wrong at this point with our nation's leadership," said a major with more than 17 years of active service. "We are facing an unconstitutional edict that I think is very targeted as a political purge, taking out some of the best and brightest soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and guardians from the Space Force."

A lieutenant colonel with more than 19 years of active service said it appears that

the military, specifically the Marine Corps, is discharging service members “as fast as they can and as brutally as they can, damaging every Marine as much as they can on the way out.”

“The one message I got from the colonel above me was: ‘Tread very carefully, this is political, you will be crushed like an ant.’ And he told me that because he cares about me,” the lieutenant colonel said. “Do I want to continue serving in an institution that crushes people for bringing up reasonable points in defending their faith?”

One master sergeant said it seems that “the louder I speak the tighter the screws are turned against me.”

“When you’re expected to behave a certain way and to obey certain rules and follow certain processes, and then to see on the other end that that’s not a two-way street, that’s a violation of my morals that I can’t stand by and not speak out about,” the master sergeant said.

The Marines who spoke with Fox News said they were on the receiving end of a “blanket” denial of religious exemptions, with their applications being rejected without consideration. Eight separate letters of denial provided to Fox News were nearly identical, citing “military readiness” as the primary reason for rejection.

“I saw one package from a sergeant who had attached, like, 30 pages of material to substantiate why his belief was sincere, under no lawful obligation to do so,” the master sergeant said. “And then to have this as a response with no individual inquiry and just a generalized assertion of governmental interest is insulting.”

“On the religious side, this is absolutely a travesty what’s happening,” one chief warrant officer said. “People are getting blanket denials, they’re not addressing the individual concerns or beliefs of Marines who are submitting for religious accommodations, and I think that’s just horribly wrong. I honestly believe that they’re not really reading the packages.”

Another lieutenant colonel, who said she leads an 800-strong support group for service members who oppose the vaccine, said, “Everyone else pretty much has a voice except the military, because we are not authorized to speak out in opposition to our leadership.”

“I’ve talked to so many different service members,” she said. “Just recently, one of the corporals in the group was absolutely distraught because one of his friends who also declined the shot recently just killed himself.”

“This is an absolute travesty,” she continued, choking back tears. “And I’m telling you, I am so upset about this. My heart is breaking for these people.”

Marine Corps spokesman Capt. Ryan Bruce told Fox News that as of Thursday, 3,080 of the 3,192 requests for religious accommodation concerning the COVID-19 vaccine mandate had been processed and zero had been approved, adding that “no religious accommodations have been approved for any other vaccine in the past seven years.”

Despite the Marines’ claims to Fox News, the Corps spokesman said that the process for evaluating requests for religious exemptions has been done on a case-by-case basis “to ensure Marines receive due consideration.” That process, he said, includes an evaluation by a three-member Religious Accommodation Review Board, as well as by health services and legal.

There has also been a debate about what will happen with the thousands of service members who continue to refuse the shot. While they all face separation from the military, a provision added by Republicans to the 2022 National Defense Authorization Act, which Congress passed less than two weeks ago, requires service members discharged for vaccine refusal to receive either an honorable or general discharge.

Bruce said that if the sole basis for separation is vaccine refusal, “the least favorable characterization of service that may be approved is General (under honorable conditions).” Such a designation means that an individual’s military service was satisfactory, but did not deserve the highest level of discharge. He said that 169 Marines have been separated from the Marine Corps for vaccine refusal so far, but he could not say how many have been separated with that designation.

The first lieutenant colonel said that even a general discharge under honorable conditions results in the loss of G. I. Bill education benefits for the individual member and their dependents.

Of the more than 180,000 active-duty Marines, approximately 5%, or 9,000, are

considered unvaccinated by the Corps. Bruce told Fox News, however, that the number includes service members who are either currently exempt, are waiting for religious exemptions, or are new recruits who have yet to be entered into the reporting system, and that not all have necessarily “refused” the vaccine.

The Corps’ most recent weekly newsletter last week said COVID-19 is a “readiness” issue, because the “speed with which the disease transmits among individuals has increased risk to our Marines and the Marine Corps’ mission.”

When asked what effect losing thousands of members might have on Corps readiness, Bruce said, “The Marine Corps will be ready to answer the nation’s call if needed.”

And while the Marine vaccination rate is the lowest among the military services, compared to 96-98% among the Army, Navy and Air Force, only two Marines have died from COVID-19 to date, Bruce said.

Which has many Marines asking, is it worth it?

“My son, my cousins, they will not be signing up for service,” the major said. “You talk about the generational damage that was caused during Vietnam and how we treated our veterans there, this will be significantly worse.”

CRUZ, REPUBLICANS SIGN AMICUS BRIEF BACKING NAVY SEALS SUING OVER BIDEN VACCINE MANDATE

<https://www.foxnews.com/politics/cruz-republicans-amicus-brief-navy-seal-biden-vaccine-mandate-lawsuit>

He added that with the current tensions in Russia, Ukraine and China, the military is sacrificing in readiness by purging thousands of able-bodied men and woman ahead of a “World War III scenario.”

“This is the American equivalent of Roman decimation,” added the master sergeant.

“I’ve never had such a moral objection to anything in my life,” the chief warrant officer said. “I have a lot of pride in my service in the Marine Corps and I just don’t like where it’s going.”

“I want to stay in,” he added. “I have the potential to go beyond 20 years and I

would love to do that if given the opportunity.”

Earlier this month, California Rep. Darrell Issa led a group of Republicans in sending a letter to Biden saying he was committing a “grave mistake” in enforcing his military vaccine mandate. Last week, the congressman joined a group of nearly 50 Republican lawmakers in filing an amicus brief in support of a lawsuit by 35 SEALs and other Navy personnel who are seeking religious exemptions to the vaccine.

The Navy reported last week that zero of 2,844 active duty requests for a religious exemption to the COVID-19 vaccine had been approved.

Issa spokesman Jonathan Wilcox told Fox News roughly 45,000 active duty members across the military, the equivalent of 45 battalions, face dismissal over the mandate.

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“I think that this White House and this president are declaring a rhetorical war on what they call the unvaccinated, and they’re catching the military in that same rhetorical battle,” Wilcox said. “They are determined to fire, remove and I think ruin those who are challenging their mandate.”

“This would be the most grievous injury that a commander-in-chief has imposed in his command, I think, in the history of this country,” he added.

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