

# Trump Considering DeSantis as Pentagon Chief Alternative to Hegseth: Source

Pete Hegseth, Trump's nominee for the role, said on Dec. 4 that he has no intention of turning down his nomination.

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Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis speaks during a press conference in West Palm Beach, Fla., on Sept. 17, 2024. Joe Raedle/Getty Images



By T.J. Muscaro

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The Trump team is considering Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis as an alternative pick to lead the U.S. Department of Defense over the current nominee Pete Hegseth, a source familiar with the transition confirmed to The Epoch Times.

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The confirmation follows earlier reports from The Associated Press and other media outlets as Hegseth faces scrutiny over allegations of sexual assault and alcohol use while in previous roles. Hegseth, a former Army National Guard officer and a former director of several veterans groups, has denied the allegations.



Hegseth told reporters on Dec. 4 that he spoke to President-elect Donald Trump in the morning and Trump told him to “keep fighting.”



Hegseth said Trump told him, “I’m behind you all the way.”



The defense secretary nominee said he has no intention of withdrawing from consideration. He needs Senate approval to serve in the position.

“The press is peddling anonymous story after anonymous story, all meant to smear me and tear me down,” he wrote in an op-ed published in [The Wall Street Journal](#) on Dec. 4. “It’s a textbook manufactured media takedown. They provide no evidence, no names, and they ignore the legions of people who speak on my behalf.

“Talk to those who served with me in Guantanamo Bay, Iraq, Afghanistan or the National Guard. They support me, and I’m honored by that. I have never backed down from a fight and won’t back down from this one.

“I am grateful President-elect Trump chose me to lead the Defense Department, and I look forward to an honest confirmation hearing with our distinguished senators—not a show trial in the press.”

Hegseth has worked to meet with those lawmakers one-on-one.

Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) said on Dec. 3 that some of the reports on Hegseth were disturbing. He told CBS News that he wants to “make sure that every young woman that joins the military feels respected and welcomed.”

The next day, upon reading Hegseth’s op-ed, Graham said that Hegseth still had an opportunity to be heard.

“I agree that no one should make a decision based on allegations from anonymous sources,” [he said on social media platform X](#). “Time will tell if there are people willing to substantiate these allegations under oath.

“Based on fundamental fairness, that would be required. While I have said Pete deserves a chance to defend himself, it is only fair that those making the allegations come forward and substantiate their claims under oath.”

Several lawmakers have voiced their support for Hegseth, including Sen. Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn.).

“I’ve spoken with Pete Hegseth about his military background and business experience,” [she said on X](#). “He is more than qualified to assume the role of Secretary of Defense.”

Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) voiced his support for Hegseth on Dec. 2.

“Pete has a decorated military career and a stellar academic background,” [he said on X](#) after meeting with Hegseth. “He is laser-focused on ending the wokeness that has overtaken the Armed Forces. Under his leadership, the DOD will return to making America and our allies safer around the globe.”

Hegseth is one of several veterans already nominated by Trump to serve in his administration, having served in the Army National Guard as a major. He was deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan and was most recently a Fox News host.

DeSantis served in the Navy from 2004 through 2010, providing legal counsel to a SEAL Commander in Iraq. As governor, he has developed the Florida State Guard and coordinated several operations with the Florida National Guard, including deployments to Texas to assist Gov. Greg Abbott in his efforts to secure the southern border.

DeSantis and Trump were last seen together on Dec. 3 in West Palm Beach, Florida, attending a ceremony that honored three fallen sheriff's deputies. It is unclear if the secretary of defense position was discussed that day.

DeSantis earned Trump's endorsement for Florida governor in 2018. Their relationship became competitive when DeSantis decided to challenge Trump for the Republican presidential nomination in the recent election.

It was not until DeSantis suspended his campaign, and the two sat down for a private [meeting](#) in April, arranged by real estate broker Steve Witkoff, that the two renewed their alliance. Trump has named Witkoff as his special envoy to the Middle East.

If DeSantis becomes the new nominee, he would be the 10th Floridian selected by Trump to join the administration, and the second from the greater Tampa Bay Area picked to join his Cabinet, after Pam Bondi. Two of those 10—former Rep. Matt Gaetz and Hillsborough County Sheriff Chad Chronister—are no longer being considered for their respective positions after they withdrew themselves from consideration for U.S. attorney general and the head of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, respectively.

If nominated as defense secretary, DeSantis would have to resign his governorship in order to assume the role. His second and final term as governor does not end until 2026.

Spokespeople for the governor and president-elect did not respond to The Epoch Times' requests by publication time.

*The Associated Press and Jack Phillips contributed to this report.*

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