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The Army's Command Assessment Program put prospective commanders through a series of physical and mental tests. PROVIDED BY SPC. MARK BOWMAN/U.S. ARMY

# Army ends its grueling NFL-style officer test

## Hegseth hails assessment program's demise

Davis Winkie  
USA TODAY

The Army announced the cancellation of its flagship officer selection program on Sept. 2 after officials in Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's office directed its review.

The Army's Command Assessment Program, an NFL Combine-style program which put prospective battalion and brigade commanders through a series of physical and mental tests, was canceled "effective immediately," Army spokesperson Maj. Travis Shaw confirmed.

Hegseth, in a Sept. 3 post on X, hailed the program's demise, saying, "Good riddance."

CAP was a trial for officers seeking to command battalions and brigades.

The cancellation comes as part of a Pentagon review of officer personnel processes ranging from evaluations to promotions and command selection.

Stuart Scheller, a former Marine lieutenant colonel who was convicted by a court-martial and forced to resign for his public criticism of leaders during the disastrous 2021 Afghanistan evacuation, is leading the review. Scheller did not respond to an email from USA TODAY.

A senior defense official familiar with CAP but not authorized to speak publicly told USA TODAY that Hegseth's office ordered the cancellation without meaningful consultation with the Army.

CAP, which was independent of the officer promotion system, began during President Donald Trump's first administration and became a permanent program in early 2025 after a more than five-year pilot period. The program was modeled after how military special operations units assess and select their members and leaders.

Participants would complete a physical fitness test, have their body fat measured, undergo a psychological evaluation, receive leadership evaluations from former peers and subordinates, and complete verbal and written communication assessments.

An interview panel would anonymously judge the candidate's communication skills based on their performance in an interview setting. Officers deemed "ready" by the panel would then be ranked for command opportunities based on their CAP performance and a review of their personnel file.

According to Michael Arnold, who helped lead CAP development during a nearly six-year term as deputy director of the Army Talent Management Task Force, the program was a "crown jewel" of the service's extensive talent management reforms. The program was designed to spot potentially overlooked talent while also preventing abusive leaders from assuming positions of power.

"Political appointees have absolutely every right to re-look the (command selection) process," said Arnold, now a fellow at the conservative-leaning Hoover Institution think tank. "But to just cancel the best thing they've got going in terms of modernizing the way we ... select people? That seems a little shortsighted."

Before CAP, the Army's battalion and brigade command selection process consisted of a paper file review.

Contributing: Tom Vanden Brook, USA TODAY

# Trump's support for COVID vaccines wavers

## He has history of both praising, doubting shots

Josh Meyer and Ramon Padilla  
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – President Donald Trump demanded Sept. 1 that COVID-19 vaccine manufacturers prove their shots have been effective, adding to his long string of comments alternately praising – and doubting the effectiveness of – the potentially life-saving medication.

"Many people think they are a miracle that saved Millions of lives. Others disagree!" Trump said of COVID-19 drugs, including vaccines made by Pfizer, Moderna and other pharmaceutical companies.

Trump said he wants the CDC to release data "NOW" to "clear up this MESS, one way or the other!!!"

Recently, Trump and his Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. have created controversy with moves such as cutting funding for mRNA vaccine development, putting new restrictions on access to COVID-19 vaccines and firing Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Susan Monarez.

Those actions, and the departure of hundreds, if not thousands, of federal vaccine experts, "endanger the nation's health," a group of more than 1,000 current and former HHS employees said in a Sept. 3 letter demanding Kennedy's resignation.

Yet Trump was initially an enthusiastic proponent of combating COVID-19 through developing and deploying vaccines. In his first term, he championed the "Operation Warp Speed" campaign to develop safe and effective shots for the pandemic.

Here's a timeline of some of Trump's key comments on the issue.

- **April 23, 2020:** At a White House briefing, Trump makes an offhand comment wondering if using disinfectant as an "injection inside or almost a

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