

What's at Stake: An NDAA Veto Will Hurt Military Families and Threaten Our National Security

A Presidential veto of the FY21 National Defense Authorization Act threatens the important policy priorities secured by Democrats to improve support for military personnel and take action on critical matters of national security. It is essential that Congress override any veto and preserve the gains made by the FY21 NDAA.

Providing Support for Military Families and Personnel

The FY21 NDAA will strengthen DOD's response to COVID-19 and continues the work of expanding protections for all federal workers. The bill:

- Includes an across-the-board 3 percent pay raise for all service members, providing an average **increase of \$860 to \$1,500 per year for enlisted troops.**
- Requires the Department of Defense to develop a strategy for pandemic preparedness and review the military health system's response to COVID-19. **More than 89,000 Department of Defense employees, including 60,000 servicemembers, have already contracted COVID** and a more comprehensive strategy is essential to prevent further spread and preserve readiness.
- Provides transitional health benefits for National Guard members and their families who support the Federal response to COVID-19.
- Ensures that Paid Parental Leave provisions from last year's NDAA apply to all Federal government employees and expands anti-discrimination protections for Federal workers.
- Makes substantive policy improvements to fix the privatized housing crisis for military families and adds over \$1.1 billion in additional military construction projects, including multiple child development centers, pier replacements, additional National Guard Readiness Centers, and \$25 million for projects to combat the effects of climate change.

Advancing National Security Priorities

The FY21 NDAA is one of the strongest yet in countering emerging threats and ensuring a robust response to protect American interests.

On China, the bill:

- Counters the threat posed by China to the U.S. and our allies by establishing the Pacific Deterrence Initiative, a new authority for the Department of Defense modeled after the European Deterrence Initiative, and authorizes an additional \$150 million in funding.
- Includes the CHIPS Act, which will support U.S. semiconductor research and manufacturing, and prohibits procurement of covered printed circuit boards ("PCBs") from China.

- Provides Section 333 security assistance authority to help our allies build defenses against Chinese cyberattacks and enhance Air Domain Awareness, as well as providing \$2.5 million to Vietnam, Indonesia, and Thailand for a pilot program to help counter Chinese cyberattacks.
- Requires the Department of Defense to notify Congress prior to basing a major weapons system or additional permanently assigned forces in a host country with network infrastructure provided by at-risk vendors, including Huawei and ZTE.

On other global priorities, the bill:

- Fully funds the European Deterrence Initiative to strengthen efforts to counter Russian aggression and authorizes \$250 million in security assistance to Ukraine. Additionally requires the Secretary of the Treasury to take measures to combat Russian money laundering.
- Establishes the role of a Senate-confirmed National Cyber Director to coordinate cybersecurity policy and requires DOD to establish a program to train personnel on the threat of foreign malign influence across social media.

Protecting Health Care for Veterans

The bill also expands access to health care for veterans and their families. The bill:

- Adds Parkinsonism, bladder cancer, and hypothyroidism to the list of diseases associated with exposure to Agent Orange, **providing access to benefits to an additional 34,000 veterans.**
- Authorizes additional VA care for newborn children of veterans.
- Requires the DOD IG to audit the medical conditions of servicemembers and their families who have lived in unsafe or unhealthy military housing.

Improving Access to Justice for All Americans

In addition to advancement on personnel and national security priorities, the FY21 NDAA includes reforms to the military justice system and the 1033 program. The bill:

- Requires the Secretary of Defense to establish a “safe-to-report” policy allowing survivors to report a sexual assault without being punished for minor misconduct related to the assault.
- Requires a GAO report on implementation of recommendations on actions to improve racial, ethnic, and gender disparities in the military justice system.
- Establishes statutory qualifications for military appellate judges and establishes a higher statutory standard for review of the sufficiency of the evidence by appellate courts reviewing court-martial convictions.
- Reforms the 1033 program to prohibit the transfer of certain weapons of war, including bayonets, grenades, weaponized track combat vehicles, and weaponized drones to state and local law enforcement agencies.

Other Provisions

- The bill requires DOD to, within three years, rename all DOD properties that honor the Confederacy. This provision would also provide \$2 million to establish a commission to create a renaming plan, identify costs, and include local community input.
- The bill finally places limits on 10 U.S.C. 2808, the reprogramming authority President Trump used to take over \$10 billion from DOD to build border wall projects.