



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0916

October 30, 2024

The Honorable Jack Reed
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Roger Wicker
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mike Rogers
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Wicker, Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Smith,

As the House and Senate negotiate the final Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), I write to urge the inclusion of my amendments, which were unanimously approved and included in the House-passed bill.

All 18 of my amendments seek to address the health, safety and security of our active-duty troops and their families as well as improve military readiness and ensure the United States remains the world's preeminent fighting force.

Specifically, one of my amendments instructs the Secretary of Defense to submit a report to the House Armed Services Committee on expanding and improving the Future Soldier Preparatory Course, which has proven to be extremely successful in preparing our young men and women for service and help address military recruitment shortfalls.

Another amendment directs the Department of Defense (DoD) to develop a strategy and education campaign to align programs to help combat obesity within the military.

Shockingly, obesity rates in the military have increased from approximately 10 percent in 2012 to more than 21 percent in 2022, weakening military readiness and costing the Department of Defense nearly \$1.5 billion on an annual basis. It is also the leading contributor to in-service injuries and medical discharges.

Yet another one directs the Secretary of Defense to report on the threat of China's use of artificial intelligence (AI) in their military, such as rifle-toting robot dogs.

Over the last few years, China has prioritized "AI weapons" within the military, including unmanned combat systems, among other innovations that could severely threaten the United States and global peace.

Lastly, one of my amendments requires the Defense Health Agency to report to Congress on ways to increase access to telehealth services, including mental health treatment.

Sadly, of the roughly 63,000 active-duty service members hospitalized in 2023, nearly one-third were there for mental health reason. Furthermore, soldiers are nine times more likely to die by suicide than combat, a trend that has only been rising due to deteriorating mental health issues within the service members.

Please see below for a full list of my House-passed amendments below, which all enjoy broad bipartisan support and will go a long way to addressing some of the most pressing challenges facing our military and our service members.

- Directs the Department of Defense (DOD) to promptly notify the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) about someone transitioning from active-duty service to civilian life with an opioid use disorder to prevent the VA from prescribing opioids to these individuals.
- Instructs the Secretary of Defense to submit a report to the House Armed Services Committee on expanding and improving of the Future Soldier Preparatory Course, which aims to help individuals improve their academic and physical fitness prior to basic training.
- Mandates the Secretary of Defense to study the feasibility of establishing a mentoring program for members of the Armed Forces who are interested in becoming entrepreneurs or founding start-up businesses after their active-duty service.
- Calls on the DOD to continue helping Israel fend off attacks from Hamas by supporting the Iron Dome system.
- Directs the DOD to develop a strategy and education campaign to align programs to help combat obesity within the military.
- Informs DOD that the United States should not be spending more money to house illegal immigrants than we do on housing for America's military families.
- Instructs the Secretary of Defense to create a strategy to support the transition of military aviation mechanics to commercial aviation mechanics after active-duty service.
- Requires the Secretary of Defense to submit a report to Congress on a plan and strategy to construct a memorial at the Arlington National Cemetery to commemorate the 13 servicemembers who died during the chaotic Afghanistan withdrawal.

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- Directs the Secretary of Defense to report on the threat of China's use of AI in the military, such as rifle-toting robot dogs, and the national security threat posed to the U.S.
- Mandates the Secretary of the Army to submit a report to the House Armed Services Committee on the effectiveness of the Optimizing the Human Weapon System Program and include recommendations on actions to improve or expand.
- Requires the Secretary of the Navy to report to Congress on the benefits and feasibility of establishing a training and safety program for operating Assault Amphibious Vehicles.
- Instructs the DOD to conduct a study on the accessibility of mental health care providers and services for members of the Armed Forces serving on active duty.
- Requires the Secretary of Defense to report to Congress on military technology and weapons lost to the Taliban during the disastrous Afghanistan withdrawal.
- Mandates the DOD to maintain prescription drop boxes on all military bases to allow for the safe disposal of unused prescription drugs, including opioids.
- Requires the Director of the Defense Health Agency to conduct a study and report to Congress on how the agency can increase access to telehealth services, including how telehealth can better mental health treatment outcomes.
- Calls on the Secretary of Defense to raise the Family Separation Allowance from \$250 to \$400 per month, as authorized by the FY24 National Defense Authorization Act.
- Instructs the Government Accountability Office to examine ways unmanned vehicles can reduce overall operating costs.
- Calls on the DOD to remain committed to the Philippine's defense against Chinese expansion in the Indo-Pacific.

I thank you for your commitment and dedication to our young men and women who selflessly serve our country in uniform and put it all on the line so that we may continue to enjoy our many freedoms.

Sincerely,



Vern Buchanan
Member of Congress

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