



Left-Right Coalition Urges Senate to Oppose FY20 NDAA Providing For Pentagon Topline of \$750 Billion

June 24, 2019

Dear Senator:

As organizations representing Americans across the ideological spectrum, we are writing to urge you to **vote “no”** on any version of S. 1790, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020, that provides for Pentagon spending of **\$750 billion**.

Current national defense spending is **not driven by necessity**. Indeed, the ever-changing budget levels that emerged from the Trump administration demonstrated that politics guide the President’s budget requests. Less than eight months ago, the Pentagon and Pentagon boosters in Congress were calling for a \$733 billion topline, as President Trump pushed for \$700 billion.¹ The President’s formal request for \$750 billion has been reported to have been an arbitrary “round number” and a “negotiating tactic” to ensure the most Pentagon spending. This level of Pentagon increase remains unacceptable and unwise — even, to borrow the President’s words, **“crazy.”**²

Recent **polling** suggests a majority of the public does not want defense spending increased, and in fact, may prefer substantial reductions.³ 29 percent of Americans say the current level of Pentagon spending is too high while 43 percent (the highest in 15 years) believe the country is spending roughly the right amount already. That means that nearly three-quarters of Americans would not support more of their tax dollars going to the Pentagon, as S. 1790 would.⁴ Citizens are paying attention to policy changes in this area and are increasingly acting on their preferences.⁵

Furthermore, there have been growing calls for substantial reductions from groups and experts across the ideological spectrum and across issue areas nearly all of which seek **elimination, reform, or reduction** of the **Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) account**, the deeply troubled and costly **F-35 program**, **U.S. force structure plans** including expanded **Navy shipbuilding**, the **U.S. nuclear arsenal**, the establishment of a **Space Force**, and **costly inefficiencies** including excess or duplicative personnel, contractors and property.⁶

Many of the aforementioned recommendations draw heavily from the findings of government agencies like the Congressional Budget Office, Government Accountability Office, and the Pentagon itself.⁷ There have similarly been calls for Congress to reject as too high Pentagon spending levels of \$750 billion from women **state legislators from 29 states**, a former high-ranking **Reagan administration Defense Department official**, as well as by coalitions of **left- and right-leaning groups** (including many of the under-signed).⁸

S. 1790 as reported by the Committee on Armed Services expands on last year’s already excessive use of **Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO)** funding to escape budget limits Congress agreed to impose on itself and the Pentagon

nine years ago.⁹ The Government Accountability Office (GAO)¹⁰ and two former Pentagon Comptrollers¹¹ who served in Republican and Democratic administrations are part of the growing chorus calling on Congress to rein in OCO to ensure better use and accounting of taxpayer dollars, especially those used ostensibly for war-making. Acting White House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney previously has decried the use of OCO dollars as a “**slush fund.**”¹² The Pentagon has acknowledged that tens of billions of these OCO dollars supplement “base” budget spending on non-war programs. These abuses should be met by significant reductions, not increases, in the use of OCO funding.

In late 2018, the Department of Defense finally completed—and **failed—a first-ever full financial audit** that every other major federal agency has passed.¹³ No business or private sector employee would expect to see such a failure rewarded with a massive increase in financing or salary. Instead of rewarding the Pentagon with still more of the taxpayers’ billions, the Senate should insist that the Pentagon decrease waste, improve accountability, and prioritize missions.

We urge you to oppose an FY 2020 National Defense Authorization Act that provides three-quarters of a trillion dollars for the Pentagon.

Sincerely,

Campaign for Liberty
Center for International Policy
Coalition to Reduce Spending
DownsizeDC.org, Inc.
FreedomWorks
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Just Foreign Policy
National Priorities Project at the Institute for Policy Studies
National Taxpayers Union

Peace Action
Project On Government Oversight
Taxpayers for Common Sense
Taxpayers Protection Alliance
The United Methodist Church-General Board of Church and Society
Truth in Accounting
Win Without War
Women’s Action for New Directions

Endnotes

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2. Politico, [“Trump reverses course, tells Pentagon to boost budget request to \\$750 billion.”](#) 12/9/18; @realDonaldTrump via [Twitter](#), 12/3/18
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4. Gallup News, [“Demand Wanes for Higher Defense Spending.”](#) 3/12/19
5. Jesse Jackson, [“Mobilizing the Poor People’s Campaign.”](#) 6/17/19. [“Sign the Petition: End Wasteful Military Spending.”](#) Accessed 6/24/19
6. Sustainable Defense Task Force via Center for International Policy, [“Sustainable Defense: More Security. Less Spending.”](#) 6/19/19; Defense News, [“How the Pentagon Can Save Over \\$1.2 Trillion.”](#) 6/19/19. Poor People’s Campaign, Institute for Policy Studies, Repairers of the Breach and Kairos Center for Religious Rights and Social Justice, [“Poor People’s Moral Budget: Everybody Has the Right to Live.”](#) 6/17/19. Project On Government Oversight, [“Spending Smarter, Spending Less: Opportunities to Reduce Excessive Pentagon Spending.”](#) 5/19; Associated Press, [“Liberal Groups Want 2020 Dems to Back Pentagon Spending Cuts.”](#) 5/23/19; Institute for Spending Reform, [“Guide for a Strong America: 21st Century Tradeoffs for Keeping America Safe.”](#) 2/18. Jake Grant, [“Throwing More Money at the Pentagon Doesn’t Make America Safer.”](#) 8/15/18. National Taxpayers Union Foundation and U.S. Public Interest Research Group, [“Toward Common Ground: Bridging the Political Divide with Deficit Reduction Recommendations for Congress.”](#) 6/5/17.
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8. Women’s Legislator Lobby (WiLL), [Budget Letter to Congress](#), 5/20/19; State Representative Kathy Sykes, Clarion Ledger, [“Tax day: Where does our hard-earned money go?”](#) 4/12/19. Lawrence Korb, [“What the FY 2020 Defense Budget Gets Wrong.”](#) 4/29/19. [“Left-Right Statement to the U.S. House of Representatives: Vote ‘No’ on Pentagon Increase in House Democratic Budget Caps Bill \(H.R. 2021\).”](#) 4/8/19.
9. Project On Government Oversight, [Pentagon admits half of War Funding is Slush](#), 10/3/16
10. Government Accountability Office, [“Overseas Contingency Operations: Alternatives Identified to the Approach to Fund War- Related Activities.”](#) 1/28/19
11. Stimson Center, [“First Full Accounting of US Counterterrorism Finds US Has Spent \\$2.8 Trillion.”](#) 5/6/18
12. Mick Mulvaney, [“Mulvaney, Van Hollen, Lee, Sanford Amendment Helps Prevent Abuse of OCO Slush Fund.”](#) 5/19/16
13. The New York Times, [The Pentagon Doesn’t Know Where Its Money Goes](#), 12/1/18