

House overrides Trump veto of military spending bill

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By a huge bipartisan margin, the House of Representatives voted Monday evening to override President Trump's veto of the National Defense Authorization Act. The vote was by 321 to 87, with Democrats voting to override by 211–20, and Republicans by 109–66. Two independents, both anti-Trump former Republicans, split their votes.

The veto override was the first of Trump's presidency, an indication of the slavish subordination of House and Senate Republicans to the ultra-right president. It came only 23 days before Trump is scheduled to leave office, when his successor, Democrat Joe Biden, is to be inaugurated on January 20, 2021.

It is no accident that the veto override came on the bill that sets policy for the Pentagon and authorizes \$740 billion in military spending. A National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) has passed Congress for 60 consecutive years and has never before been vetoed, as both capitalist parties and all previous presidents are on their knees before the US military-intelligence apparatus.

Trump vetoed the legislation only because of disagreements on secondary issues, and because he had been privately informed that his veto would be overridden in both the House and Senate and the bill would become law without his signature.

The objections voiced by Trump were entirely irrelevant to the main thrust of the legislation. He objected to provisions that allowed the Pentagon to review the naming of military bases after Confederate generals and rescind those names over a three-year period. This is expected to take place quickly and include Fort Bragg in North Carolina, Fort Hood in Texas, and Fort Benning in Georgia, three of the most prominent US military compounds.

Trump also insisted that the NDAA be the vehicle for rescinding Section 230 of the Federal Communications Act, which exempts internet platforms and internet service providers from liability for the contents of postings by their users. Section 230 has also been cited by platforms like Facebook and Twitter as giving them authority to apply labels to tweets and postings by Trump that are obviously false, inflammatory or direct incitements to violence.

There is no connection between section 230 and the Pentagon budget, except in Trump's mind. Since the NDAA was certain to pass, the president sought to add a measure directed against the social media companies that were balking at his most outrageous and provocative postings. In reality, the bulk of the censorship by social media companies is directed against left-wing, antiwar and socialist groups, not the racist and fascist right.

None of these issues was discussed in the brief debate in the House of Representatives before the vote to override, which was almost perfunctory.

Representative Mac Thornberry of Texas, the ranking Republican on the House Armed Forces Committee, was the only Republican to speak. His name is in the title of the NDAA this year, a tribute from both parties on the occasion of his retirement after a long career carrying water for the military and defense contractors.

Thornberry thanked his Democratic partners, saying that the bill before House was the "exact same bill. Not a comma has changed" from the bill passed only three weeks earlier. He hailed the legislation for providing "new tools to deal with a newly aggressive China" and maintaining US support to Israel, as well as providing for cyberwar efforts to be directed against Russia. He urged an override of the Trump veto.

The Democratic chairman of the same committee,

Adam Smith of Washington, also urged an override of the veto. He declared, “It is enormously important to give our troops the support that they need to carry out the job that we all are asking them to do.” Echoing Thornberry, he cited the supposed Russian cyberattack on US government facilities, heavily publicized—without any underlying evidence—over the past two weeks, as a particularly important reason for passing the legislation with or without Trump’s support.

The veto override, which has the effect of approving a record outlay for the US military machine, had the support of the entire Democratic leadership, from Speaker Nancy Pelosi on down. While Trump had claimed that China would applaud passage of the NDAA, this was simply more racist demagoguery from the White House. The actual substance of the legislation is to arm American imperialism to the teeth against both major rivals, China and Russia, and against any other country, such as Iran, that might become a target.

The number three House Republican, Liz Cheney of Wyoming, daughter of the former vice president and arch-war monger, supported the override vote, citing particularly the increase in pay for the military. “Congress must uphold its highest responsibility—providing for the defense of this nation—and ensure this bill becomes law,” she declared.

Only two Democrats had opposed the NDAA three weeks ago when it passed the House—Rashida Tlaib of Michigan and Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii. Several other Democrats seeking to strike a “left” or “antiwar” posture chose to vote against the bill and uphold Trump’s veto this time around. These included Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ayanna Pressley, Ilhan Omar, Jesus “Chuy” Garcia of Chicago and the co-leaders of the House Progressive Caucus, Mark Pocan and Pramila Jayapal.

But the total of 20 Democrats opposing the NDAA were safely short of having any impact. While the Republicans failed to muster the two-thirds needed to override, instead marshaling a narrow majority, the 10-1 margin among Democrats was more than enough to ensure that the record spending for the military would move one step closer to enactment.

The Senate is expected to take up the veto override on Tuesday, with Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman James Inhofe of Oklahoma strongly urging a

vote against Trump. “The NDAA has become law every year for 59 years straight because it’s absolutely vital to our national security and our troops. This year must not be an exception,” he said in a statement after Trump’s veto.



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