

# House Republicans load Pentagon bill with anti-abortion, anti-gay provisions

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The annual National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) was only narrowly passed by the Republican-led House of Representatives on Friday, largely along party lines, despite overwhelming bipartisan support for the record military spending proposed in the Biden administration's bill and its blueprint for expanded war against Russia and future war against China.

The 1,200-page bill, which authorizes \$886 billion for fiscal year 2024 (beginning October 1), is loaded with initiatives and funding proposals openly directed against Russia and China, including an additional \$32 billion for nuclear weapons programs at the Energy Department. The bill passed out of the House Armed Services Committee last month by a vote of 58-1.

It authorizes \$300 million in security assistance for Ukraine and \$600 million more than the Biden administration requested to respond to "security threats" in the Indo-Pacific region. It includes increased investment in precision missiles, warships and newer technologies like artificial intelligence and hypersonics, required, according to Biden, to take on China.

It also authorizes a 5.2 percent base pay increase for military personnel and expanded support for their families through housing improvements and increased access to child care, healthcare and education benefits, all deemed necessary to reverse a decline in recruitment.

The House Armed Services Committee posted an outline of the NDAA that includes the heading, "The FY24 NDAA provides the overmatch we need to counter CCP [Chinese Communist Party] aggression."

Among the items in the NDAA that were approved on a bipartisan basis, it lists:

- Extends the Pacific Deterrence Initiative to enhance US deterrence and defense posture in the Indo-Pacific region. Funds the initiative at \$9.7 billion, an increase of \$600 million over Biden's budget request.

- Rejects the Biden administration's effort to reduce the size of the Navy.

- Builds more projection forces (battle force ships and ISR aircraft) than requested to ensure overmatch in a CCP fight.

- Increases funding for innovative new technologies needed

to deter the CCP on future battlefields, including AI, autonomous systems, cyber, mobile micronuclear reactors and high energy lasers.

- Requires the Department of Defense (DOD) to undertake efforts to expand the deployable capacity of US nuclear forces to counter the CCP's unprecedented nuclear buildup.

Despite the bipartisan consensus on this war-mongering plan, on Thursday, far-right members of the Republican Conference prevailed on House Speaker Kevin McCarthy to support a series of amendments embedding the GOP's anti-abortion, anti-gay and anti-DEI ("diversity-equity-inclusion") agenda in the bill. Aimed at mobilizing the Republican Party's right-wing base, the amendments forced the Democratic leadership in the narrowly divided chamber to withdraw its support and call for a vote against the bill.

As a result, the House version of the NDAA, which has passed with broad bipartisan support for the past 60 years, was only approved by a vote of 219 to 210. Four far-right members of the House Freedom Caucus—Andy Biggs (Arizona), Eli Crane (Arizona), Ken Buck (Colorado) and Thomas Massie (Kentucky)—voted against the bill, while four "moderate" Democrats—Don Davis (North Carolina), Jared Golden (Maine), Marie Gluesenkamp Pérez (Washington) and Gabe Vasquez (New Mexico)—voted in favor.

The amendments and their sponsors exuded more than a whiff of fascism and racism. Rep. Crane of Arizona, arguing in a floor speech for his amendment to prohibit the Defense Department from requiring "diversity training," which was ultimately passed, said: "The military was never intended to be inclusive. Its strength is not its diversity. Its strength is its standards." Those, he suggested, were lowered by efforts to recruit minorities.

"My amendment has nothing to do with whether or not colored people or Black people or anybody can serve," he added. Following protests from Democrats over the use of the term "colored people," Crane asked to amend his words to "people of color."

A number of House Republicans lauded the efforts of their fellow Republican in the Senate, Tommy Tuberville of Alabama. Tuberville has held up the confirmation of hundreds

of military officers, including nominees to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and its new chairman, to demand the ending of pro-abortion rights policies in the military.

These included Rep. Ronny Jackson of Texas, who served as Donald Trump's White House physician and who introduced the amendment to the House bill banning the Defense Department from providing paid time off and transportation costs for female soldiers forced to travel out of state to obtain abortion services.

Earlier this week, Tuberville said he had no problem with "white nationalists," whom he considered "Americans," being in the military.

Other Republican amendments included in the House bill include banning a healthcare program from covering hormone treatments for transgender individuals and gender confirmation surgeries, the elimination of all DEI offices at the Pentagon, a ban on books that promote "radical gender ideology," barring the use of affirmative action policies in admissions to the military academies, a prohibition on the Pentagon implementing Biden's executive orders on climate change and a ban on "critical race theory."

However, amendments from a few far-right Republicans limiting spending for the war against Russia in Ukraine and banning the use of cluster munitions were voted down by overwhelming bipartisan majorities, underscoring the basic support in both capitalist parties for the ever-expanding war.

Both parties sought to defend their positions on the grounds that they were necessary to uphold and strengthen US military readiness, prosecute the current war in Europe and prepare for war against China.

"There is absolutely no reason why any Republican should vote against this bill," Armed Services Chairman Mike Rogers (Republican—Alabama) said on the House floor Friday. "It will enhance the congressional oversight of the DOD (Department of Defense). It will improve the quality of life for our service members and their families. And it will help build the ready, capable and lethal fighting force we need to deter the Chinese Communist Party."

Republican Rep. Barry Loudermilk of Georgia said, "House Republicans today passed an NDAA that increases our military's lethality and decreases the wokeness that has been infused in its ranks in recent years."

The Democrats, for their part, framed their criticisms of the Republicans' attack on abortion rights and other democratic issues entirely from the standpoint of military readiness and "national security."

On Thursday, Biden, standing beside Finnish President Sauli Niinistö in Helsinki, called Senator Tuberville's blocking of military appointments "completely irresponsible," adding, "He's jeopardizing US security with what he's doing."

In a briefing to reporters, the Pentagon press secretary, Brig. Gen. Patrick Ryder, confirmed that Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Tuberville spoke Thursday and said Austin

explained that the holds are causing "uncertainty in the force" and jeopardizing "military readiness." All but accusing Tuberville of undermining US war planning, he added that any uncertainty about "incoming or outgoing commanders, and senior leaders, can make it difficult to plan for advanced mission requirements."

Austin himself said much the same, telling CNN's Wolf Blitzer: "This is a national security issue. It's a readiness issue. And we shouldn't kid ourselves. I think any member of the Senate Armed Services Committee knows that."

In the House, Representative Adam Smith of Washington, the top Democrat on the Armed Services Committee, said on the floor Friday morning, "We are opposed to this bill because it is our firm belief that it will undermine our ability to meet the national security objectives of this country."

The Democrats made a point of presenting as their media mouthpieces representatives of what the *World Socialist Web Site* has called the "CIA Democrats," i.e., the growing ranks of Democratic candidates and politicians recruited from the CIA, the State Department and the military. Rep. Abigail Spanberger of Virginia, a former CIA agent, appeared on the cable news networks to denounce the Republican-amended NDAA as inimical to the military and national security.

She was complemented on the news channels by Rep. Seth Moulton of Massachusetts, a former Marine captain who served four combat tours in Iraq. Moulton, a member of the House Armed Services Committee, issued a statement that declared: "At a time when we need to fix the recruitment crisis and focus on future threats, this legislation undermines both. Above all else: it does not adequately support our troops."

The Senate, which has a narrow 51-49 Democratic majority, will begin to debate its version of the NDAA on Tuesday. The eventual Senate bill will no doubt exclude most if not all of the "anti-woke" provisions in the House bill, but the two competing bills will then have to be reconciled and a compromise measure sent to the White House for Biden's signature, which promises to be a contentious process.



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