Durbin Statement On Gao Legal Opinion Finding Trump Administration Violated Law By Withholding Ukraine Military Aid

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WASHINGTON—U.S. Senate Democratic Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL), Vice Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Defense Subcommittee, today released the following statement after the Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a legal opinion, which finds that the Trump Administration's order to hold $250 million in defense aid to Ukraine violated the Impoundment Control Act, a law passed by Congress to rein in Nixon-era abuses. The GAO ruling found that a president can only put a hold on congressionally-approved spending for very limited and temporary purposes, which was not the case with the White House's orders in the summer of 2019.

The unlawful, months-long hold on $250 million in defense aid to Ukraine resulted in $35 million of the funds not being spent before the end of the fiscal year – leading GAO to conclude that the hold was not permissible. Durbin and other Senators wrote to Secretary of Defense Mark Esper on November 18, 2019, urging the Pentagon to spend the remaining funds as quickly as possible. As of late December, about $18 million of those carryover funds remain unspent.

"The Government Accountability Office has a sterling reputation as the non-partisan watchdog of the taxpayer's money. GAO's legal opinion today concludes that President Trump and his Administration violated the law by putting a hold on military aid to Ukraine while that country defends itself against an invasion ordered by Vladimir Putin.

"This is an important ruling that deserves a thorough hearing in the impeachment trial, especially as it relates to the charges of abuse of power. I also hope that this ruling will

convince the Administration to speed delivery of the additional $250 million in military aid to Ukraine approved by Congress last month, as well as the remaining money that was held at the President's direction."

The war in eastern Ukraine began in 2014, and has cost more than 14,000 Ukrainian lives.