

# Durbin Statement On Senate Passage Of NDAA Conference Report

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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 voting for the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 *National Defense Authorization Act* (NDAA) conference report. President Donald Trump has threatened to veto the NDAA over a provision to rename military bases named for Confederate generals and for not including a repeal of Section 230 liability protection for tech companies.

“The Senate’s bipartisan passage of the NDAA shows that members on both sides of the aisle are committed to a strong national defense and to the protection of our women and men in uniform—regardless of petty veto threats from the outgoing President. This is especially important in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacts everyone from new recruits to our seasoned service members and their families. President Trump needs to move past the politics and quickly sign this legislation.”

Durbin-led measures included in the FY21 NDAA are:

- Bill language expressing support for coordinated action to ensure the security of our Baltic allies – Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.
- Bill language welcoming Ukraine into NATO's Enhanced Opportunities Partnership Program.
- Bill language continuing support for the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center in North Chicago, Illinois.

The Senate FY21 NDAA report also included two Durbin-led measures:

- Joint Munitions Command: Report language Durbin requested directing the Army to brief the Committee on the feasibility of a pilot program at the Joint Munitions Command, headquartered at Rock Island Arsenal, for the sustainment of munitions as part of the overall life-cycle management of any given munitions program.
- Military Sexual Trauma: Report language Durbin requested to urge the Defense Department to expeditiously carry out the Military Sexual Trauma pilot program he helped establish in the FY19 NDAA, in partnership with civilian institutions and using new models of care.

Durbin also helped secure the following measures in the FY21 NDAA:

- Renaming Confederate Bases. The bill establishes a commission tasked with removing within three years all names, symbols, displays, monuments, and paraphernalia that honor or commemorate the Confederacy or any Confederate leader from all Defense Department assets.
- Troop Drawdowns. The bill includes certain restrictions on the President's drawdown of American troops from Germany, Afghanistan, and South Korea, as well as reporting requirements to ensure that the Department of Defense conducts thorough risk assessments before any hasty drawdowns take place. In addition, the bill requires an update on efforts to secure the release of Americans detained in Afghanistan. Illinoisan Mark Frerichs was abducted in Afghanistan earlier this year, and Durbin has pressed the Trump Administration to secure his release.
- Military Gear to Law Enforcement. The bill includes provisions placing certain restrictions on transfers of surplus military gear to civilian law enforcement as part of the 1033 program, effectively prohibiting police from obtaining bayonets, grenades, weaponized tracked combat vehicles, and weaponized drones, and

requiring annual training by participating law enforcement agencies in de-escalation of force, and respect for the rights of citizens under the Constitution. The bill also requires federal law enforcement officers and members of the armed forces or National Guard deployed in response to public protests to visibly display their name and agency on their uniform.

- **Agent Orange.** The bill expands the VA's list of medical conditions associated with exposure to Agent Orange to include Bladder Cancer, Hypothyroidism, and Parkinsonism—health conditions that each meet the historical standard for being added to the presumptive list for service-connection as it relates to Agent Orange exposure. Durbin has cosponsored legislation on this and written to President Trump on the matter, as his Administration has been blocking inclusion of these diseases on the Agent Orange presumptive diseases list since 2017.
- **Military Sexual Assault.** The conference report includes a number of provisions aimed at addressing sexual assault and harassment in the military, including creating a task force to study and make recommendations on domestic violence in the military. It would also enable victims to make confidential reports of sexual harassment outside of the chain of command and requires the Department of Defense to implement a safe to report policy and coordinate support with the VA for survivors.
- **PFAS.** The bill includes language incentivizing the development of non-PFAS containing fire-fighting agents, requiring increased notifications about potential PFAS exposure, and increases CDC funding for PFAS research. The bill in total authorizes \$90 million in PFAS testing and \$1.4 billion for environmental remediation.

Earlier this year, the Air Force detected PFAS during site inspections at Scott Air Force Base (AFB), the Peoria Air National Guard Base, and the Capital Air National Guard Base in Springfield, which may be impacting off-base water wells. Since then, Durbin has been pushing for immediate measures to protect the health of residents, including securing funding for PFAS-related clean-up, research, and mitigation work at and near military bases as Vice Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Defense Subcommittee.