

Streamline Pentagon Spending Act of 2024

Senators Elizabeth Warren, Mike Braun, Mike Lee, and Chuck Grassley

Background:

For decades the military services have submitted wish lists, referred to as “unfunded priorities lists,” to Congress on top of their annual budget submissions.¹ Unlike agencies’ annual budget submissions,² these wish lists often fail to consider the long term costs of these investments over the future years defense plan (FYDP).³ As a consequence, these lists can distort the force and undermine the overall budget process.⁴

Former Defense Secretary Robert Gates made curtailing these lists a center piece of his broader Department of Defense reform efforts, which led to shrinking the size of these lists by nearly 90 percent.⁵ The fiscal year 2017 National Defense Authorization Act created a statutory requirement for the chiefs of staff of the military services to provide these lists annually.⁶ Subsequent defense bills have expanded this requirement to other defense agencies and components.⁷

In 2023 the Department of Defense endorsed repealing the statutory requirement to provide these wish lists, saying the process has “no necessary connection to the Secretary’s global priorities” and was “not an effective way to illuminate our top joint priorities.”⁸

The Streamline Pentagon Budgeting Act

The Streamline Pentagon Budgeting Act would repeal statutory requirements to provide unfunded priorities lists, reduce wasteful reporting burdens, and enhance civilian oversight over the budgetary process. Specifically, the legislation:

- Repeals the requirement for the top military officers to provide unfunded priorities lists.
- Repeals the requirement for combatant commanders to provide unfunded priorities lists.
- Repeals the requirement for the Missile Defense Agency to provide unfunded priorities lists.
- Repeals the requirement for the Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering to provide unfunded priorities lists.
- Repeals the requirement for the National Nuclear Security Administration to provide unfunded priorities lists.

¹ National Taxpayers Union, “Congress Should Do Away with Unfunded Priorities Lists, a Multibillion-Dollar Wish List Boondoggle,” Andrew Lautz, March 31, 2021, p. 2, <https://www.ntu.org/library/doclib/2021/03/Congress-Should-Do-Away-With-DoD-Unfunded-Priorities-Lists-A-Multibillion-Dollar-Wish-List-Boondoggle.pdf>.

² Congressional Research Service, “Defense Primer: Future Years Defense Program (FYDP),” December 15, 2021, p. 1, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/natsec/IF10831.pdf>.

³ 10 U.S.C. § 222a.

⁴ Congressional Research Service, “Defense Primer: Department of Defense Unfunded Priorities,” November 9, 2021, p. 1, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/natsec/IF11964.pdf>.

⁵ Time, “Gates Takes Aim at the Military’s Spending Wish Lists,” Mark Thompson, July 17, 2009, <http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1911152,00.html>.

⁶ National Taxpayers Union, “Congress Should Do Away with Unfunded Priorities Lists, a Multibillion-Dollar Wish List Boondoggle,” Andrew Lautz, March 31, 2021, p. 3, <https://www.ntu.org/library/doclib/2021/03/Congress-Should-Do-Away-With-DoD-Unfunded-Priorities-Lists-A-Multibillion-Dollar-Wish-List-Boondoggle.pdf>.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren, “Department of Defense Recognizes Ineffectiveness of ‘Wish List’ Spending, Endorses Senator Warren’s Proposal to Repeal Requirement,” Press Release, March 28, 2023, <https://www.warren.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/department-of-defense-recognizes-ineffectiveness-of-wish-list-spending-endorses-senator-warrens-proposal-to-repeal-requirement>.