

The Honorable Representative Adam Smith
Chairman
House Armed Services Committee
2264 Rayburn House Office Building

The Honorable Representative Mac Thornberry
Ranking Member
House Armed Services Committee
2208 Rayburn House Office Building

The Honorable Senator James Inhofe
Chairman
Senate Armed Services Committee
205 Russell Senate Office Building

The Honorable Senator Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Senate Armed Services Committee
728 Hart Senate Office Building

April 7, 2020

Dear Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Thornberry, Chairman Inhofe, and Ranking Member Reed,

We write to you to express our alarm at recent reports indicating that the Department of Defense has issued a legislative proposal that would shroud its spending plans in further secrecy. We strongly oppose this proposal and urge you to ensure that it is excluded from the chairman's mark of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021.

Specifically, a Pentagon proposal for the pending FY2021 NDAA¹ would eliminate a longstanding requirement that the Defense Department submit an unclassified version of the Future Years Defense Program (FYDP) database to Congress.² As you know, this required annual disclosure maps the Pentagon's expected expenditures for the next five years, and serves as a critical tool for transparency and accountability.

A Department that currently touts a budget of more than \$738 billion,³ is unable to pass an audit,⁴ and already over-classifies information⁵ should not be permitted to obscure its financial projections. The unclassified FYDP disclosures enable American taxpayers and their elected representatives to openly view and vet Pentagon spending expectations and hold the Department accountable for deviations. The notion that such information should remain classified flouts transparency and common sense. There is no plausible way such information disclosure weakens national security; and there is no way for the public to engage in a sensible debate about Pentagon spending policy without it. Classifying the outyear budget projection for specific programs will also serve as a way to hide cost overruns, particularly in procurement.

We appreciate that your committees have consistently stood up for the public's right to know and to hold government officials accountable, including rebuffing attempts by the Department to circumvent open

¹ <https://fas.org/blogs/secrecy/2020/03/ndaa-fydp/>

² <https://fas.org/man/eprint/ndaa-2021-prop/03062020-fydp.pdf>

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<https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/FY20%20NDAA%20Conference%20Summary%20-%20FINAL.pdf>

⁴ Norquist: With 2 Audits Done, DOD Still Has Work to Do, DoD News, November 20, 2019, <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2022270/norquist-with-2-audits-done-dod-still-has-work-to-do/>

⁵ <https://www.pogo.org/analysis/2019/12/the-pentagon-war-on-transparency/>

government laws.⁶ Attempts to further restrict access to budget information for vague and unsupported security concerns severely jeopardize oversight and accountability efforts. For these reasons, we urge you to ensure that this provision be excluded from the upcoming FY21 NDAA chairman's mark.

Respectfully,

American Friends Service Committee
Beyond the Bomb
CODEPINK
Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation
Center for International Policy
Church of the Brethren Office of Peacebuilding and Policy
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington
Council for a Livable World
Demand Progress
Federation of American Scientists
FreedomWorks
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Friends of the Earth U.S.
Global Zero
Government Accountability Project
Government Information Watch
Greenpeace USA
Indivisible
National Coalition Against Censorship
National Priorities Project at the Institute for Policy Studies
National Taxpayers Union
Open the Government
Pax Christi USA
Peace Action
Project On Government Oversight
Public Citizen
R Street Institute
Social Security Works
Society of Professional Journalists
Society of Professional Journalists Freedom of Information Committee
Taxpayers Protection Alliance
Taxpayers for Common Sense
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
Veterans for Peace
Win Without War
Women's Action for New Directions

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<https://www.pogo.org/letter/2018/05/civil-society-warns-against-pentagons-repeat-foia-secrecy-exemption-ask/>; <https://www.pogo.org/letter/2016/04/dod-tries-to-amend-foia-through-ndaa-again/>;
<https://www.pogo.org/letter/2017/06/civil-society-opposes-dods-requested-foia-expansion-again/>