

Statement: Congress Must Stop Locking the American People Out of Pentagon Budget Negotiations

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End closed-door markups on the Pentagon budget and appropriations

This week, key committees in Congress are holding closed-door discussions on President Trump's proposal for a \$1.5 trillion Pentagon budget. By locking journalists and the public out of the room, the Senate Armed Services Committee and House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense are engaging in an outrageous violation of the basic values of transparency and democracy in the United States. While these committees have often closed their defense bill markups to the public, the House Armed Services Committee maintains a process that is open to the public. At a time of extraordinary corruption, the American public has the right to know what is happening in the room when Members of Congress negotiate over whether \$1.5 trillion is really needed, and for what.

Beginning [today](#) in the U.S. Senate and [Thursday](#) in the House of Representatives, the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) and the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense will hold closed-door markups of their response to the President's \$1.5 trillion Pentagon budget request. These committee markups must be opened to the public immediately.

The administration's proposed National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) budget would increase Pentagon funding by \$250 billion up front, increasing last year's roughly \$900 billion budget to \$1.15 trillion annually. Its explicitly stated goal is to ultimately increase the Pentagon budget to \$1.5 trillion later this year. Last year, Congress already increased Pentagon funding by \$150 billion in H.R. 1, with little bipartisan discussion of whether and how this addresses real security needs. Much of that money remains unspent. To make room for the proposed \$1.5 trillion Pentagon budget, the administration's overall FY2027 budget request proposes further slashing funding for health care, housing, food, education, climate action, and other human needs. If Congress believes the Pentagon needs \$1.5 trillion, they should be prepared to discuss it publicly.

There is no justifiable reason for these committees to hold secret negotiations on the Pentagon budget and appropriations. Any legitimate concerns regarding classified information could be addressed by pausing debate to briefly close the session. Just last week, the U.S. House of Representatives Armed Services Committee (HASC)

conducted a public debate over their version of the NDAA Pentagon budget. During those open debates, Rep. Seth Moulton and 24 Democrats voted to cut Trump's budget by \$150 billion, and 12 Democrats voted publicly against the final bill.

In the past, both Republican and Democratic senators have [voted against deciding the text of the NDAA and Pentagon budget in a closed session](#). Former Senator Claire McCaskill (D-MO) opened her Armed Services subcommittee markups to the public. She stated [at a hearing in 2012](#), "The public deserves to be able to witness, understand, and scrutinize the positions being advocated and the decisions being made by their elected leaders regarding an over half a trillion dollar defense budget and the associated policies that impact our national defense." At the same hearing, Senator Kelly Ayotte (R-NH) agreed: "Given what is at stake, I think that the American people deserve to know what is happening, deserve to know what decisions we are making."

The Pentagon is unaccountable to American taxpayers, having never passed an audit, while more than half of its budget (54 percent) is paid to corporate military contractors. The Senate Armed Services Committee and House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense must stop locking the American people out of their negotiations on the Pentagon budget. It is time to end congressional secrecy on Pentagon funding and let the public into the room.

Organizational Signatories:

**Coalition on Human Needs
Project on Government Oversight
Public Citizen**