

## **Streamline Pentagon Spending Act**

*Senators Elizabeth Warren, Mike Braun, Mike Lee, and Angus King*

### **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.<sup>1</sup> Unlike agencies’ annual budget submissions,<sup>2</sup> these wish lists do not include information about the long term costs of these investments over the future years defense plan (FYDP).<sup>3</sup> As a consequence, these lists can distort the force and undermine the overall budget process.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> Subsequent defense bills have expanded this requirement to other defense agencies and components.<sup>7</sup>

Recently this practice has been abused by placing programs that belong in the base budget in the unfunded priorities list. For example, the Government Accountability Office’s review of the impact of the Navy’s unfunded priorities lists impact on multiyear procurement found, “the Navy was not required to explain this decision to Congress, leading to the concerns that it was engaging in budgetary maneuvers that impede congressional oversight and decision-making.”<sup>8</sup> This year the Army included needed construction and upgrades for military housing in the unfunded priorities lists in a similar form of gamesmanship.<sup>9</sup>

### **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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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>.

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

<sup>3</sup> 10 U.S.C. § 222a.

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

<sup>5</sup> 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>.

<sup>6</sup> 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>.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> Government Accountability Office, “Multiyear Procurement: Navy Should Provide Congress More Complete Information on Budget Request Decisions,” August 8, 2022, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-22-105966>.

<sup>9</sup> Roll Call, “Bipartisan Criticism for Army’s Housing Budget,” Andrew Clevenger, May 5, 2022, <https://rollcall.com/2022/05/05/bipartisan-criticism-for-armys-housing-budget/>.