



Primer: Key Policy Reforms for the FY2026 National Defense Authorization Act

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Synopsis

The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) is authorization legislation introduced and reported each year by the House and Senate Committees on Armed Services.¹ The act sets policy and authorizes appropriations for the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) and national security programs within the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE).² The FY2025 NDAA authorized \$883.7 billion in defense spending.³ While the NDAA alone does not provide funding, historically, the legislation has served as an indicator of congressional views on funding for defense activities.⁴ Yet, it is the underlying statutory provisions within the NDAA that steer these resources toward both short- and long-term priorities while also cultivating the culture of the United States military. In that regard, the NDAA is relatively unique among legislative vehicles.

Since taking office in January 2025, President Donald Trump and his Secretary of Defense, Pete Hegseth, have taken actions to restore America's military after the Biden administration infused it with woke and weaponized policies and incentive structures not based on merit. These destructive initiatives jeopardized the security of the United States, prioritizing radical and divisive ideologies ahead of the safety of the American people and the interests of the republic. An all-hands-on-deck effort is required to reorient the Pentagon's mission back toward maximum deterrence against emerging threats and, if necessary, maximum lethality against our enemies. Achieving this goal will take years. Nevertheless, these reforms must be the sustained focus of leaders in the administration as well as congressional lawmakers.

Assessing the Terrain: What Has Been Accomplished So Far

The Trump administration acted swiftly to begin restoring the American military to preeminence after a debilitating lack of leadership under President Joe Biden. The catastrophic execution of the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the indefensible decision to become embroiled in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and the feckless efforts to appease America's enemies in Tehran and Beijing scrambled America's defense posture. Further, the Biden administration's emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives within the Pentagon and throughout the service branches rattled the foundations of the military's task and purpose, intentionally corroding the

¹ McGarry (May 2, 2024). "FY2024 NDAA Funding Authorizations and Legislative Activity: In Brief," *Congressional Research Service*.

<https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R48057?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%22national+defense+authorization+act%22%7D&s=1&r=2>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

military culture to focus more on appeasing faculty lounge radicals than defeating America's enemies. The mission to renew America's military is a monumental one. So far, President Trump and Secretary Hegseth have taken the following critical steps towards restoring the integrity of the military profession:

President Trump's Selected Executive Actions

- Prioritizing Military Excellence and Readiness (Executive Order 14183)⁵
 - Directs the secretary of defense to formulate a new policy regarding transgender service members with specific emphasis on gender dysphoria being a disqualifying medical condition for active duty service
- Restoring America's Fighting Force (Executive Order 14185)⁶
 - Orders the abolition of every DEI office within the Department of Defense
- Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity (Executive Order 14173)
 - Among other actions that rescind DEI considerations from federal employment, specifically terminates an Obama-era memorandum from 2016: "Promoting Diversity and Inclusion in the National Security Workforce."

Secretary Hegseth's Selected Actions

- Restoring America's Fighting Force (Memorandum)⁷
 - Implements President Trump's executive order and lays out the following actions the Defense Department needs to take:
 - Asserts that the DOD will not consider sex, race, or ethnicity when considering individuals for promotion, command, or special duty
 - Eliminates quotas and articulates that no DOD component will establish sex-based, race-based, or ethnicity-based goals for organizational composition, academic admission, or career fields⁸
 - Bans critical race theory (CRT) and establishes that the DOD will not provide instruction on CRT, DEI, or gender ideology as part of a curriculum or for purposes of workforce training
 - Mandates that U.S. service academies and other defense academic institutions teach that America and its founding documents remain the most powerful force for good in human history

⁵ Executive Order (January 27, 2025). "Prioritizing Military Excellence and Readiness," *The White House*. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/prioritizing-military-excellence-and-readiness/>

⁶ Executive Order (January 27, 2025). "Restoring America's Fighting Force," *The White House*. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/restoring-americas-fighting-force/>

⁷ Memorandum (January 29, 2025). "Restoring America's Fighting Force," *Department of Defense*.

<https://media.defense.gov/2025/Jan/29/2003634987/-1/-1/1/RESTORING-AMERICAS-FIGHTING-FORCE.PDF>

⁸ Ibid.

- Orders that all advisory boards, councils, and working groups must cease operations related to gender ideology, DEI, and CRT
- Additional Guidance on Prioritizing Military Excellence and Readiness (Memorandum)⁹
 - Sets the policy that transgender individuals are ineligible for military service and declares that no funds from the Department of Defense will be used to pay for sex reassignment surgeries or genital reconstruction surgeries as a treatment for gender dysphoria
- Combat Arms Standards (Memorandum)¹⁰
 - Directs the secretaries of the military departments to develop comprehensive plans to distinguish combat arms occupations from noncombat arms occupations. The plans must address the following:
 - Standards for ground combat occupations should emphasize the ability to carry heavy loads, endure prolonged physical exertion, and perform effectively in austere, hostile environments.
 - Standards for special forces operations must be equally rigorous, incorporating advanced swimming, climbing, parachuting, and the ability to operate in extreme environments.
 - For certain specialized occupations such as Navy Divers, the focus should be on sustained endurance, which is necessary to endure long hours in physically and mentally taxing conditions.
- Review of Medical Conditions Disqualifying for Accession into the Military (Memorandum)¹¹
 - Directs a review of existing medical standards for enlistment, induction, or appointment into military service

The Trump administration has done a lot of heavy lifting when it comes to purging woke and weaponized elements from the military. To make these reforms permanent, however, Congress must codify these actions into law. As the House and Senate begin drafting the FY2026 NDAA, they should incorporate the Trump administration's actions and consider addressing remaining woke and weaponized paradigms during the bill's drafting phase and amendment process.

⁹ Memoranduma (February 26, 2025). "Additional Guidance on Prioritizing Military Excellence and Readiness," Department of Defense.
https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Spotlight/2025/Guidance_For_Federal_Policies/Prioritizing_Military_Excellence_and_Readiness_P&R_Guidance.pdf

¹⁰ Memoranduma (March 30, 2025). "Combat Arms Standards," Department of Defense.
<https://media.defense.gov/2025/Mar/31/2003678527/-1/-1/1/COMBAT-ARMS-STANDARDS.PDF>

¹¹ Memoranduma (April 24, 2025). "Review of Medical Conditions Disqualifying for Accession into the Military," Department of Defense.
<https://media.defense.gov/2025/Apr/28/2003698967/-1/-1/1/REVIEW-OF-MEDICAL-CONDITIONS-DISQUALIFYING-FOR-ACCESSION-INTO-THE-MILITARY.PDF>

Policy Recommendations: Congressional Focus Areas

The NDAA maintains a longstanding tradition of *attempting* to be bipartisan and “noncontroversial.” The desire, particularly by members of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees, to operate in this manner is commendable. It harkens back to eras when politics truly ended at the proverbial water’s edge concerning the nation’s defense. As such, policymakers typically draft the NDAA in a manner that garners the most bipartisan consensus, leaving hot-button policy matters to the amendment process.

The Armed Services Committees’ leadership will prioritize consensus for the FY2026 NDAA, but the Biden administration’s infusion of woke and weaponized policies into the Pentagon means that uprooting such provisions in the bill’s text must be a priority. The process of *removing* such harmful and radical provisions, especially when those provisions in practice would run afoul of civil rights protections provided in every other agency of the federal government, should be a bipartisan effort. In future bills, committee members should ensure that the baseline text includes prohibitions on these radical and discriminatory ideologies as the de facto operating paradigm within the Department of Defense.

Assuming a healthy NDAA amendment process on both the House and Senate floors, the following policy areas must be core priorities for final passage of this critical piece of legislation.

1. Ban DEI from the U.S. Military

DEI programs harm the mission and structure of the armed forces and waste valuable DOD resources, trampling over the core principle of merit-based considerations. The explicit embrace of DEI also undermines the public’s confidence in the military and erodes mission focus. The Center for Renewing America has long recommended that DEI offices be prohibited from the service academies and in all other areas under the purview of the Department of Defense.¹² As demonstrated above, the Trump administration has purged all advisory boards, councils, and working groups related to DEI, along with DEI training.¹³ Congress should consolidate these gains and build into the FY2026 NDAA provisions that ban any DEI initiative or DEI-like initiative from guiding any aspect of decision-making in the U.S. Armed Forces.

Gaps to Fill

Key areas that need to be codified within the NDAA include the following:

1. Statutory prohibition on DEI practices throughout the Department of Defense, including prohibitions on DEI offices and termination of all personnel associated with such offices

¹² Model Legislation (March 7, 2024). “Vehicles for Restoring the United States Armed Forces,” *Citizens for Renewing America*.

<https://citizensrenewingamerica.com/issues/model-legislation-vehicles-for-restoring-the-united-states-armed-forces/>

¹³ Memorandum (January 29, 2025). “Restoring America’s Fighting Force,” *Department of Defense*.

<https://media.defense.gov/2025/Jan/29/2003634987/-1/-1/1/RESTORING-AMERICAS-FIGHTING-FORCE.PDF>

2. Statutory prohibition on the Department of Defense from ever adopting an “equity action plan” or any other department-wide, service branch–wide, or unit-wide initiative that prioritizes DEI practices
3. Prohibition on offices from reconstituting as permutations of DEI initiatives in a way that prevents the application of DEI policy by a different name

Model Language Example

SEC. 1 DEFINITIONS

(A) For the purposes of this Act, the following are defined as

- (1) “Discriminatory ideology” shall refer to ideologies, practices, theories, and initiatives that inculcate belief in, implementation of, or adherence to efforts and policies that determine an individual’s moral character, workplace value, and societal worth by the individual’s race, color, ethnicity, national origin, religion, or biological sex.
- (2) “Gender identity ideology” shall refer to ideologies, practices, theories, and initiatives that inculcate belief in, implementation of, or adherence to efforts and policies that affirm that an individual’s subjective sense of belonging to a particular sex does not necessarily match his or her biological sex; that gender is defined on the basis of societal roles, behaviors, stereotypes, and other attributes typically associated with that sex; and that gender operates on a fluid spectrum as opposed to the biological binary of the male and female sexes.
- (3) “Race or sex stereotyping” shall refer to ideologies, practices, initiatives, programs, or activities that inculcate belief in, implementation of, or adherence to efforts and policies that ascribe character traits, values, moral and ethical codes, privileges, status, or beliefs to a race or sex, or to an individual because of his or her race or sex.
- (4) “Racial discrimination” shall refer to ideologies, practices, initiatives, programs, or activities that inculcate belief in, implementation of, or adherence to efforts and policies that determine whether an individual, by virtue of the individual’s race, should be actively or passively discriminated against or receive adverse treatment.
- (5) “Racist ideology” shall refer to ideologies, practices, initiatives, programs, or activities that inculcate belief in, implementation of, or adherence to efforts and policies that determine or insinuate that an individual, by virtue of the individual’s race, is inherently racist or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously.
- (6) “Racial scapegoating” shall refer to ideologies, practices, initiatives, programs, or activities that inculcate belief in, implementation of, or adherence to efforts and policies that determine or insinuate that an individual, because of the individual’s race, bears responsibility for the actions committed by other members of the individual’s race, color, ethnicity, or national origin, or determine or insinuate that an individual should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological or emotional distress on account of the individual’s race, color, ethnicity, or national origin.
- (7) “Revisionist history” shall refer to ideologies, practices, initiatives, programs, or activities that inculcate belief in, implementation of, or adherence to efforts and policies that declare or insinuate that the United States is a fundamentally racist country; that the United States is uniquely culpable for the promulgation of slavery; that the true founding of the nation occurred prior to the signing of the Declaration of Independence; that the

Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, or the Federalist Papers are fundamentally racist documents; or that the core identity of the United States is marked by discrimination.

SEC. 2 PROHIBITION ON DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION PRACTICES THROUGHOUT THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

(A) None of the funds authorized to be appropriated by this Act or otherwise made available for the Department of Defense for fiscal year 2026 or any fiscal year thereafter may be used to discriminate or to use quotas in selection, recruitment, promotion, or any other duty- or service-oriented assignment on the basis of race, ethnicity, or sex.

(B) None of the funds authorized to be appropriated by this Act or otherwise made available for the Department of Defense for fiscal year 2026 or any fiscal year thereafter may be used to create or operate offices, train or assign Defense Department personnel, or hire third-party contractors that practice or promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging or any other discriminatory ideology, gender identity ideology, race or sex stereotyping, racial discrimination, racist ideology, racial scapegoating, or revisionist history as defined in Section 1(A) of this Act.

(C) The employment of all personnel of such offices and the contracts provided to any third-party entities that practice diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging or any other discriminatory ideology, gender identity ideology, race or sex stereotyping, racial discrimination, racist ideology, racial scapegoating, or revisionist history as defined in Section 1(A) of this Act are hereby terminated upon enactment.

SEC. 3 PROHIBITION ON DEPARTMENT ACTION PLANS PROMOTING DIVISIVE CONCEPTS

(A) None of the funds authorized to be appropriated by this Act or otherwise made available for the Department of Defense for fiscal year 2026 or any fiscal year thereafter may be used to disseminate, advance, promote, or implement a department-wide, service branch-wide, agency-wide, or unit-wide initiative, action plan, or memorandum that practices or promotes diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging or any other discriminatory ideology, gender identity ideology, race or sex stereotyping, racial discrimination, racist ideology, racial scapegoating, or revisionist history as defined in Section 1(A) of this Act.

2. Restore Merit and Eliminate Woke Discrimination in the U.S. Military

The Biden administration, and the establishment writ large well before it, spent the last several years turning the U.S. military from a lethal fighting force into a sex- and race-based quota factory.¹⁴ Most brazen was the Biden–Austin Pentagon’s Strategic Management Plan of 2022–2026, in which Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks established race and sex quotas for all personnel categories throughout the department.¹⁵ The Trump administration has sought to address this situation by eliminating quotas and articulating that no component of the

¹⁴ YouTube Video (July 26, 2021). “US Army - Emma, The Calling #GOARMY (2021),” *Marketing The Rainbow*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C8-Yslv4PME>

¹⁵ Report (March 2023). “DoD Strategic Management Plan, Fiscal Years 2022–2026, *Department of Defense*. “<https://media.defense.gov/2023/Mar/13/2003178168/-1/-1/1/DOD-STRATEGIC-MGMT-PLAN-2023.PDF>

Department of Defense will establish sex-based, race-based, or ethnicity-based goals for organizational composition, academic admission, or career fields.¹⁶ Congress should codify these prohibitions and consider incorporating language in the FY2026 NDAA that applies Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to the Department of Defense and create a companion clause in the Uniform Code of Military Justice.¹⁷ While a combat effectiveness clause concerning sex is likely necessary for specific combat-related roles, this approach would prohibit the military from discriminating based on race, sex, color, religion, or national origin in its organizational practices.¹⁸ The Center has called for a reestablishment of the primacy of merit while acknowledging basic biological realities of the male and female sexes. Identitarian and woke qualifications cannot be allowed to determine selections for promotion, benefits, or any other kind of single selection.¹⁹

Gaps to Fill

Key areas that need to be codified within the NDAA include the following:

1. Statutory prohibition on consideration of race or ethnicity in service academy admissions
2. Statutory prohibition on consideration of sex, race, or ethnicity concerning promotions, transfers, duty assignments, and other service-related changes

Model Language Example

SEC. 1 PROHIBITION ON RACE OR ETHNICITY IN SERVICE ACADEMY ADMISSIONS.

(A) None of the funds authorized to be appropriated by this Act or otherwise made available for the military service academies for fiscal year 2026 or any fiscal year thereafter may be used to discriminate or to use quotas in admissions on the basis of race or ethnicity. None of the funds authorized should be used to even measure the racial composition of service academy admissions classes.

(B) None of the funds authorized to be appropriated by this Act or otherwise made available for the military service academies for fiscal year 2026 or any fiscal year thereafter may be used to include race, ethnicity, or gender as a criterion for acceptance into or consideration for the military service academies.

(C) PENALTY. Notwithstanding any other provision of the law, any individual employed by or contracted to work for the U.S. Military Academy, U.S. Naval Academy, or U.S. Air Force Academy that promotes, practices, or advocates for race-based policies referred to in Section 1(A) shall be subject to investigation under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 or, if the employee is a member of the armed forces, shall be subject to punitive articles under 10 U.S. Code 47 § 934.

¹⁶ Memorandum (January 29, 2025). “Restoring America’s Fighting Force,” *Department of Defense*.

<https://media.defense.gov/2025/Jan/29/2003634987/-1/-1/1/RESTORING-AMERICAS-FIGHTING-FORCE.PDF>

¹⁷ Brown and Miller (February 21, 2025). “Congress’s Role in the Elimination of DEI and Other Radical Ideologies,” *Citizens for Renewing America*.

<https://citizensrenewingamerica.com/issues/congresss-role-in-the-elimination-of-dei-and-other-radical-ideologies/>

¹⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁹ Model Legislation (March 7, 2024). “Vehicles for Restoring the United States Armed Forces,” *Citizens for Renewing America*.

<https://citizensrenewingamerica.com/issues/model-legislation-vehicles-for-restoring-the-united-states-armed-forces/>

SEC. 2 PROHIBITION ON DATA COLLECTION FOR RACE, ETHNICITY, OR GENDER IN SERVICE ACADEMY PROGRAMS.

(A) None of the funds authorized to be appropriated by this Act or otherwise made available for the military service academies for fiscal year 2026 or any fiscal year thereafter may be used to collect, track, or use data regarding a cadet or midshipman's race, ethnicity, or sex for anything other than passive internal knowledge on annual class composition.

(B) Such knowledge may only be internally assessed at the end of an academic year.

SEC. 3 PROHIBITION ON RACE, ETHNICITY, OR GENDER IN DUTY OR SERVICE-RELATED ASSIGNMENTS.

(A) None of the funds authorized to be appropriated by this Act or otherwise made available for the Department of Defense for fiscal year 2026 or any fiscal year thereafter may be used to consider or achieve quotas in selection, recruitment, promotion, demotion, discharge, transfer, reassignment, or any other duty- or service-oriented assignment on the basis of race, ethnicity, or sex.

(B) None of the funds authorized to be appropriated by this Act or otherwise made available for the Department of Defense for fiscal year 2026 or any fiscal year thereafter may be used to include race, ethnicity, or sex as a consideration by any department employee for the selection, recruitment, promotion, demotion, or discharge of any other department employee.

3. Reform Fitness Standards

As recently as 2023, reports indicate nearly 70 percent of active service members are overweight.²⁰ The Trump administration has sought to address this problem by aggressively redefining combat role standards and implementing sex-neutral fitness standards to ensure that America's fighting force is ready to confront any adversary.²¹ The FY2026 NDAA must include provisions codifying the Trump administration's actions in this area. The Center has previously published proposed model legislation that mandates a baseline, uniform physical fitness test for men and women across the branches, consistent with the Army Physical Fitness Test's grading and evaluation scale as it existed on January 1, 2020.²²

Gaps to Fill

Key areas that need to be codified within the NDAA include the following:

1. Statutory adoption of the sex-neutral fitness standard as outlined in the previously mentioned model legislation

Model Language Example

²⁰ Myers (October 13, 2023). "Nearly 70% of Active Service Members Are Overweight, Report Finds," *Military Times*. <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2023/10/13/nearly-70-of-active-service-members-are-overweight-report-finds/>

²¹ Wolfe (April 22, 2025). "Female Soldiers Will Have to Pass 'Sex-Neutral' Physical Test, U.S. Army Says," *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/22/us/new-army-fitness-test-women.html>

²² Model Legislation (March 7, 2024).: "Vehicles for Restoring the United States Armed Forces," *Citizens for Renewing America*. <https://citizensrenewingamerica.com/issues/model-legislation-vehicles-for-restoring-the-united-states-armed-forces/>

SEC. 1 PHYSICAL FITNESS TEST.

(A) IN GENERAL. The physical fitness test of record for the U.S. Army, U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Air Force, and U.S. Space Force must adhere to sex-neutral fitness standards with implementation no later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

Notwithstanding any other provision of the law, these sex-neutral fitness standards must adopt a grading and evaluation scale that is at least as rigorous as Department of Defense Instruction 1308.03 as it existed on January 1, 2020. All uniformed service members must meet the fitness standards, as determined by each branch of the armed forces, that would be expected during a time of active military engagement. This test shall be the baseline test of physical fitness for members of the service branches and shall be administered at least annually, except when operational requirements or contingency operations would make such administration impracticable. In instances such as the Army's removing the leg tuck from the Army Combat Fitness Test, the military should restore fitness events previously subject to removal due to perceived sex-based discrepancies in results.

(B) UPDATES AND MODIFICATIONS. Notwithstanding subsection (A), each of the service branches may update, replace, or modify the events and scoring standards as the needs of each service branch require after a robust pilot and testing period of at least twelve months. Such modifications shall take effect no later than six months after the secretary of the relevant service branch has provided a briefing on these new modifications to members of the House Armed Services Committee and Senate Armed Services Committee. No modification, update, or replacement can be less rigorous than Department of Defense Instruction 1308.03 as it existed on January 1, 2020, and must be of equal, similar, or greater difficulty.

(C) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION. Nothing in this section prohibits the service branches from using Department of Defense Instruction 1308.03 as it existed on January 1, 2020, or any other physical assessment the branches may develop, as a supplemental tool to assess physical fitness for all or parts of the force. Service branch commanders may also require higher standards than the existing grading scale for promotions, awards, schools, and similar actions. Such enhanced supplemental assessments shall not constitute the baseline physical fitness assessment of record for the service branches unless it is adopted using the procedure described in subsection (B).

SEC. 2 SEX-NEUTRAL HIGH FITNESS STANDARDS FOR ARMY CLOSE COMBAT FORCE MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTIES.

(A) IMPLEMENTATION. Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of the Army shall implement sex-neutral fitness standards on the Army Combat Fitness Test that are enhanced in each tested category for members in the following military occupational specialties or areas of concentration:

- (1) 11A
- (2) 11B
- (3) 11C
- (4) 12A
- (5) 12B
- (6) 13A
- (7) 13F
- (8) 18A
- (9) 18B
- (10) 18C

- (11) 18D
- (12) 18E
- (13) 18F
- (14) 18Z
- (15) 19A
- (16) 19D
- (17) 25C assigned to infantry, cavalry, and engineer line companies or troops in brigade combat teams and infantry battalions
- (18) 68W assigned to infantry, cavalry, and engineer line companies or troops in brigade combat teams and infantry battalions
- (B) BRIEFING. Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of the Army shall provide a briefing to the Committees on Armed Services of the Senate and House of Representatives describing the methodology used to establish standards under subsection (A).
- (C) SEX-NEUTRAL FITNESS STANDARDS FOR OTHER SERVICE BRANCHES. The U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Air Force, and U.S. Space Force must craft and implement sex-neutral fitness standards for their respective service branches no later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

4. Ban Transgender Service Members and “Gender-Affirming” Care

As mentioned above, President Trump issued an executive order to formulate a new policy regarding transgender service members.²³ According to the Department of Defense, service members diagnosed with gender dysphoria will be processed for separation by their respective services.²⁴ An additional consideration for a medical ban on enlistment for those who have had prior sex transition procedures completed at any point in their life should be considered, even if they are not currently suffering from gender dysphoria. It can take nearly twelve months for an individual to complete treatments after transition surgery, and this treatment often involves the use of heavy narcotics.²⁵ The need for prescription drugs to function is a security threat in a time of war, where troops may be in combat and access to drugs limited. People dependent on drugs to function are a liability to their units and a detriment to national security. And yet, between 2015 and 2024, the Defense Department spent \$52 million on care for active-duty service members to treat gender dysphoria.²⁶ Every taxpayer dollar wasted on assisting mental illness unrelated to combat service undermines the mission of the U.S. Armed Forces. The FY2026

²³ Executive Order (January 27, 2025). “Prioritizing Military Excellence and Readiness,” *The White House*. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/prioritizing-military-excellence-and-readiness/>

²⁴ DOD News (February 28, 2025). “DOD: Gender Dysphoria Incompatible With Military, Service Members Must Serve in Accordance With Sex,” *Department of Defense*. <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/article/4086111/dod-gender-dysphoria-incompatible-with-military-service-members-must-serve-in-a/>

²⁵ Fact Sheet (January 27, 2025). “President Trump Ensures Military Excellence and Readiness,” *The White House*. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/01/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-ensures-military-excellence-and-readiness/>

²⁶ Hagans (April 22, 2025). “HAGANS: Military Readiness, Not ‘Woke’ Politics, Must Come First,” *The Daily Caller*. <https://dailycaller.com/2025/04/22/hagans-military-readiness-woke-politics-transgender-dei/>

NDAA should include language banning gender-affirming care within the military, along with a prohibition on service by transgender individuals.

Gaps to Fill

Key areas that need to be codified within the NDAA include the following:

1. Statutory recognition of gender dysphoria as a disqualifying condition for active-duty military service
2. Statutory prohibition of gender transition services for active-duty service members in the U.S. Armed Forces
3. Statutory prohibition of coverage of sex reassignment surgeries and procedures under the Tricare program

Model Language Example

SEC. 1 PROHIBITION ON TRANSGENDER MILITARY SERVICE.

(A) PROHIBITION. Any individual who identifies as a member of the opposite sex, identifies as a gender outside the confines of the biological sex binary of male and female, or has undergone hormone replacement for the purposes of treating gender dysphoria, taken puberty blockers for the purposes of treating gender dysphoria, or undergone gender transition procedures is hereby prohibited to serve as a member of the U.S. Armed Forces or work as an employee at the Department of Defense or a military department.

(B) RECOGNITION OF DISQUALIFICATION. Notwithstanding any other provision of federal law, any individual who identifies as a member of the opposite sex, identifies as a gender outside the confines of the biological sex binary of male and female, has undergone hormone replacement for the purposes of treating gender dysphoria, has taken puberty blockers for the purposes of treating gender dysphoria, has undergone gender transition procedures, or has been similarly evaluated, diagnosed, or recognized as having any form or variation of gender dysphoria is hereby deemed to be physically and mentally unfit for active-duty service within the U.S. Armed Forces.

(C) DISCHARGE. Notwithstanding any other provision of federal law, individuals currently enlisted or serving in the Armed Forces who fit the description provided in Section 1(A) shall be allowed to complete their remaining term of service in nondeployable billets without the opportunity to renew enlistment.

(D) IMPLEMENTATION. The provisions within Section 1(A), Section 1(B), and Section 1(C) are effective upon enactment.

SEC. 2 PROHIBITION ON PROVISION OF GENDER TRANSITION SERVICES FOR ACTIVE-DUTY SERVICE MEMBERS IN THE U.S. ARMED FORCES.

(A) IN GENERAL. No gender transition procedures, including surgery, hormone replacement, puberty blockers, or similar medication, may be provided to any employee of the Department of Defense or of a military department, including any member of the armed forces.

(B) REFERRALS. No referral for procedures described in subsection (A) may be provided to any employee of the Department of Defense or of a military department, including any member of the armed forces, for the purposes of treating gender dysphoria or otherwise attempting to advance a sex change procedure.

(C) REASSIGNMENT. No change of duty station may be approved for the purpose of providing any employee of the Department of Defense or of a military department, including any member of the armed forces, with access to procedures described in subsection (A).

SEC. 3 PROHIBITION ON THE PROVISION OF GENDER TRANSITION SERVICES THROUGH AN EXCEPTIONAL FAMILY MEMBER PROGRAM OF THE ARMED FORCES.

(A) IN GENERAL. No gender transition procedures, including surgery, hormone replacement, puberty blockers, or similar medication, may be provided to a minor dependent child through an Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP).

(B) REFERRALS. No referral for procedures described in subsection (a) may be provided to a minor dependent child through an EFMP if for the purposes of treating gender dysphoria or otherwise attempting to advance a sex change procedure.

(C) REASSIGNMENT. No change of duty station may be approved through an EFMP for the purpose of providing a minor dependent child with access to procedures described in subsection (A).

(d) EFMP DEFINED.—In this section, the term “Exceptional Family Member Program” (EFMP) means a program under 10 U.S. Code § 1781c.

SEC. 4 PROHIBITION ON COVERAGE OF CERTAIN SEX REASSIGNMENT SURGERIES AND RELATED SERVICES UNDER TRICARE PROGRAM.

(A) 10 U.S. Code 55 is amended by inserting after Section 1076f the following new section (and conforming the table of sections at the beginning of such chapter accordingly):

§ 1076g. TRICARE program: prohibition on coverage and furnishing of certain sex reassignment surgeries and related services

(a) PROHIBITION.—The medical care to which individuals are entitled under this chapter does not include the services described in subsection (b), and the Secretary of Defense may not furnish any such service.

(b) SERVICES DESCRIBED.—The services described in this subsection are the following:

(1) Sex reassignment surgeries furnished for the purpose of the gender alteration of a transgender individual.

(2) Hormone treatments furnished for the purpose of the gender alteration of a transgender individual

5. Implement Flag Requirements and Curate Image and Information

Recently, progressive activists have more frequently flown pride flags and those marked with other political symbols at U.S. military bases, embassies, and government facilities. These displays promote ideological agendas and undermine the core mission of the U.S. Armed Forces: to uphold the Constitution and defend the nation against foreign and domestic enemies. Instead of projecting strength and unity, these symbols propagate divisive and civilization-eroding doctrines across military ranks, American society, and every corner of the globe where our forces operate.

The Center urges Congress to prohibit the display of such flags entirely. The Department of Defense should authorize only the following flags at DOD-controlled sites: the American flag, flags of U.S. states and the District of Columbia, military service flags, general officer flags, flags representing presidentially appointed and Senate-confirmed civilians, senior executive service or military department flags, the POW/MIA flag, flags of allied or partner nations (when used for protocol), flags of organizations to which the United States belongs, and appropriate ceremonial, command, unit, branch flags, or guidons.

To further reinforce the armed forces' public image and operational discipline, the Center also recommends curbing undisciplined social media activity. No military unit below division level in the Army or Marine Corps, major command level in the Air Force, or fleet level in the Navy should operate an official website or social media account. Additionally, the Center recommends prohibiting active-duty service members from posting content related to unit activities, operations, maneuvers, deployments, or identifiable characteristics. This policy would mitigate risks to unit cohesion, operational security, and national security.

Congress must incorporate all of these reforms into the FY2026 National Defense Authorization Act.

Gaps to Fill

Key areas that need to be codified within the NDAA include the following:

1. Prioritization of purpose through the statutory prohibition of unapproved flags and symbols
2. Prioritization of purpose through new statutory constraints on social media usage by units within the armed forces and active-duty service members

Model Language Example

SEC. 1 PROHIBITION ON DISPLAY OF UNAPPROVED FLAGS.

(A) PROHIBITION. No member of the armed forces or civilian employee of the Department of Defense may display a flag other than an approved flag in any workplace, common access area, or public area of the Department of Defense. (b) APPROVED FLAG.—In this section, the term “approved flag” means any of the following:

- (1) The American flag
- (2) The flag of a state or of the District of Columbia
- (3) A military service flag
- (4) A General Officer flag
- (5) A presidentially appointed and Senate-confirmed civilian flag
- (6) A Senior Executive Service and military department–specific flag
- (7) A POW/MIA flag
- (8) The flag of another country that is an ally or partner of the United States or that is used for official protocol purposes
- (9) The flag of an organization in which the United States is a member

(10) A ceremonial, command, unit, or branch flag or guidon

SEC. 2 PROHIBITIONS ON INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVITY.

(A) UNIT PROHIBITION.

(1) No unit of the armed forces below the division level in the U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps, below the major command level in the U.S. Air Force, or below the fleet level in the U.S. Navy may operate a website or social media account.

(2) Units of the armed forces allowed to operate a website or social media account may not promote, advocate, celebrate, or otherwise acknowledge holidays except federal holidays recognized in 5 U.S. Code 6103 that also provide for time off from work.

(B) ACTIVE DUTY RESTRICTIONS. No active-duty service member of the armed forces may post on any website or social media platform about his or her assigned unit activities, events, maneuvers, deployments, or any other identifiable characteristics because of the threat these posts could pose to unit cohesion, operational security, or national security while still a member of the United States military.

(C) RULES OF CONSTRUCTION.—(1) PROTECTED SPEECH NOT RESTRICTED.

Nothing in this section shall be construed to restrict the speech of military personnel off duty and off base, or of a student, teacher, or any other individual outside of a school setting.

(2) POST DEFINED. In this section, the term “post,” when used with respect to an action described in subsection (B), means any social media post, repost, comment, reply, upload, direct message, or additional public expression on a social media platform that denotes, conveys, or otherwise provides specific information on a military unit’s activities as described in subsection (B).

6. Ban Climate Radicalism

Climate change hysteria has infiltrated the U.S. military in the worst possible way. There have been efforts to create “green” combat vehicles²⁷ and to make climate awareness a standard operating procedure within the military. The infusion of climate extremism into the mission of the U.S. military must be addressed, as it all too often serves as a funnel for woke ideologies oriented around promoting “equity” and “environmental justice” that elevate pseudo-scientific green dogmatism as a higher priority and security issue than actual security threats. This posture not only panders to a radical, discriminatory ideology anathema to the fundamental American ethos, but also poses a direct risk to active-duty service members by absorbing critical resources and priorities for an issue that is entirely unrelated to the core mission of the department.

Congress should act during the FY2026 NDAA process to prohibit the authorization of funds for any extreme climate-related project within the Department of Defense. The Center has previously recommended that funds be prohibited from implementing President Biden’s executive orders related to climate radicalism to create programs within the Department of Defense. Such orders include Executive Order 13990, “Protecting Public Health and the

²⁷ Clark (May 4, 2022). “Biden’s Plan for ‘Climate Friendly’ Military Vehicles Another Bad Idea for Defense,” *The Heritage Foundation*.

<https://www.heritage.org/defense/commentary/bidens-plan-climate-friendly-military-vehicles-another-bad-idea-defense>

Environment and Restoring Science to Tackle the Climate Crisis”;²⁸ Executive Order 14008, “Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad”;²⁹ and various others.³⁰

Gaps to Fill

Key areas that need to be codified within the NDAA include the following:

1. Statutory prohibition on the use of funds to implement Biden-era climate change orders

Model Language Example

PROHIBITION ON USE OF FUNDS TO IMPLEMENT CERTAIN EXECUTIVE ORDERS.

(A) None of the funds authorized to be appropriated by this Act or otherwise made available for the Department of Defense for fiscal year 2026 or any fiscal year thereafter may be used to implement any of the following executive orders:

- (1) Executive Order 13990, “Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science to Tackle the Climate Crisis”
- (2) Executive Order 14008, “Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad”
- (3) Section 6 of Executive Order 14013, “Rebuilding and Enhancing Programs to Resettle Refugees and Planning for the Impact of Climate Change on Migration”
- (4) Executive Order 14030, “Climate-Related Financial Risk”
- (5) Executive Order 14057, “Catalyzing Clean Energy Industries and Jobs Through Federal Sustainability”
- (6) Executive Order 14082, “Implementation of the Energy and Infrastructure Provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022”
- (7) Executive Order 14096, “Revitalizing Our Nation’s Commitment to Environmental Justice for All”

7. Additional Areas of Concern

The above focus areas are not the only policies in need of statutory changes, and numerous other policy gaps will require reforms in the upcoming or future NDAA bills to effectively counter and mitigate the woke agenda. These include, but are not limited to the following:

- Rethinking the purpose of the military service academies
- Reorienting curricula in Department of Defense Dependents Schools to produce strong educational outcomes that foster civic awareness and a duty to country
- Transitioning back to all-male combat units through a combat effectiveness clause carveout that facilitates lethality over destructive political correctness

²⁸ Executive Order (January 20, 2021). “Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science to Tackle the Climate Crisis,” *The White House*.

https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/01/25/2021-01765/protecting-public-health-and-the-environment-and-restoring-science-to-tackle-the-climate-crisis?aff_id=1314

²⁹ Executive Order (January 27, 2021). “Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad,” *The White House*.

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/02/01/2021-02177/tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad>

³⁰ Model Legislation (March 7, 2024). “Vehicles for Restoring the United States Armed Forces,” *Citizens for Renewing America*.

<https://citizensrenewingamerica.com/issues/model-legislation-vehicles-for-restoring-the-united-states-armed-forces/>

- Cultivating a culture of life by prohibiting abortion tourism within the department
- Prohibiting a wider swath of deviant activities, like adult cabaret performances among active-duty members or on military properties, that degrade readiness and unity of purpose

While these additional reforms are important, Congress must implement the outlined reforms on eliminating woke ideologies, restoring merit, reconstituting strong fitness standards, and prohibiting radical gender and climate policies in this year's NDAA to provide real momentum for the larger restoration mission in the years to come. There is likely to be pushback from fringe far-left ideologues, but the reality is that these positions are ideologically neutral, moored by a common sense of purpose, and designed to return the nation's armed forces to defending the country and, if necessary, killing the bad guys who would otherwise do us harm.

In sum, these are the right policy changes needed at the moment to accomplish the larger mission, and they also happen to enjoy broad political support.

Conclusion

The Trump administration is off to an excellent start in pursuing its goal to rebuild the U.S. military and end woke ideology and weaponization within the Department of Defense. Congress must secure these efforts and codify policies within statute to ensure that the U.S. military remains free from destructive ideologies hostile to the American ethos. Only through the restoration of a warrior mindset, tethered to the defense of the constitutional order, can our armed forces remain the strongest fighting force on the planet. The FY2026 NDAA is an excellent opportunity to incorporate these priorities and begin the march back to unquestioned military superiority.