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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6025

<http://appropriations.senate.gov>

February 13, 2020

The Honorable Mark Esper
Secretary of Defense
The Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Esper:

We write to express our strong objection to the transfer of \$3.8 billion in funds appropriated by Congress to support and benefit our service members, to be used for additional barriers on the Southwest border that were not approved by Congress.

This transfer notification is being made merely weeks after the President signed the defense appropriations bill into law. As was the case last year, the Department of Defense did not request, and the Congress did not provide, any defense funds for border wall construction. This repeated maneuver to transfer funds once again is in contrast to the long-established processes involving consultation with the defense oversight committees of Congress on reprogrammings and transfers. Engaging in this scheme again is not only divisive, but also poisonous to the relationship we seek on national defense matters – which should be above this type of rancor and partisanship.

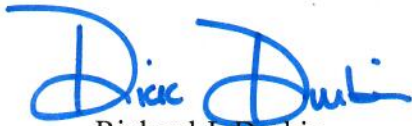
We are dismayed that the Department decided to target congressional increases to a vast number of critical programs, from aircraft to ships, including the perennially-underfunded Army National Guard, Air National Guard, and other Reserve Components. In particular, Congress provided \$1.3 billion to the National Guard and Reserve Equipment (NGRE) account after the President's budget request asked for nothing in this vital appropriation. The NGRE account has been the lifeline of modernization for the National Guard and Reserves, both for warfighting missions and domestic contingencies. The same can be said of many of the other programs targeted.

The raid on this funding is quite simply an attack on the efforts to ensure our citizen-soldiers are prepared to respond to disasters, both overseas and in nearly every community in all fifty states and four territories.

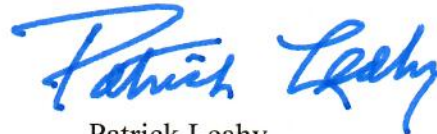
We are aware that the President has announced plans to divert \$7.2 billion from the Pentagon's budget in this year alone to pay for his ill-advised and wasteful campaign promise. We expect the Administration to continue this assault on the congressional power of the purse in the coming weeks and months, by implementing additional reprogrammings and cancelling more military construction projects without regard to the views of the Congress. We urge you to bear in mind that Congress has paid for the projects you have cancelled once, and we are under no obligation to pay for them a second time.

Finally, we are alarmed at the inclusion of Overseas Contingency Operations/Global War on Terrorism funds for additional wall construction. These accounts were created to separate what was supposed to be temporary war-related spending from the routine operations of our Armed Forces, but critics came to call these accounts little more than a slush fund to evade spending caps. This raid on these funding lines puts an end to any pretense that the critics were wrong.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
Vice Chairman
Subcommittee on Defense



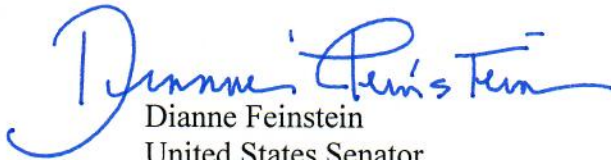
Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
Committee on Appropriations



Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services



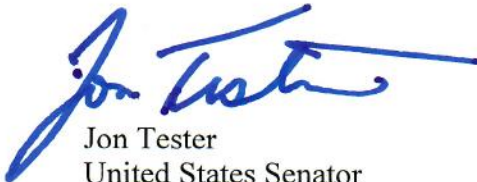
Brian Schatz
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Military Construction



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Patty Murray
United States Senator



Jon Tester
United States Senator



Tom Udall
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator