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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
APPROPRIATIONS

SUBCOMMITTEES ON
ENERGY & WATER DEVELOPMENT,
& RELATED AGENCIES
DEFENSE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES

SUBCOMMITTEES ON
ENERGY & MINERAL RESOURCES
FEDERAL LANDS

April 10, 2026

The Honorable Mike Rogers
Chairman
House Armed Services Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
House Armed Services Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Smith,

Thank you for the opportunity to share some of my priorities for the fiscal year (FY) 2027 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

As you know, Nevada plays a critical role in our nation's security. As a member of the House Appropriations Committee Subcommittee on Defense, and previously a member of the Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, I have seen firsthand the many ways in which Nevada is leading the way in securing our country and our allies.

At Nellis Air Force Base, for example, the U.S. Air Force conducts advanced combat aviation training, ensuring airmen have the training required to secure our nation's interests. This includes at the Nevada Test and Training Range (NTTR) — the largest contiguous air and ground space available for peacetime military operations in the free world — making the state a leader in test and training for our armed services and ensuring that our warfighters have the skills and equipment needed for today and into the future. And at Creech Air Force Base, airmen operate some of the most advanced remotely piloted aircraft in the world, flying attack and reconnaissance missions abroad to protect U.S. and allied assets. Creech AFB is an acknowledged center of excellence for uncrewed aircraft systems and is the chosen site of the Collaborative Combat Aircraft Experimental Operations Unit which will define the tactics, techniques, procedures for how we integrate this critical weapon system into our force design.

Nevada also plays an important role in the nuclear security enterprise. At the Nevada National Security Site (NNSS), scientists and engineers ensure the nation's nuclear weapons remain safe, secure, and effective without full-scale nuclear testing as well as protect against global and homeland nuclear threats. Finally, critical minerals remain crucial to the defense industrial base

as virtually every Defense Department system relies upon them. Nevada contains known occurrences or deposits of 33 of the 50 minerals identified as “Critical Minerals” by the U.S. Department of the Interior. Further, MP Materials, which is headquartered in Nevada’s Third District, operates the largest rare earth mine in North America and will be central to the U.S. onshoring critical minerals.

As you begin to assemble the FY27 NDAA, I ask that you consider the following items, which build on Nevada’s great strengths to help make our country stronger.

1. Health Coverage for Toxic Exposed Veterans Who Served at NTTR

Between 1951 and 1992, over 900 explosive nuclear weapons tests were conducted at NTTR. This, in addition to other dangerous, toxic activities, exposed countless service members to toxic contamination. However, because of the highly classified nature of the work these veterans were performing, combined with the difference between the Department of Energy’s (DOE) and Department of Defense’s (DOD) classification of NTTR as a location where contamination occurred, veterans who served at NTTR are unable to receive the care they have earned.

The Energy Employee Occupational Illness Compensation Act (EEOICPA) does not cover veterans not involved in DOE operations or that were otherwise omitted for national security reasons. Similarly, under The Sergeant First Class (SFC) Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act, veterans who served at NTTR are unable to prove their service at NTTR to the VA and are unable to receive care and benefits connected with exposure because the DOD and VA do not consider the NTTR to be a location where contamination occurred, as DOE does.

In the FY26 NDAA, Congress recognized this troubling disparity. In the Joint Explanatory Statement, the Committee wrote: “We note that there are concerns that members of the Armed Forces who were assigned to certain locations have been unable to successfully make claims for healthcare and disability compensation with the Veterans Administration due to classification of their service and medical records.”

Legislation, such as the PROTECT Act (H.R.1400) and the FORGOTTEN Veterans Act (S.2220), would correct this inequity by recognizing the toxic exposures veterans endured during their service at NTTR and other DOE facilities where DOE employees are already presumed to have been exposed. This will provide veterans a basis to submit PACT Act claims for the benefits they deserve.

2. Combat Action Recognition and Evaluation (CARE) for Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA) Crews Act of 2025 (S.2218)

Remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) crews, like those operating out of Creech Air Force Base, fly combat missions from the United States to protect U.S. forces and civilians. While they are not physically located in a combat zone, they are exposed to many of the same stressors because of their combat operations.

Unfortunately, RPA crews currently do not receive an identifier in their records for combat operations performed because they are not physically located in a combat zone. This means that RPA crews lack both proper recognition for their service and access to the kinds of mental health services they need.

Legislation like the CARE for RPA Crews Act would establish a status identifier for RPA crew who conduct combat operations. Creating a status identifier will provide them with the recognition and access to services they deserve, which have long been overlooked and out of reach.

3. Protecting DOE Facilities from Drone Incursions

DOE lacks authority to adequately protect DOE/National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) facilities from unmanned aircraft systems (UAS). From calendar year 2022 to 2024, NNSA reported six unauthorized UAS sightings at the Nevada National Security Site (NNSS), one suspicious UAS overflight of the Pantex Plant (PTX), and five suspicious UAS overflights of Los Alamos National Labs (LANL) restricted airspace. These events highlight the need for DOE to have adequate authorities and capabilities to combat evolving threats.

Current law, enacted as part of the American Security Drone Act via the FY24 NDAA, prevent federal agencies from procuring and operating UAS from certain “covered foreign entities.” This law is designed to protect against security risks posed by drones from these foreign entities, including the possibility that data may be sent back to the manufacturer.

This requirement, while important to the national security of the country, prevents federal agencies from accessing these UAS systems purely for research, testing, and evaluation to better understand the risks they may pose and better develop systems for countering them.

That is why the American Security Drone Act provided explicit statutory exemptions for the Department of Defense (DoD), Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Department of Justice (DOJ), and the State Department to procure, operate, and inventory certain UAS systems for purposes of operational research, development, testing, and evaluation. Unfortunately, this list excludes DOE, the agency responsible for the nation’s nuclear weapons stockpile.

Congress should add DOE to the list of exempted federal agencies able to procure, operate, and inventory covered UAS from covered entities (Sections 1823(b), 1824(b), 1825(b), and 1827(c) of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024 (Public Law 118–31; 137 Stat. 696)).

4. Military and Educational Data Integration Act (H.R.1573)

Serving our country in the armed forces is an honor and a legitimate career path for students with a wide variety of professional and academic interests. Unfortunately, we have a critical gap in information that prevents schools from effectively informing students about the diverse and rewarding career options available within the military and verifying that they have adequately prepared students for these careers.

The Military and Educational Data Integration Act helps address this gap by requiring the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security to establish a data sharing process to provide state educational agencies with information about military enlistment data to better inform both high school students and educators on military careers and more accurately track the outcome of students who choose a career in the military after graduation. With accurate and timely data, educators can provide students with a clearer understanding of the benefits and opportunities military service offers, ranging from engineering to healthcare roles.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susie Lee". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Susie Lee

Member of Congress