



Trump threatens veto on defense bill that targets 'forever chemicals'

BY REBECCA BEITSCH AND MIRANDA GREEN - 07/10/19 05:40 PM EDT

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One day after President Trump delivered a speech preaching of his administration's environmental achievements, he threatened to veto a military spending bill in part due to provisions that aim to clean up a toxic, cancer-linked chemical found near military bases.

"If H.R. 2500 were presented to the President in its current form, his advisors would recommend that he veto it," the White House wrote in a [statement](#) Tuesday night.

The House has not yet voted on its version of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) but Trump on Tuesday highlighted among its various sticking points two provisions that would address the clean up of a class of chemicals abbreviated as PFAS.

PFAS is used in a variety of non-stick products as well as firefighting foams frequently utilized by the military. The chemical is known for its slow breakdown process, denoting it as a "forever chemical," making it particularly concerning as it leaches into the water supply.

Contamination has spread to as many as 43 states, according to the [Environmental Working Group](#), and there are at least 400 military sites with known or suspected PFAS contamination. The military is facing \$2 billion in clean up costs for PFAS.

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While the Environmental Protection Agency has promised to release a new standard for PFAS found in drinking water by the end of the year, lawmakers on both sides of the aisle have been pushing forward with legislation to address what they consider a public health issue.

Some of those measures are already part of the NDAA. But the president highlighted two in his veto threat. One would phase out military use of firefighting foam with PFAS by 2025 while the other would require the Department of Defense (DOD) to treat contaminated water near bases that are used for agricultural purposes.

"At potentially great cost to and significant impact on DOD's mission, the legislation singles out DOD, only one contributor to this national issue," the White House statement said.

PFAS also enters the environment through manufacturing and municipal airports that likewise use firefighting foam.

"If the President wants to veto this bill because he thinks the PFAS provisions go too far, I invite him to drink, bathe, or swim in some of the water our communities do," Rep. Debbie Dingell (D-Mich.), whose state has several PFAS contamination sites, said in a statement. "Congress needs to act to address PFAS contamination wherever it exists and stop kicking the can down the road."

Democrats have pushed a variety of measures that would require the military to take greater action to stem the spread of PFAS and clean up contamination, including requiring a Government Accountability Office review of the Department of Defense's (DOD) response to PFAS contamination and making DOD to enter into cooperative agreements with states for contamination cleanups.

It also includes a measure from Sen. Tom Udall (D-N.M.) requiring military assistance for farmers impacted by PFAS.

A Food and Drug Administration study presented abroad but [leaked to U.S. media](#) in June did testing from a dairy farm near an Air Force base in New Mexico and found that water contamination from the base had reached the cows and the milk they produced.

Udall said he has tried over and over again to get DOD to take accountability for damage to nearby farms.

"But how are New Mexicans repaid? With a veto threat from a president who bragged this week about his environmental record. It's totally disgraceful," Udall said on a call with reporters. "The livelihood of dairy farmers in New Mexico have been threatened or even ruined by toxins from neighboring Air Force bases and this administration will do nothing."

Some provisions are beyond the scope of the military, including a requirement for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to regulate PFAS levels for drinking water and another that would make Superfund cleanup funds available for cleaning up PFAS contamination.

"With this veto threat, President Trump has said he would hold up funding for our troops because his administration does not want to act swiftly to eliminate toxic PFAS chemicals to protect service members and the

communities that support them,” Rep. Dan Kildee (D-Mich.), who authored several PFAS amendments for the NDAA, said in a statement.

The Senate has also passed its version of the NDAA with largely similar PFAS provisions, though it lacks the Superfund provision the House will vote on.

Facing the possibility that Congress might need to have enough votes to override Trump’s veto, Udall said it was about putting community first.

“Congress must stand up to this president and override this veto,” he said. “This is an extremely bipartisan issue, Republicans have already sponsored legislation, there should be overwhelming support for these amendments to overturn a veto...Both sides need to organize to give these communities help.”

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