



July 24, 2023

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Majority Leader, United States Senate
S-230 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader Schumer:

We, the undersigned organizations whose missions espouse fiscal responsibility, urge you to ensure the Senate has the opportunity to vote on Senator Bernie Sanders' (I-VT) amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) calling for a 10 percent reduction in the Act's total spending outside of personnel, health, and Ukraine-related accounts.

None of us would consider a fixed, pro rata percentage reduction across a broad swath of programs to be the ideal approach to budgeting. Numerous weapons systems, ranging from the [perennially troubled F-35](#) to the mission-challenged [Littoral Combat Ship](#), could be more fundamentally restructured to achieve a larger spending reduction, or even zeroed-out. Other, well-performing programs should be left untouched.

Unfortunately, Congress continues to avoid making these choices, and as recent [consideration of NDAA](#) among your House colleagues demonstrated, amendments to make more targeted reductions either repeatedly failed or were never ruled in order for floor debate. Meanwhile, we have observed with increasing concern the [support among Senators](#) to unravel the Pentagon spending restraint provided in the Fiscal Responsibility Act, which became law less than two months ago. On its current trajectory, the FY 2024 NDAA could create structural commitments that will make it very difficult to meet [future caps](#) beyond the FY 2024 level of \$886.3 billion. Meanwhile, Senate Appropriations Committee leaders have [just announced](#) their intention to draft a supplemental appropriations bill that will exceed FRA's caps for defense. In this context, the Sanders Amendment could offer the opportunity for a more fulsome discussion over national security spending priorities.

In a normal budget environment, a 10 percent funding reduction in any area of federal spending, let alone military spending, might be considered ambitious. Yet, in the context of recent history, a 10 percent reduction in the Pentagon budget is not unrealistic. Between FYs 2022 and 2023, military spending in NDAA actually rose by [slightly more than 10 percent](#).

Perhaps most important, however, the nation's finances are well past normality and are [nearing irreversible chaos](#). The impending crises facing mandatory retirement and health care programs, the remaining need to ratchet-down COVID-era federal spending expectations from states, and the continuing mismanagement of existing budgetary resources, now demand a robust response across government.

The House erred in not allowing floor debate on a 10 percent Pentagon spending reduction amendment sponsored by Reps. Barbara Lee (D-CA) and Mark Pocan (D-WI). Now the Senate must act, by introducing this concept into its own floor debate. Taxpayers are counting on leadership in both parties now to follow through on the longer-term path envisioned in the Fiscal Responsibility Act and begin the vital task of bringing federal deficits and debt back under control. Permitting consideration of the Sanders amendment is one of many such steps that will be necessary going forward. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

National Taxpayers Union

R Street Institute