

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 4614

To protect the editorial independence of the Stars and Stripes news organization.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MAY 20, 2026

Mrs. SHAHEEN (for herself and Mr. BLUMENTHAL) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Armed Services

A BILL

To protect the editorial independence of the Stars and Stripes news organization.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Stars and Stripes Edi-
5 torial Independence Act of 2026”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress makes the following findings:

8 (1) Stars and Stripes has reported on issues
9 unique to members of the United States Armed

1 Forces, particularly those serving abroad, dating
2 back to the Civil War.

3 (2) Stars and Stripes remains editorially inde-
4 pendent of interference or censorship from outside
5 its own editorial chain of command.

6 (3) A free and independent press is a corner-
7 stone of democratic governance and is essential to
8 transparency, accountability, and informed public
9 decisionmaking.

10 (4) Congress has historically recognized Stars
11 and Stripes as an independent journalistic organiza-
12 tion serving members of the Armed Forces and their
13 families overseas.

14 (5) Stars and Stripes provides unique and sus-
15 tained coverage of issues affecting servicemember
16 and veterans' quality of life, including housing,
17 health care, pay and benefits, family readiness,
18 training conditions, and the long-term impacts of
19 military service.

20 (6) Such reporting elevates concerns and expe-
21 riences that may otherwise receive limited attention,
22 enabling policymakers and the public to better un-
23 derstand the lived realities of members of the Armed
24 Forces and their families.

1 (7) Independent war reporting and coverage of
2 military operations demonstrate transparency and
3 accountability to the American public regarding the
4 human, strategic, and financial costs of armed con-
5 flict.

6 (8) Transparent reporting on military oper-
7 ations and conflicts strengthens public trust by en-
8 suring that decisions made in the name of national
9 security are subject to informed public awareness
10 and debate.

11 (9) Maintaining a clear separation between De-
12 partment of Defense public affairs activities and
13 Stars and Stripes editorial operations is necessary to
14 preserve confidence among servicemembers and mili-
15 tary families in the accuracy and independence of re-
16 porting provided by Stars and Stripes.

17 (10) The ability of defense journalists to oper-
18 ate without censorship, undue influence, or retali-
19 ation is essential to maintaining credibility, accuracy,
20 and public trust.

21 (11) Protecting press freedom within the de-
22 fense sector strengthens national security by pro-
23 moting accountability, identifying inefficiencies or
24 misconduct, and ensuring informed debate on de-
25 fense policy.

1 (12) Members of the Armed Forces, Depart-
 2 ment of Defense civilian employees, and their fami-
 3 lies stationed overseas, including in combat zones
 4 and other remote locations, often rely upon Stars
 5 and Stripes as a primary source of independent
 6 English-language news and information.

7 (13) Members of the Armed Forces, Depart-
 8 ment of Defense civilian employees, and their fami-
 9 lies operate in information environments that are
 10 frequent targets of foreign adversary influence oper-
 11 ations, including disinformation, propaganda, and
 12 coordinated inauthentic behavior.

13 (14) Independent oversight and internal edi-
 14 torial review mechanisms, including the Stars and
 15 Stripes Ombudsman, support accountability and
 16 journalistic integrity.

17 (15) Congressional oversight is necessary to en-
 18 sure that Stars and Stripes is not subjected to cen-
 19 sorship, ideological influence, or political direction.

20 **SEC. 3. INDEPENDENCE OF STARS AND STRIPES.**

21 (a) PURPOSE.—The purpose of this section is to cod-
 22 ify the requirements related to the editorial independence
 23 of Stars and Stripes provided for in section 4.2 of Depart-
 24 ment of Defense Directive (DODD) 5122.11, dated Octo-

ber 11, 1993, and section 246.4(b) of title 32, Code of Federal Regulations.

(b) EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE REQUIREMENT.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Defense shall ensure that—

(A) editorial policies and practices of Stars and Stripes are in accordance with journalistic standards governing United States news media of the highest quality, with emphasis on matters of interest to the Stars and Stripes readership;

(B) Stars and Stripes' editorial operations are independent of the military chain of command, military public affairs activities, or other external influences, and without censorship or propaganda;

(C) the Stars and Stripes publisher remains a civilian government employee with independent professional news media experience, who manages and controls the day-to-day business and financial, operational, and administrative activities, and provides editorial oversight of Stars and Stripes;

(D) Stars and Stripes' reporters with access to Department of Defense installations are

1 authorized to cover events or activities open to
2 those with installation access, even though com-
3 mercial news media may not have the same
4 unescorted access;

5 (E) Stars and Stripes is a digital-first
6 news organization, but is also published in a
7 print newspaper edition at a frequency and dis-
8 tribution determined by the publisher to best
9 serve its readership; and

10 (F) except as provided in paragraph (3),
11 Stars and Stripes provides a free flow of news
12 and information to its readership without news
13 management or censorship from the Secretary
14 of Defense or the Department of Defense.

15 (2) PROHIBITION ON WITHHOLDING OF UNFA-
16 VORABLE NEWS.—The calculated withholding from
17 publication in Stars and Stripes of news unfavorable
18 to the Department of Defense, the military services,
19 or the United States Government is prohibited.

20 (3) EXCEPTIONS.—

21 (A) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding the
22 requirement under paragraph (1), Stars and
23 Stripes shall not publish original staff-produced
24 news stories based upon classified information
25 or publish information that clearly endangers

1 the lives of United States personnel or would
2 adversely affect national security.

3 (B) LIMITATION.—The exceptions under
4 subparagraph (A) may not be construed to per-
5 mit the calculated withholding of news unfavor-
6 able to the Department of Defense, the military
7 services, or the United States Government. Any
8 security risk information shall not be withheld
9 without concurrence from both the Stars and
10 Stripes publisher and the relevant combatant
11 commander.

12 (4) STARS AND STRIPES PERSONNEL.—The ex-
13 clusion of civilian candidates for consideration for
14 officer, journalist, or other Stars and Stripes staff
15 positions is prohibited.

16 (c) NEWS CONTRACTING.—Stars and Stripes shall
17 not be prohibited from purchasing, contracting for, or
18 publishing news stories, features, syndicated columns,
19 comic strips, and editorial cartoons from commercial news
20 media services or sources.

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