

PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION  
OF H.R. 2670, NATIONAL DEFENSE  
AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL  
YEAR 2024

SPEECH OF

**HON. SHEILA JACKSON LEE**

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, July 12, 2023*

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on the rule for H.R. 2670, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2024.

This is an important measure that for over 60 years, Republicans and Democrats have come together to support investments authorized in the NDAA that will help address the changing global landscape and prepare the country for future challenges and threats.

I along with my colleagues have offered a number of robust and thoughtful amendments in furtherance of a process that has generally been bipartisan work on behalf of America's national defense.

However, I am dismayed that this year, my Republican colleagues in the majority have refused meaningful consideration of the majority of amendments offered by my Democratic colleagues.

While I am grateful that one of my amendments was made in order, the Jackson Lee Amendment No. 1075 (No. 136 as reported in the Rule) and included in the En Bloc package No. 3, it is beyond disappointing and disgraceful that my additional 19 amendments were not made in order—and particularly ones I have offered for many years and have been made in order.

With respect to my amendment that was made in order, I ask for a favorable vote on the En Bloc package No. 3 in support of the Jackson Lee Amendment No. 1075.

The Jackson Lee Amendment No. 1075 would require that a report be submitted within 220 days of the NDAA's passage detailing our national capacity to provide disaster survivors with short term housing.

In the aftermath of emergencies and national disasters, victims have much on their minds.

Homes, properties, businesses, and livelihoods may have been damaged in the disaster, and families, friends, and community members may be mentally and physically affected by the disaster, not to mention additional challenges as they seek to return to work and school.

As these communities begin to face the long process of recovery and rebuilding, short term housing is one of the first things disaster survivors need to get back on their feet.

Unfortunately, my constituents and I are no stranger to these kinds of disasters.

In 2017, Hurricane Harvey devastated the Houston area, affecting over 100,000 homes across the city. In the aftermath of the storm, finding temporary housing was one of the biggest challenges to recovery for many survivors.

Short-term housing was difficult to coordinate due to the sheer number of Houstonians affected. As such, it is crucial that Congress have a strong understanding of our current capabilities and, specifically, our ability to provide these survivors with short term housing before disaster strikes.

If voted on favorably, this report will not only inform us of our current capacity to provide housing but will also better equip Congress to respond to disasters and support survivors in the future.

In addition to this amendment, I offered the below listed amendments.

The Jackson Lee Amendment No. 1051 directed the Secretary of Defense to submit a report on the naming practices recognizing African American service members in the Department of Defense.

Throughout the history of our Nation, from the Battle of Lexington through the Battle of Fallujah to Afghanistan and Iraq, Black soldiers have served honorably and answered the call to duty during our nation's time of maximum danger.

For over 200 years, African Americans have participated in every conflict that confronted this Nation.

Besides fighting the common enemies of this country with unmatched bravery and valor, Black soldiers also had to confront individual and institutional racism of their countrymen.

African American servicemembers have served with great valor and distinction in all branches of our nation's armed forces.

Since the revolutionary war, Black Americans have faithfully defended this Nation and built a legacy of courage, commitment, and professionalism.

Like any other group of Americans, Black soldiers have served the armed forces with great honor, distinction, and generational inspiration.

The Jackson Lee Amendment No. 1051 would have ensured that the legacies of Black American servicemembers are duly recognized and honored.

The Jackson Lee Amendment No. 1104 requires a report to be submitted to Congress within 240 days of NDAA enactment on the risks posed by debris in low Earth orbit and to make recommendations on remediation of risks and outline plans to reduce the incident of space debris.

Space debris encompasses both natural and artificial particles and this amendment would address the risk of man-made space debris. Man-made objects in Earth's orbit that may no longer serve a useful function can include nonfunctional spacecraft, abandoned launch vehicle stages, mission-related debris and fragmentation debris.

Space debris travels at speeds up to 17,500 miles per hour—fast enough for a small piece of man-made debris to damage a satellite or a spacecraft.

There are more than 20,000 pieces of debris larger than a softball orbiting the Earth. There are 500,000 pieces of debris the size of a marble or larger tracked by NASA, and there are many millions of pieces of debris that are so small they can't be tracked.

This amendment seeks a report on risks posed by man-made space debris, solutions for reducing risks, and strategies for reducing the incidence of more man-made space debris being introduced into space.

Jackson Lee Amendment No. 1104 would have addressed these challenges.

Jackson Lee Amendment No. 1402 requires the Secretary of Defense to ensure that military academy graduates undergo screening for speech disorders and be provided with their results.

Many officer positions and occupation specialists require successful performance on the

speech test, so it is essential that military academy students are aware of their status as they shape their career path.

Under this amendment, military academy students would have the option of undergoing speech therapy to reduce speech disorders or impediments.

Thus, military academy students who do not perform successfully on the speech test have the opportunity to improve their performance and potentially go on to pursue the officer and specialist positions they seek.

Approximately 5–10 percent of all children stutter as they develop language skills. Boys are 2 to 3 times more likely to stutter than girls. And approximately 75 percent of children recover from stuttering, but the remaining 25 percent will experience life-long effects of stuttering.

I offered this amendment to help entrants into military academies find the right career fit for their military service after graduation.

I learned about the issue of stuttering and its implications for a successful military career through the experiences of a Legislative Fellow who once served in my D.C. office.

He was a 2016 graduate from the United States Naval Academy with a degree in Operations Research and a veteran naval officer who was separated from the Navy in April 2019 because his speech fluency testing results did not meet the Naval Aviation community standards, and so he was disqualified from serving as an aviator.

At that critical juncture he was not informed about what careers he could qualify to fill that would not be impacted by the determination regarding his speech.

This Jackson Lee Amendment No. 1402 would have represented an important investment in military academy students, improving transparency and providing avenues for personal improvement, ensuring quality candidates for vital military leadership positions.

Jackson Lee Amendment No. 1405 removes bill language about Critical Race Theory, thereby rejecting any efforts to inject politics into the armed services.

In this way, my amendment affirms the importance of July 26, 1948, the date that President Harry Truman signed Executive Order 9981, creating the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services.

This executive order desegregated the military and declared that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin.

This was a major step forward and was the result of dedicated advocacy efforts from the NAACP and ACLU, as well as President Truman's own commitment to the issue.

The importance of this Executive Order and the change it brought about cannot be overstated. The diversity of the military and the equality of opportunity found there is one of the major strengths of the armed services.

It is crucial that the armed services continue their commitment to live out the promises of equality and opportunity enshrined in Executive Order 9981.

The current provisions of the NDAA which prohibit the use of federal funds for critical race theory are largely political in nature and represent a step away from the promises President Truman made of equality and opportunity in the military. The Jackson Lee Amendment No. 1405 would have ensured that these

political provisions are struck, thereby affirming the value of diversity and equality of opportunity throughout our military.

Jackson Lee Amendment No. 1406 requires a report be provided to the House and Senate Armed Services committee on the extent that readiness relies on electricity availability to bases, installations, and duty stations.

The report would provide an assessment on the military's reliance upon electricity service provided by transformers that manage power transmission from high power lines to end points. The assessment would evaluate supply chain issues impacting the availability of transformers and surplus transformers held in reserve by the military. The report would also assess the overall market supply and demand for transformers, and any risks that market availability issues of transformers pose to military readiness, to ensure recommendations on resolving any risk to readiness posed by supply chain issues with transformers. The report would also evaluate the extent if any that extreme weather plays on transformer supply. As such, Congress can be best informed on military readiness if supply chain issues with transformers persist. And Congress can ensure that the bases, installations, and duty stations of the armed services maintain the electricity they need to remain reliable and fulfill their function, even in times of crisis induced by natural disasters or supply chain issues. This Jackson Lee Amendment No. 1406 offered a proactive approach to military electricity supply and would have ensured informed responses when issues arise.

Jackson Lee Amendment No. 1509 helps to address military recruitment and retention needs by providing the following modifications to the J-1 Visa process:

J-1 Visa holders who have been legally admitted into the United States and have successfully completed 8 months out of a 12-month visa duration or 14 months out of an 18-month visa duration may pursue opportunities to join the military. If inducted into the armed services, they would qualify for permanent residency provided they meet other enlistment requirements, military fitness standards, have no criminal background, and are of good conduct during their period of enlistment and during which time they may pursue citizenship.

During the first years of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, many military experts expressed concerns that the constant deployments could negatively impact the force with the expectation that fewer young Americans would volunteer to serve in a wartime military. The expectations of these experts seem ten-

able given the current recruitment crisis following our full withdrawal from Afghanistan the summer of 2022.

With the current trend, this recruitment crisis shows no signs of abating anytime soon. As a result, we see shrinking numbers in all branches of our forces. To put this in perspective, the last fiscal year, the Army missed its recruitment goal by about 15,000 active-duty soldiers, roughly 25 percent of its target. Consequently, the army was forced to cut its projected active-duty end strength from about 476,000 down to around 466,000. Shrinking numbers is not caused by strategic choices but largely due to the lack of qualified volunteers. The Jackson Lee Amendment No. 1509 would have addressed this recruitment crisis with serious implications for our strategic position in this increasingly uncertain and dangerous world.

The Jackson Lee Amendment No. 1510 directs the Secretary of Defense to establish a task force 180 days after enactment that will report to the House and Senate Armed Services Committees and make publicly available an annual report that explains the progress made over the history of the Department of Defense and its predecessor departments (Department of War) and experiences in integrating African Americans into the branches of the armed services and the civilian staffing of Pentagon offices and agencies.

The report shall provide information on the lessons learned about the social, cultural, legal, and logistical challenges faced, obstacles incurred, advances made, and the impact of integration on the warfighting capacity of the Nation.

In this way, the lessons of military integration can be drawn upon by policy makers charged with the important and necessary work of binding up the nation's wounds first inflicted with the governmental legalization and tolerance of slavery in the United States. The Jackson Lee Amendment No. 1510 would have made this possible.

Jackson Lee Amendment No. 1512 requires the Chief of the National Guard Bureau, in coordination with the Secretary of Defense, to submit a report identifying the personnel, training, and equipment required by the non-federalized National Guard to prevent, mitigate, respond to, and recover from natural and manmade disasters.

It is always hard to ever fully be prepared for what is to come whenever any form of disaster strikes. It therefore helps to know that the survival specialists of the Air National Guard are always equipped, ready, and quick to respond and assist the affected commu-

nities. Whenever a state of emergency is declared, it is because the authorities believe that the disaster that has occurred or is imminent, is severe enough to require State or federal aid to increase local resources to prevent and alleviate damage, suffering, and hardship to the affected communities.

The Air National Guard has an exceptionally unique role in aiding the prevention and recovery of these forms of disasters disaster. Jackson Lee Amendment No. 1512 would have ensured that the Air National Guard was prepared to successfully fulfill their role in disaster prevention and recovery.

Jackson Lee Amendment No. 1514 requires the Secretary of the Navy, not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, to submit to the congressional defense committees a report on desalination technology's application for defense and national security purposes to provide drought relief to areas impacted by sharp declines in water resources.

Throughout the history of our Nation, the U.S. Navy has been a pioneer in national defense and security technology. The two main types of desalination systems on Navy ships, including reverse osmosis and distillation, produce up to 12,000 gallons of fresh, drinkable water a day.

The U.S. Navy has a unique opportunity to share resources and technology that lowers the cost of clean water production and use low-carbon energy sources. Now, as climate change becomes an increasing national security concern, desalination technology could have rippling benefits for drought concerns here in the U.S. and around the world.

In one of the most unstable and geopolitical regions of the world, the Middle East and North Africa, water scarcity is a severe problem, with over 60 percent of the population having little or no access to drinking water. Currently, the region is heavily dependent on their current system of desalination, which is expensive and energy intensive. As many as 13 out of 22 Arab countries fall into the category of severe water scarcity and Navy desalination technology could make significant improvements in their process, addressing both climate change and security concerns.

Beyond addressing humanitarian concerns, this report will support needs here at home as water scarcity is a growing concern. New desalination technologies could give Americans an opportunity to be prepared for the next water crisis. Jackson Lee Amendment No. 1514 offered a proactive approach to protecting our national security and our planet as a whole.