Senate Moves FY 2027 NDAA Forward Amid Larger Uncertainty

By Ken Miller, AOC Director of Advocacy & Outreach

As we approach the July 4th holiday, I wanted to take a few moments to update our community on developments in the US Congress and annual defense budget process. It's been a busy month with many positive steps forward yet just as much uncertainty about the way ahead.

On June 10, I wrote about the **reporting of H.R. 8800, the FY 2027 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), from the House Armed Services Committee (HASC)**. Since then, the most important development was that the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) reported its version of the NDAA on June 11. Similar to the House version, the Senate bill provides $1.15 trillion in FY 2027 for national defense, including the Department of Defense and defense-related activities in the Department of Energy and other federal agencies.

Specifically, the Senate NDAA provides an increase in the maximum amount for fire and imminent danger pay; provides a $1 billion increase for maritime unmanned systems, counter-drone technology, and policy implementation; and focuses on DOD's capabilities for countering cartels, defending the southwest border, and building partner capacity in SOUTHCOM.

Most notably, however, for AOC and our global EMSO community, was the inclusion of direct support language to develop a core curriculum for EMSO. AOC proposed this language in the spring, and Sen. Mark Kelly (AZ) sponsored its inclusion in the bill.

The language reads (p. 179-180):

The committee believes Electromagnetic Spectrum Operations (EMSO) are coordinated military actions to exploit, attack, protect, and manage the electromagnetic environment (JP 3-85). EMSO is a core competency of the Department of Defense (DOD), which requires a trained cadre of competent warfighters and federal workforce to achieve superiority across the Electromagnetic Spectrum (EMS) enterprise. Modern military operations require that every warfighter and DOD civilian serving in a mission support role across each of the services should be required to learn about the EMS in the same foundational way before specializing first by competency, then by each military service, as Joint personnel, and finally as senior leaders.

The committee notes that modern military operations require every warfighter to learn about the EMS in the same foundational way. The committee recognizes the value of EMSO education and encourages the military service academies to consider opportunities to incorporate both core competency fundamentals and service-specific fundamentals into their curricula. Therefore, the committee directs the Secretary of Defense to:

1. *Conduct a comprehensive survey of existing EMSO courseware in service academies, Senior Service Colleges, and the Joint Forces Staff College to determine alignment with requirements for both core competency fundamentals and service-specific fundamentals, including Joint Force EMSO and Senior Leaders EMSO; and*
2. *Provide a report to the congressional defense committees, not later than December 31, 2027. The report shall include:*

a. *Findings from the survey, specifically how/if existing courseware aligns with Goal 3 of the Department of Defense Electromagnetic Spectrum Superiority Strategy (2020), which emphasizes advancing EMSO education and training to strengthen operational readiness;*
b. *Recommendations for curriculum integration; and*
c. *An assessment of associated costs required to implement EMSO curriculum across military educational institutions.*

Sen. Kelly and his office have strongly supported EMSO over the years, and we greatly appreciate their advocacy in Congress. Between both the House and Senate versions of the NDAA, the AOC was successful in securing progress for both of our legislative priorities this year. Additionally, since both provisions were DRL, they are already considered implemented and do not have to survive a conference committee negotiation. Our focus now turns to ensure DOD implements both provisions in accordance with the will of Congress.

The outlook for the NDAA is less certain. The House plans to vote on H.R. 8800 on July 2, prior to the July 4th district work period. The Senate, however, has no plans to consider its bill yet. Sen. Chuck Schumer (NY), the Democrat Minority Leader, has signaled that he will block the advance until other concessions are agreed upon.

Regardless, both chambers are proceeding with a conference committee process as if both bills have passed their respective chambers. It’s important to keep in mind that most congressional processes and rules manage political elements of the legislative process. The only rule that really matters – and social studies teachers need to plug their ears for this – is that both the House and Senate must pass the same bill before it proceeds to the President’s desk for his signature.

There will be a final NDAA agreed upon by both chambers before the end of the session in December. Until then, enjoy a show of misdirection and uncertainty.