



Congresswoman

VERONICA ESCOBAR

Texas' 16th Congressional District

December 11, 2019

FACT SHEET

Congresswoman Escobar Secures Inclusion of Key El Paso Priorities in NDAA

Congresswoman Veronica Escobar (TX-16), member of the House Armed Services Committee, secured key priorities for El Paso and Fort Bliss in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 (NDAA).

In addition to key regional priorities, this first NDAA under the new Democratic majority secures a strong national defense that is built on Democratic principles and advances American values. Below, an overview of the big wins in the FY20 NDAA:

PROMOTES A DIVERSE, INCLUSIVE MILITARY

- At the request of Congresswoman Escobar, the NDAA requires the Secretary of Defense to update and implement the Department of Defense Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan.
- Strengthens and diversifies the Department's science and technology workforce and infrastructure, promoting the diversification of the research and engineering workforce of the Department of Defense (DOD).
- Requires DOD to record and maintain information regarding race, ethnicity, and gender in the military justice system and establish guidance to identify and take action on any disparities discovered.

CLIMATE CHANGE

- Congresswoman Escobar successfully added an amendment that requires DOD to consult with experts from other agencies to adapt or develop a risk assessment tool that can help them better assess and plan for climate risk uniformly across the Department.
- Authorizes \$283 million, an additional \$133 million, for military construction projects that improve energy resiliency and energy conservation efforts at military installations.
- Contains a number of provisions that require DOD to identify, mitigate, and plan for the material impacts of climate change, and improve resiliency, on military installations and infrastructure.

PROVIDES MILITARY FAMILIES REMEDIES FOR MEDICAL MALPRACTICE

- Under a current law known as the Feres Doctrine, service members on active duty who are victims of medical malpractice in a Military Treatment Facility are prevented from filing claims for personal injury or death.
- The NDAA creates a pathway for a service member to file a claim for themselves, or a family member, in the case of medical malpractice – providing our service members an opportunity to seek justice.

SUPPORTS SERVICE MEMBERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

- The NDAA provides a 3.1 percent pay raise, the largest increase in a decade, extending special pay and bonuses for service members.
- Provides federal employees with 12 weeks paid parental leave in the case of birth, adoption, or fostering, and brings Civilian Employee parental leave benefits more in line with what military personnel receive.
- Repeals the “widow’s tax” – a longstanding offset in dependent benefits that denied surviving family members the security they deserve – to allow surviving families to collect annuity payments in full for both the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense.
- Requires DOD to develop a comprehensive mental health policy that considers the availability of mental health services for service members and the effectiveness in how these services are delivered.
- Requires DOD to examine and report on the effectiveness of suicide prevention programs and develop metrics evaluating treatment plans, mental health screenings and resiliency programs.
- Adopts numerous provisions that reform the oversight and management of privatized military family housing – including a tenant’s bill of rights and prohibits the use of Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs) by contractors.
- Requires the Establishment of a Defense Advisory Committee for the Prevention of Sexual Misconduct; requires enhanced training for Special Victims’ Counsel (SVCs) to ensure sound advice on criminal legal options are available to sexual assault victims; and, for the first time, provides for legal counsel to victims of domestic violence.

ADVANCED MANUFACTURING

- Congresswoman Escobar worked to ensure the NDAA includes Congress’ support and authorization for new funding for additive manufacturing programing and requires that DoD assess and report to Congress on the contributions that these technologies, like the ones researched and used daily at UTEP’s W.M. Keck Center, can make when employed directly in theatres of combat.

INFRASTRUCTURE

- Programs that invest in infrastructure for the communities that support military installations can positively impact readiness and quality of life for our service members, their families, and their neighbors in cities like El Paso.
- The NDAA authorizes \$75 million for the Office of Economic Adjustment’s Defense Community Infrastructure Program (DCIP), a Congresswoman Escobar priority essential for helping communities like El Paso access infrastructure funding.

PROTECTING OUR AMERICAN VALUES

- The NDAA does not authorize any backfill of military construction funds the President chose to take from military accounts for a wasteful and ineffective border wall.
- Protects service members who are protected under DACA or TPS from being involuntarily separated from the military, and requires that a veteran’s military service be considered in removal proceedings
- Requires counseling to service members who are not citizens on how to apply as well as inclusion of questions on the pre-separation counseling checklist on immigration status to ensure those leaving the military know how to apply for citizenship.