



Defense Appropriations Highlights and Conference Issues

Elaine McCusker and John G. Ferrari

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Key Points

- The House and Senate Appropriations Committees have both produced fiscal year 2024 defense bills, and while the Senate measure is bipartisan, the House bill is not.
- The Senate appropriations bill adds more money for defense-wide and Navy programs, while the House bill adds more funding for the Army and Air Force.
- Key conference issues, on top of wide discrepancies in funding priorities, include innovation and the agility of budget processes to support military competitiveness, industrial base and workforce initiatives, multiyear contracting, a large pay raise for enlisted personnel provided by the House, and the Senate's inclusion of \$8 billion above budget caps for emergency spending.

The House and Senate Appropriations Committees have produced fiscal year (FY) 2024 defense spending bills.¹ Time for floor debate in both chambers has been scarce and will likely remain so in September, so these measures may proceed directly into conference negotiations, as has been the case in recent years. Similar to the authorization measures, the Senate defense appropriations bill was actioned on a bipartisan basis with a committee vote of 27–1, while the House bill was approved by committee on a partisan vote of 34–24.²

The most contentious issues for conference are likely to be those that do not directly relate to military capability. This report does not focus on those issues but instead summarizes the Senate bill and highlights key commonalities and differences to be resolved with the House in the coming weeks.³

Senate Initiatives of Interest

Unlike authorization measures, which contain a lot of language explaining committee priorities and initiatives,

appropriations reports tend to be much shorter with limited descriptive text. This means that whenever appropriators devote more than a paragraph of text to a topic, that text conveys a level of importance on its own. With that in mind, the Senate appropriators put words on the page on two broad issue areas of particular note: innovation and the budget processes that support military competitiveness and industrial base and workforce initiatives.

Authorizers have done much over the past decade to provide the Pentagon with rapid acquisition authorities and other mechanisms to speed the way it develops and buys goods and services from concept to capability. As the Department of Defense (DOD) and Congress focus on modernizing the planning, programming, budgeting, and execution (PPBE) process with a particular emphasis on budgeting and execution, the appropriations committees' views are particularly important because these committees control the funds that translate the budget into executable dollars.

The House appropriators laid out their views on the PPBE process with what they called a “hedge portfolio” as their vision for resourcing “organizations capable of developing non-traditional solutions from non-traditional sources by intentionally taking calculated risks to incentivize positive, deliberate, accelerated change.”⁴ Key to the House approach is \$1 billion, to include new budget lines for prototyping and fielding of capabilities led by the Defense Innovation Unit.

Senate appropriators have now put their thoughts on the PPBE process on paper as well, providing somewhat rare and valuable insight into their views on agility, congressional responsiveness, and previously provided flexibilities. The committee notes: “It is imperative that speed and innovation do not come at the expense of sound financial, acquisition, and management best practices essential to delivering capability to the warfighter on time and on budget.”⁵

In summary, the Senate argues that, in most cases, the department already has what it needs but does not fully use previously provided authorities. Additionally, the Senate contends that acquisition structures and expertise—resident in the military departments and the under secretary for acquisition and sustainment—with clear acquisition lines of authority should remain the center of gravity for accelerated testing, scaling, and production of capabilities.

In making the case for their approach, the Senate appropriators lay out program failures in each military department associated with rapid acquisition authorities, emphasizing “the need to understand requirements, technical risk, systems engineering, and the industrial base capabilities upfront before pursuing” such acquisition paths.⁶ Programs and authorities highlighted include the following.

- **Air Force.** The Air-Launched Rapid Response Weapon used the middle tier of acquisition (MTA) authority with the intent to develop capability by 2023, but, due to little development success and multiple test failures, it was eventually terminated.
- **Navy.** The extra-large unmanned underwater vehicle was identified as a solution to the joint emergent operational need for advanced mining. The Navy used rapid acquisition with

a plan to deliver vehicles in January 2023, but after exceeding its planned budget by more than 64 percent, the program is running three years behind with no deliveries to date.

- **Army.** The Extended Range Cannon Artillery program is an MTA rapid prototyping effort that had planned to equip its first unit in 2025, but technical difficulties have delayed the program past the five-year MTA time frame, with equipping now not expected until 2027.

The Senate committee also defends congressional responsiveness to reprogramming and new start requests while increasing reprogramming thresholds from \$10 million to \$15 million for certain accounts.⁷ In a nod toward the potential benefits of reducing the number of program elements as one solution to budget inflexibility, Senate appropriators recommend centralizing all defense-wide Joint All-Domain Command and Control resources.⁸ They further direct the Army to work with the comptroller to “develop a proposal to reduce and streamline the number of individual budget lines in the ‘Other Procurement, Army’ appropriations account” for consideration during the FY 2025 budget cycle.⁹ Both of these should serve as a proving ground for future reduction of program elements.

The Senate appropriators’ explanation of their views on this topic is important and useful, but also troubling as it signals a preference for a status quo we know is not producing the outcomes our military needs in the time frames it needs them. Conference discussions on this portfolio of topics will be crucial, as will the future of the Pentagon-congressional partnership in breaking the chains of legacy PPBE processes and structures while providing the necessary transparency for oversight.

Concerns about the defense industrial base and associated workforce training, skills, and sufficiency run through numerous sections of the Senate bill, starting upfront, where the committee lays out its initiatives and notes that “people are the most important resource in the joint force and that taking care of the workforce is a critical readiness issue.”¹⁰ The committee includes direction specifically related to acquisition workforce requirements, emphasizes defense language and education, encourages expansion of

enhanced workforce development through the Skill-Bridge program, and pays particular attention to virtual language training for members of the Army National Guard.¹¹ The committee continues this theme by devoting a section to hiring and retention of the Navy shipbuilding trades workforce, adding funds for the Sentinel industrial base workforce, encouraging additional partnerships to improve readiness of the defense supply-chain workforce, and inserting a new section of law designating appropriations for the defense industrial base capacity and workforce shortfalls as an emergency.¹²

Other Issues of Interest Between the Two Bills

Interestingly, one other issue related to both innovation and the industrial base, the use of multiyear procurement contracts, will need to be resolved in conference. On this issue, the House appropriators were actually more restrictive than the Senate in approving only five of seven requested procurements, citing the department's failure to "provide realistic cost estimates" and meet other requirements outlined in statute.¹³

In contrast, the Senate approved all seven of these requests, though it has anxieties of its own. Specifically, the committee noted its concern that, in some instances, the Pentagon has not secured co-investment commitments from industry, despite asking for funds to boost production capacity beyond what is required in the proposed multiyear requests.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the Senate appropriators still followed their authorization colleagues more closely in supporting these contracts as a way to provide industry with a clear demand signal and get the production necessary to rebuild munitions stockpiles.¹⁵

Finally, the House appropriators, defying conventional wisdom on authority for pay raises, have added a 30 percent pay raise for junior enlisted members.¹⁶ They are the outlier, as neither authorization committee has done this, nor have the Senate appropriators. A pay raise of this size is indeed unprecedented, so this is a remarkable proposal by the House. Regardless of whether the House appropriators meant for this to be a strong signal for DOD to address enlisted pay, it is clear they are serious about this issue. On top of the

recruiting challenges, DOD is on record that a large portion of the junior enlisted force is suffering from food insecurity, so throwing money at this problem could be the end solution.¹⁷

House and Senate Comparisons by the Numbers

Both appropriations bills largely adhere to the budget caps contained in the Fiscal Responsibility Act, with one key exception.¹⁸ The Senate added \$8 billion in a combination of supplemental support for Taiwan and Ukraine and for some normal DOD activities that it designated as emergency spending. The Senate also strongly indicated an expectation for a supplemental funding request from the administration for Ukraine, Taiwan, and any other related emergency requirements.¹⁹

The Office of Management and Budget has now submitted a \$40.1 billion supplemental request, of which \$13.1 billion would go to defense. Of that amount, nearly \$10 billion is for Ukraine-related responses, and an additional \$3.1 billion is for military personnel (MILPERS), operations and maintenance (O&M), procurement, and research, development, test, and evaluation (RDTE) costs designated as emergency requirements.²⁰

It is unclear at present exactly how the appropriations committee conferees will action the existing bills to include disposition of the Senate emergency funding and the new supplemental. Therefore, this analysis removes the Senate emergency funds to compare what both committees marked as within the base budget.

With Senate emergency funding and rescissions of previously provided appropriations excluded, the chambers are about \$1.8 billion apart (Table 1). Note that both committees added or subtracted funds from certain accounts in an undistributed manner. When that occurred, we allocated the additional funds or reductions proportionally across the corresponding service appropriations within that account. From an appropriation title standpoint, the big losers in the Senate Appropriations Committee (SAC) bill compared to the president's budget (PB) and House Appropriations Committee (HAC) bill are the MILPERS and RDTE accounts. The O&M account also loses out when the Senate bill is compared to the House bill. Big winners are military construction (MILCON) and procurement.

Table 1. Defense Topline Adjusted (Non-Emergency)

Category	PB 2024	SAC	PB 2024 vs. SAC Difference	HAC	SAC vs. HAC Difference
MILCON and Family Housing	\$16,674,944	\$19,070,000	\$2,395,056	\$17,674,000	\$1,396,000
MILPERS	\$178,873,966	\$176,538,766	(\$2,335,200)	\$178,722,024	(\$2,183,258)
O&M	\$329,897,044	\$331,321,890	\$1,424,846	\$334,153,257	(\$2,831,367)
Procurement	\$169,080,185	\$170,538,561	\$1,458,376	\$165,559,322	\$4,979,239
RDTE	\$144,879,625	\$143,382,724	(\$1,496,901)	\$146,836,251	(\$3,453,527)
Revolving and Management Funds	\$1,682,708	\$2,002,708	\$320,000	\$1,674,408	\$328,300
Total	\$841,088,472	\$842,854,649	\$1,766,177	\$844,619,262	(\$1,764,613)

Note: Totals are presented in thousands of dollars.

Source: Authors' calculations based on fiscal year 2024 defense budget materials and defense and military construction appropriations bills and reports.

Table 2. Service Topline Adjusted (Non-Emergency)

Category	PB 2024	SAC	PB 2024 vs. SAC Difference	HAC	SAC vs. HAC Difference
Air Force	\$226,283,289	\$225,015,336	(\$1,267,953)	\$225,657,549	(\$642,212)
Army	\$179,729,835	\$180,508,753	\$778,918	\$182,152,290	(\$1,643,537)
Defense-Wide	\$152,681,765	\$155,528,434	\$2,846,669	\$155,519,932	\$8,502
Navy	\$221,121,831	\$221,767,836	\$646,005	\$220,662,322	\$1,105,514
Space Force	\$30,197,675	\$29,059,003	(\$1,138,672)	\$29,084,729	(\$25,726)
Marine Corps	\$31,074,077	\$30,975,287	(\$98,790)	\$31,542,440	(\$567,154)
Total	\$841,088,472	\$842,854,649	\$1,766,177	\$844,619,262	(\$1,764,613)

Note: Totals are presented in thousands of dollars.

Source: Authors' calculations based on fiscal year 2024 defense budget materials and defense and military construction appropriations bills and reports.

Comparing the Senate bill to the PB from a military department perspective (Table 2), the Air Force and Space Force are clearly the big losers, with the defense-wide appropriations obtaining the biggest increases. Comparing the Senate and House versions of the bills, the Army and Air Force will clearly prefer the House version, while the Navy will prefer the Senate version. The Army and defense-wide programs are the only ones that do better in both the House and Senate versions of the bills, indicating that both chambers believe they are underfunded. For the Army, this may change if its end strength comes in below

expectations, necessitating a further cut from what was requested for MILPERS.

Breaking down the appropriations lines a bit further (Table 3), funding priorities between the two bills become even clearer. The Senate emphasizes procurement, particularly for the Navy and Air Force, and MILCON, with a heavy focus on the Navy. The House favors RDTE, with more than \$1.3 billion more for the Navy than the Senate, and O&M, again adding the most money for the Navy, but with adds for each service except the Space Force.

Table 3. Categories by Service Topline Adjusted (Non-Emergency)

Category	PB 2024	SAC	PB 2024 vs. SAC Difference	HAC	SAC vs. HAC Difference
MILCON and Family Housing	\$16,674,944	\$19,070,000	\$2,395,056	\$17,674,000	\$1,396,000
Air Force	\$3,751,081	\$4,459,095	\$708,014	\$4,571,713	(\$112,618)
Army	\$2,758,837	\$3,668,557	\$909,720	\$3,477,464	\$191,093
Defense-Wide	\$3,341,734	\$3,644,034	\$302,300	\$3,304,406	\$339,628
Navy	\$6,823,292	\$7,298,314	\$475,022	\$6,320,417	\$977,897
MILPERS	\$178,873,966	\$176,538,766	(\$2,335,200)	\$178,722,024	(\$2,183,258)
Air Force	\$44,530,363	\$43,832,977	(\$697,386)	\$44,417,923	(\$584,946)
Army	\$65,514,911	\$64,696,108	(\$818,803)	\$65,677,146	(\$981,038)
Defense-Wide	\$10,553,456	\$10,555,000	\$1,544	\$10,553,456	\$1,544
Navy	\$40,525,106	\$39,881,589	(\$643,517)	\$40,293,789	(\$412,200)
Space Force	\$1,266,573	\$1,210,928	(\$55,645)	\$1,245,498	(\$34,570)
Marine Corps	\$16,483,557	\$16,362,164	(\$121,393)	\$16,534,212	(\$172,048)
O&M	\$329,897,044	\$331,321,890	\$1,424,846	\$334,153,257	(\$2,831,367)
Air Force	\$74,469,789	\$74,308,037	(\$161,752)	\$75,127,507	(\$819,470)
Army	\$72,300,171	\$72,909,478	\$609,307	\$73,129,617	(\$220,139)
Defense-Wide	\$93,537,725	\$94,285,811	\$748,086	\$94,512,988	(\$227,177)
Navy	\$73,960,583	\$74,192,789	\$232,206	\$75,259,255	(\$1,066,466)
Space Force	\$5,017,468	\$4,970,347	(\$47,121)	\$4,890,886	\$79,461
Marine Corps	\$10,611,308	\$10,655,428	\$44,120	\$11,233,004	(\$577,576)
Procurement	\$169,080,185	\$170,538,561	\$1,458,376	\$165,559,322	\$4,979,239
Air Force	\$56,966,700	\$56,739,425	(\$227,275)	\$55,060,548	\$1,678,877
Army	\$23,380,535	\$23,341,256	(\$39,279)	\$23,109,601	\$231,655
Defense-Wide	\$7,148,819	\$8,432,252	\$1,283,433	\$8,406,664	\$25,588
Navy	\$72,890,625	\$74,033,135	\$1,142,510	\$71,098,084	\$2,935,051
Space Force	\$4,714,294	\$4,034,798	(\$679,496)	\$4,109,201	(\$74,403)
Marine Corps	\$3,979,212	\$3,957,695	(\$21,517)	\$3,775,224	\$182,471
RDTE	\$144,879,625	\$143,382,724	(\$1,496,901)	\$146,836,251	(\$3,453,527)
Air Force	\$46,565,356	\$45,675,802	(\$889,554)	\$46,479,858	(\$804,056)
Army	\$15,775,381	\$15,893,354	\$117,973	\$16,758,462	(\$865,108)
Defense-Wide	\$36,417,323	\$36,608,629	\$191,306	\$37,068,010	(\$459,831)
Navy	\$26,922,225	\$26,362,009	(\$560,216)	\$27,690,777	(\$1,328,768)
Space Force	\$19,199,340	\$18,842,930	(\$356,410)	\$18,839,144	\$3,786
Revolving and Management Funds	\$1,682,708	\$2,002,708	\$320,000	\$1,674,408	\$328,300
Defense-Wide	\$1,682,708	\$2,002,708	\$320,000	\$1,674,408	\$328,300
Total	\$841,088,472	\$842,854,649	\$1,766,177	\$844,619,262	(\$1,764,613)

Note: Totals are presented in thousands of dollars.

Source: Authors' calculations based on fiscal year 2024 defense budget materials and defense and military construction appropriations bills and reports.

Table 4. Top Five Differences, SAC vs. HAC (Non-Emergency)

Appropriation	SAC vs. HAC Difference
RDTE, Navy	(\$1,328,768)
O&M, Navy	(\$1,144,066)
MILPERS, Army	(\$894,998)
RDTE, Army	(\$865,108)
O&M, Air Force	(\$831,890)
Other Procurement, Navy	\$1,035,634
MILCON, Navy	\$1,134,839
Missile Procurement, Air Force	\$1,188,869
Aircraft Procurement, Navy	\$1,309,021
O&M, Defense-Wide	\$1,534,294

Note: Totals are presented in thousands of dollars.
 Source: Authors' calculations based on fiscal year 2024 defense and military construction appropriations bills and reports.

Table 5. Top Five Subtractions and Additions, SAC vs. PB 2024 (Non-Emergency)

Appropriation	SAC vs. PB 2024 Difference
RDTE, Air Force	(\$889,554)
MILPERS, Army	(\$787,901)
Weapons Procurement, Navy	(\$752,165)
Procurement, Space Force	(\$679,496)
MILPERS, Air Force	(\$648,423)
O&M, Army	\$525,514
MILCON, Air Force	\$539,110
Defense Health Program	\$671,241
National Guard and Reserve Procurement Account	\$850,000
Aircraft Procurement, Navy	\$1,422,301

Note: Totals are presented in thousands of dollars.
 Source: Authors' calculations based on fiscal year 2024 defense budget materials and fiscal year 2024 Senate defense and military construction appropriations bills and reports.

These contrasts are also visible when comparing the top five differences between the HAC and SAC (Table 4). The widest gaps are in the Navy, where the following lines differ by more than \$1 billion between the two bills—RDTE, O&M, aircraft procurement, other procurement, and MILCON. Gaps in Air Force missile procurement and defense-wide O&M are also over \$1 billion.

Table 6. SAC Emergency Designation FY24

Service or Appropriation	SAC Funding
Air Force	\$1,725,334
Aircraft Procurement	\$327,900
Missile Procurement	\$193,000
O&M	\$1,079,514
Other Procurement	\$71,420
RDTE	\$53,500
Army	\$968,276
Missile Procurement	\$22,700
O&M	\$868,576
Other Procurement	\$77,000
Defense-Wide	\$3,734,699
O&M, Defense-Wide	\$1,173,468
O&M, Taiwan Assistance	\$1,100,000
Procurement	\$1,010,341
RDTE	\$450,890
Navy	\$1,354,287
Aircraft Procurement	\$93,000
O&M	\$1,050,587
Other Procurement	\$36,900
RDTE	\$173,800
Space Force	\$58,236
O&M	\$58,236
Marine Corps	\$159,168
O&M	\$132,938
Procurement	\$26,230
Grand Total	\$8,000,000

Note: Totals are presented in thousands of dollars.
 Source: Authors' calculations based on the Senate Appropriations Committee's report for fiscal year 2024 defense appropriations.

Comparing the SAC bill to the PB (Table 5), the biggest winners are Navy aircraft procurement (mostly for an additional 10 P-8A Poseidon aircraft), equipment for the National Guard, the Defense Health Program, MILCON for the Air Force, and O&M for the Army. The biggest losers are Air Force RDTE, Army MILPERS, Navy weapons procurement, Space Force procurement, and Air Force MILPERS.

Finally, it is useful to see where the Senate added the \$8 billion in emergency funds discussed above. As depicted in Table 6, the Senate added the most money to defense-wide O&M, specifically for Taiwan assistance and for O&M and procurement. Air Force, Navy, and Army O&M also would receive substantial emergency funds.

Next Steps

Time is limited. When Congress returns from the August recess on September 12, only 11 joint legislative days will remain until the end of the fiscal year on September 30.²¹ Neither defense appropriation bill has been considered by the respective full chamber, jeopardizing the desire for a return to regular order this year—House passage of all 12 stand-alone appropriations bills.

In addition to hundreds of budget line items that make up the differences in appropriation titles noted above and the disposition of nonmilitary-specific items in the bills, conferees, congressional leadership, and in some cases the White House will need to agree on how appropriations bills will be packaged, passed, and sent to the president for signature. Disposition of emergency funding will also be required. The consequences of inaction will be dire, particularly for defense, which could lose close to \$73 billion in buying power compared to the FY 2024 budget caps under a yearlong continuing resolution.²²

About the Authors

Elaine McCusker is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, where she focuses on defense strategy, budget, and innovation; the US military; and national security. She was previously acting under secretary of defense comptroller and has a background in defense planning and budgeting, military campaign assessments, defense data analytics, contingency operations, and science and technology.

John G. Ferrari is a nonresident senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, where his work focuses on the defense budget, defense reform and acquisition, and the US military. Ferrari is a retired major general and former director of program analysis and evaluation for the Army.

Notes

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