

Congress Postpones Final Defense Bill Negotiations Until September

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Final negotiations on the annual defense authorization bill will be postponed until September, as Congress begins its summer recess. While staff and lawmakers continue behind-the-scenes work on draft legislation, formal talks between the House and Senate are on hold until legislators return to Washington.

Despite progress at the committee level, the fiscal year 2026 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) remains incomplete. Initial drafts from both the House and Senate Armed Services Committees propose a 3.8 percent pay raise for service members, an increase of roughly 26,000 troops to active-duty strength, and new funding for Ukraine, modernization, and acquisition reform.

The delay is partly due to competing legislative priorities, particularly ongoing negotiations over broader federal budget matters.

Disagreements over non-defense spending have slowed progress on the defense bill, despite bipartisan interest in passing it before the end of the year.

Historically, such delays are not uncommon. In 12 of the last 15 years, the final NDAA was not signed into law until after Thanksgiving.

Lawmakers and defense officials alike hope to avoid major disruptions in military planning and operations by resolving differences in the fall.

When Congress reconvenes in September, the focus will shift to reconciling the House's proposed \$847 billion topline with the Senate's more expansive \$879 billion version, which includes additional funding for shipbuilding, missile development, and industrial modernization. Another key area of debate will be aligning acquisition reform proposals, namely the House's SPEED Act and the Senate's FORGED Act, both aimed at streamlining defense procurement.

From a center-right perspective, the delay reflects the challenge of balancing fiscal discipline with national security. Supporters of the current drafts argue that acquisition reforms are essential to keeping the U.S. military competitive, especially as global threats grow more complex.

However, defense analysts warn that prolonged legislative inaction could impact decisions on troop pay, readiness initiatives, and procurement of vital equipment.

With Congress in recess until September, staff members and negotiators will continue to fine-tune proposals. Lawmakers face a compressed schedule when they return, and the upcoming months will be critical in determining whether key defense priorities are met on time or pushed deeper into the calendar year.