

**House Armed Services Committee**  
**Member Day Testimony from Rep. Jennifer Wexton (VA-10)**  
**April 11, 2024**

Thank you, Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the Committee, for holding this Member Day hearing and for allowing me this opportunity to share a few key National Defense Authorization Act priorities on behalf of the people of Virginia's 10<sup>th</sup> Congressional District.

Manufacturing Industrial Institutes (MIIs)

I am grateful for the opportunity to address a critical aspect of shoring up the US defense industrial base (DIB) - the expansion of the Department of Defense's (DoD) Manufacturing Innovation Institutes (MIIs) to prepare the civilian workforce for an increase in defense manufacturing. The recently released National Defense Industrial Strategy emphasizes the importance of MIIs in promoting the rapid transition and delivery of new defense-essential technologies, benefiting over 80,000 participants in 2021 alone.

To further this important work, I am working on an FY25 NDAA provision requesting specifics on DoD's plans to expand investment in MIIs. I propose language directing DoD to complete a study on the feasibility of expanding investment in MIIs within 180 days of enactment of this text. The study should include details on DoD's plans to collaborate with universities, colleges, and private companies to enhance workforce development and advance manufacturing capabilities.

This issue is gaining increasing attention due to its critical need and potential economic benefits for the US workforce. The current tension between the need to expand defense production and the call to "Buy American" underscores the importance of upskilling the American workforce to meet the defense production needs of tomorrow. We believe that expanding investment in MIIs is a crucial step towards harmonizing these goals and ensuring a robust and capable defense industrial base for the future.

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Dry Decontamination in the Arctic

Cold weather environments present unique challenges to the decontamination of military personnel, equipment, and warfighters exposed to chemical, biological, and radiological (CBR) contaminants for the effectiveness and safety of traditional decontamination methods. The primary difficulty arises from the subfreezing temperatures, which render water-based decontamination methods less effective due to the freezing of water, thereby complicating application processes and potentially damaging equipment or causing harm to individuals undergoing decontamination. Additionally, the use of water in such conditions increases the risk of hypothermia for decontaminated personnel.

Dry or water-less decontamination methods offer a promising solution to these challenges. These methods, including specialized wipes, powders, and vacuum systems, are unaffected by freezing temperatures, making them reliably deployable in all weather conditions. They also significantly reduce the risk of hypothermia by eliminating the use of water, enhancing the safety of decontamination procedures for personnel.

However, developing effective dry decontamination methods is a complex challenge that requires meticulous planning and coordination. It is essential to ensure the safety, efficacy, and practicality of these methods in diverse operational environments. This includes addressing issues such as broad-spectrum efficacy, material compatibility, and logistical considerations.

I urge the Committee to support the inclusion of report language in the NDAA directing the Army to provide a report on its strategy and plans for developing dry or water-less decontamination requirements and fielding capabilities into the force. This report will help ensure that the Department of Defense has the necessary tools and capabilities to protect our servicemembers from chemical, biological, and radiological contaminants in Arctic and cold-weather environments.

***Language:***

***Dry Decontamination capabilities to support arctic warfighting***

(1) The Committee is concerned about the ability of the Department to effectively secure and potentially decontaminate Servicemembers from chemical, biological, and radiological particulates in an arctic or cold-weather environment. The Committee is encouraged by the Department's testing of dry and water-less decontamination solutions and believes the Department should incorporate these capabilities, procedures, and tactics into current requirements and fielding plans. Further, these capabilities should be available soonest to units and servicemembers currently operating worldwide. The Committee directs the Secretary of the Army to report to the Congressional defense committees no later than December 15, 2024, on the Army's strategy and plans for developing dry or water-less decontamination requirements, and fielding capabilities into the force.