

Statement by
Rep. Veronica Escobar (TX-16)
Before the
House Committee on Armed Services
Member Day
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Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Smith,

Good morning and thank you very much for granting me the opportunity to testify today regarding the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2026. As a former Member of this Committee, I understand how critical this defense bill is. I so appreciate the incredibly hard work the Members and staff put in to ensure our military is the strongest fighting force in the world, and that our men and women in uniform and their families have the resources they need.

As you know, I have the incredible honor of representing Fort Bliss, in El Paso, Texas – one of the largest military bases in the country and one of the Army’s premier power projection platforms.

I’d like to highlight a few priorities and concerns I hope this Committee will take into consideration as you craft the FY26 NDAA.

One of my primary concerns is regarding this Administration’s unprecedented use of DoD assets for operations that traditionally fall under the jurisdiction of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). In recent months, we have seen this Administration use military airlift to deport migrants, an absurdly expensive operation to set up a migrant detention camp at Guantanamo Bay, and a plan to establish migrant detention camps on military installations around the country. DHS has requested these DoD support operations be provided on a ***non-reimbursable basis*** – which is egregious, as funds appropriated to DoD should be used to provide for our service members and focus on global threats, not misuse assets and resources when more cost-effective alternatives are available.

As we near the start of construction of a migrant detention facility on Fort Bliss, the first installation subjected to such plans thus far, I would like to iterate my opposition to this misuse of our military bases. The last time Fort Bliss was required to build and support a holding facility, it was as part of Operation Allies Welcome, when a large facility was built to hold over 10,000 Afghan refugees that the U.S. evacuated and processed in coordination with DHS. That mission alone set Fort Bliss back on readiness levels by approximately **two years**. I remain deeply worried that allowing migrant detention facilities onto our military bases and directing surges of troops along the border will have similar effects on our readiness at a time when we cannot afford to do so.

I would be remiss if I did not mention that such operations also jeopardize civil military relations in communities like my hometown of El Paso, where we are so proud to host Fort Bliss, our soldiers and their families. At a time when border crossings are at historic lows, constituents in my district have few answers as to why Strykers, armored fighting vehicles, are patrolling our community, carrying DHS personnel, who have patrol vehicles of their own. I think it is important to note that in President Trump's first term, his own Secretaries of Defense opposed using the military for federal law enforcement matters, as they revered our military as an institution and understood that military involvement in domestic political matters set a dangerous precedent, both for our military and our communities at home.

Therefore, I respectfully request this Committee takes steps to lend transparency to the DoD funds that have been used for DHS support operations, especially as some of those funds have been drawn from accounts intended to support the repair and maintenance of barracks, training facilities, and more. And further, I request this Committee analyze the negative readiness impacts of this operation, which I worry will be far reaching, even as this administration claims it wants to refocus the DoD on its warfighting mission and warns of growing aggression by the People's Republic of China.

I'd now like to turn my attention to Fort Bliss infrastructure. Fort Bliss is home to the 32nd Army Air and Missile Defense Command (AAMDC) headquarters. The 32nd AAMDC is a theater level air and missile defense organization with a worldwide 72-hour deployment mission. The men and women of the 32nd AAMDC's brigades are constantly deployed, keeping our own servicemembers, assets, and those of our allies safe all over the globe. Despite the dire importance of this command, their headquarters building is incredibly outdated, and the state of their decrepit SCIF is unacceptable. I hope to work with this Committee and the Army to ensure the 32nd AAMDC gets a new, state of the art HQ building in coming years. As you know, new military construction requires both authorization and appropriations, so I look forward to partnering on this effort through my seat on the MILCON subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee.

Lastly, I look forward to working with Members of this Committee to ensure that proposed civilian workforce reductions, outlined as a goal by Secretary of Defense Hegseth, do not negatively impact this Committee's efforts to ensure robust civilian oversight of unaccompanied housing and increase the frequency of inspections. The House Armed Services Committee's Quality of Life Panel focused heavily on improving the oversight of military housing facilities, and it would be a great disservice to our service members if Congress does not fight to protect the very DoD civilian positions we have charged with administering routine inspections of military housing.

Thank you again for allowing me to outline objectives for your consideration as you craft the FY26 National Defense Authorization Act. I am so grateful for all I learned in my six years serving on your committee, and I have used that experience to inform my work on the Committee on Appropriations, where I continue my advocacy for the men, women and families of Fort Bliss and our military at large. I look forward to working with you to ensure Congress protects and provides for them in FY26 and the years to come.