

Testimony in Support of North Dakota's Defend the Guard Act

Presented by Dan McKnight, Chairman of Bring Our Troops Home and National Sponsor of Defend the Guard Legislation

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today in support of the Defend the Guard Act. My name is Dan McKnight. I'm a 13-year military veteran, Chairman of Bring Our Troops Home, and an advocate for protecting our National Guard and upholding the Constitution.

This legislation has received national attention and widespread support from leaders who recognize its importance. When the New Hampshire House of Representatives passed Defend the Guard, Pete Hegseth, the Secretary of Defense nominee, reported on Fox News and said, *"I love this idea."* His support didn't stop there.

Last month, I met with Pete Hegseth in West Palm Beach, Florida, to discuss Defend the Guard. When I asked for his thoughts on the legislation, he again said, without hesitation, *"I love this idea."* He asked what he could do to help. Hegseth understands the value of this legislation—not only for its constitutional fidelity but also for the protection it provides to the men and women of the National Guard. When I explained the opposition we've encountered, namely thinly veiled threats of loss of federal funding by 1 and 2 star generals representing the National Guard Bureau, he was baffled and asked, *"What could possibly be the argument against a bill that ensures the National Guard is only deployed when Congress fulfills its constitutional duty?"*

His words are a powerful reminder: this bill is not radical—it's a return to the principles our nation was founded on. Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution clearly gives Congress—not the president—the authority to declare war. Yet, for decades, presidents of both parties have ignored this, using the National Guard in conflicts Congress never authorized.

One stark example is the Syrian Civil War. In 2013, President Obama asked Congress to authorize military action in Syria, and Congress said no. Yet, the administration moved forward anyway, citing the Afghanistan 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force—meant to target the perpetrators of 9/11—to justify American involvement in Syria. At the beginning of the Syrian Civil War, less than 3% of U.S. forces deployed were National Guard members. By the war's conclusion in 2024, after the fall of the Assad regime, 58% of the U.S. troops involved were National Guard. These were ordinary Americans—teachers, firefighters, and small business owners—sent to fight in an undeclared war Congress never approved.

This misuse of our National Guard must end. That's why Defend the Guard has earned the support of leaders like Pete Hegseth, Senators Rand Paul and Tim Sheehy, Congressmen Thomas Massie and Paul Gosar, and others, including Tulsi Gabbard and Vivek Ramaswamy. They all agree: no war should begin without the consent of the American people through their elected representatives.

Passing this bill will make North Dakota a leader in standing for the Constitution, for our National Guard, and against the dangerous precedent of endless, undeclared wars.

I urge you to join Secretary Hegseth, myself, and countless others in defending the Guard and protecting the men and women who serve this state.

Thank you.