Shoshana Abrams:
Hello, friends. Welcome to our call. This is our July national call, Advocacy Teams Call for FCNL. We are gathered here tonight to learn from one another and together as over 120 teams, I think 123 teams in 42 states who are lobbying congress to work for peace and justice. Specifically, we’re working on ending endless war and preventing a war with Iran. My name is Shoshana Abrams. I’m FCNL's Advocacy Teams Manager. It’s really good to see you all. We have already 165 participants on the line. I'm sure that will continue to grow.

Shoshana Abrams:
So tonight’s agenda, we have a wonderful guest speaker for you tonight, Mandy Smithberger, we'll have some time for question answer after she's presented her thoughts. Then I will give you an update on the important work that you all are doing around the country. Then we have FCNL's legislative manager, Hassan El-Tayyab I'll tab to give us our policy update. There's a lot happening not just in the past month, but today. So he'll do his best to tell you all what's going on The Hill right now. He'll have time for questions as well. So if you have anything specific that you're wondering about, he'll be able to answer that.

Shoshana Abrams:
Then at the end, I will walk us through the action sheet that we have for this month, and I have a couple announcements. So we are now up to 177 participants. So that's a lot of people. We have Sarah Freeman Wolpert, running tech for us tonight. She's going to try and keep everyone muted so we have a nice clear line. As we enter the questions and answer part of the call, you can go ahead and type your question into the chat. If you're on the phone, you can use star-six to unmute yourself, to ask your question, we just ask that you state your name first so that I can recognize you. If you have any questions that you'd like to send in via email, both Sarah and I are monitoring our emails. Sarah maybe if you could put our emails into the chat box, it's just our my first name at FCNL.org. So S-H-O-S-H-A-N-A@FCNL.org. So that's another way you can ask questions.

Shoshana Abrams:
All right, so thinking about the framing for the call tonight, I was really moved by a quote by Miriam Kaaba. Miriam Kaaba is an American activist and organizer who advocates for the abolition of prisons and the prison industrial complex. Well, I'll share the quote and then I'll tell you why picked it. So they say organizing is both a science and an art. It is thinking through a vision, a strategy, and then figuring out who your targets are, always being concerned about power, always being concerned about how you're actually going to build power in order to be able to push your issues, in order to be able to get the target to actually move in the way that you want.

Shoshana Abrams:
So a lot of what we are working on is a strategy, right? We're trying to build power as an organization, we're trying to move our members of congress, and that's organizing as well as advocacy. So I thought that quote was really fitting, and I'll go ahead and put that in the chat after we get started with our guest speaker. But I thought that quote really encapsulated so much of what we're trying to do, it's both a science and an art. So I'm really excited to get started with our call. I'd like to welcome and thank Mandy Smith Berger. Mandy, are you still online? I saw you earlier.

Mandy Smithberger:
Yes. I am.

Shoshana Abrams:
Welcome. Great. Great, Mandy, we are so happy to have you on this call. I hope you're doing well and staying safe during this time. I'll take a moment to introduce you to our network. So as you said, or as I said earlier, the FCNL advocacy teams program has 120 teams in 42 states, about 2000 advocates, who are focused on building long term positive relationships with members of congress. We have teams on the call who have been doing this for five, six years with the advocacy teams and even longer before the advocacy teams were established. We have some who just started lobbying in the past month. Our St. Louis team just lobbied for the first time yesterday. So every year, we focus on one strategic campaign. This year, we're focused on preventing war with Iran and engaging with congress to try to get them to take back this power that congress is supposed to have over issues of war and peace.

Shoshana Abrams:
Mandy, I'll just give an introduction of you before we get started. Mandy currently serves as the director of the Center for Defense Information at the Project for Government Oversight, which is nicknamed PGO. She has closely followed the National Defense Authorization Act, the NDAA process for more than seven years. Previously, Mandy served as the National Security Policy Advisor for Representative Jackie Spear. In that role, she helped advance key provisions in the military Whistleblower's Protection Enhancement Act into law. She also earlier served as an analyst for the Defense Intelligence Agency and the US Central Command. She received her BA in Gpvernment from Smith College and her Master's in Strategic Studies and International Economics from Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

Shoshana Abrams:
Mandy, you know the National Defense Authorization Act pretty well at this point. Tonight, we're hoping that you can walk us through what the National Defense Authorization Act is, what the process looks like, how do people make amendments, and what the process is between the chambers? Most importantly, probably why you believe in continuing to lobby to change this big military policy bill, why that's so important. So we're looking forward to hearing from you, and thanks again for being on the call.

Mandy Smithberger:
Well, thank you so much for having me. Thank all of you for all of the work that you do. I honestly think having worked on this bill from the inside, that we need to hear your voices more, that there's a kind of common sense that drops away when this bill is being written. So the more that normal people are in the process, I think the better that bill becomes. It might be helpful to just give you, for people who aren't familiar with PGO, to just talk a little bit about what PGO is to form how we look at this bill. So we actually started as a front group for Pentagon whistleblowers who were concerned about unaffordable and effective weapon systems and that there was insufficient accountability happening. For me, I really look at the National Defense Authorization Act as one of the most important accountability bills that Congress passes every year.

Mandy Smithberger:
Certainly, there are lots of things that I don't like about the bill, beginning with how much money it spends, and how it supports a lot of wars that I don't think support our national security interest. But
one of our goals is how do we make that bill as good as it possibly can be to make sure that we’re holding the Pentagon accountable for excessive spending for wars that we shouldn't be in. It unfortunately become almost one of the only avenues for us to be able to do so. We've just seen over time and most people on this call will be aware of that, that congress has not kept up its constitutional duty to be a co-equal branch of government, both in making sure that the wars that we waged are constitutionally authorized.

Mandy Smithberger:

But on a number foreign policy measures, the fact that we had parties in control who claim that they want to hold the president accountable and not have any kind of discussion and mark up authorizations for the use of force bills, and that almost all of those debates end up happening in the National Defense Authorization Act. So it's so important that all of you talk to member offices. It's so exciting to speak with you right now, as some of you may know, the senate is debating this bill and the House Armed Services Committee is marking this bill up as we speak. Right before I got on this call, their Representative Connor was offering amendments to transition money away from nuclear weapons into improving COVID response. So there are a lot of exciting and important issues and obviously, preventing a war with Iran is one of the most important issues that can come up in the context of this debate.

Mandy Smithberger:

So I'm trying to think if there's any ... I want to get to your questions to make sure that I'm being as helpful as possible. But I thought for some people who aren't as familiar with the process, it might be helpful to go through how this bill comes together. So when I worked for Congresswoman Jackie Sphere, she was on the House Armed Services Committee, and she still is now. So one of the first, there are a number of places where congress looks to what is this bill going to look like? One is that the Department of Defense actually has its own list of policy proposals of laws that they would like to see changed on their behalf.

Mandy Smithberger:

Those used to be public. We're working on trying to make sure that they stay public. But through those kinds of proposals, we've learned about things like the department wanting to exempt itself from Freedom of Information Act laws. This year, they wanted to loosen revolving door laws for themselves to make it easier for senior Pentagon officials to go work for defense contractors. So that's where people like us have to go and make sure that we correct the process and bring common sense and say no, we have to hold the Pentagon accountable.

Mandy Smithberger:

One of the other places that members get ideas for amendments is from talking to people in their districts, certainly a number of them talk to contractors and bases in their district. Those amendments then get submitted to the committee leadership to see one, if they could become what's called the chairman's mark, which is the bill that the debate starts from and the committee. One of the unfortunate parts of that process is that we don't always know which proposals come from which people. So you don't always have as much transparency. But the good thing in the house is that you have a market process that occurs and is occurring right now, where you can see members actually debating new amendments to this bill. We can actually see what arguments they're formulating that we have the opportunity for outside, for citizens and for civil society to weigh in and try and persuade their members of congress on what amendments to support and which ones not to.
Mandy Smithberger:

In the Senate, they're in the process of considering amendments, the floor and unfortunately, we had a pretty disappointing ... Well, Hassan will get into this, but we had a pretty disappointing vote on Afghanistan just a little bit ago. But this is where everything, whether it's the road, and that this is a bill that actually becomes law. The appropriations process is obviously certainly important too and whether it puts money behind those proposals. But for me, I really see the National Defense Authorization Act as the big reform opportunity, the biggest accountability opportunity. While I think there are lots of good reasons for people to vote against the NDAA, I think that it is an important instrument.

Mandy Smithberger:

My concern is that if congress can't come together for some kind of policy bill, that they are just weakening their own hand and just allowing the executive branch to kind of continue to do what they want to do without any kind of accountability. So this year we have debates about what authority should the president have under the insurrection act in responding to protestors. Is the 1033 program, which FCL has done such tremendous work on really serving our interest. This is the bill where all of those debates are happening. So it's an exciting and tedious process. I thank you all for participating. I look forward to your questions.

Shoshana Abrams:

Thank you, Mandy. So if you have questions for Mandy, you can go ahead and put them in the chat. I have a couple that have already come through. Bill in Burlington says, "We understand that Bernie Sanders always votes against the final NDAA, whatever it contains. Is there any reason we should argue against this approach?"

Mandy Smithberger:

No, I think that it's ... I mean, I think particularly given Senator Sanders, I think that makes sense. I think he plays a really important role of being the conscience of the senate. I'm very excited about his amendment to cut 10% from the Pentagon's budget. So I think for Senator Sanders, that makes sense. He's been able to have impact on that bill's process without having to vote for it. So I just think that the overall congress, it's good for them to come to a process. Again, Senator Sanders and everyone else, it's just how can we make this bill as good as it possibly can be and not just represent the interest of defense contractors and warmongers?

Shoshana Abrams:

Absolutely. Thank you. So Holly and Ian in Boston say, "Why not amend appropriations?" which I think we do advocate for amending the appropriations bill. But if you could speak a little bit more to that. Holly and Ian continue to say, "There was a rumor last year that the NDAA was going to be dropped rather than reported out of conference?" I don't know if you want to speak to that.

Mandy Smithberger:

Yeah, so I'll start with that first question. So certainly, the appropriations bill is another one that we work on. One of the challenges with the appropriations bill is that you can move money around, but unless you're actually on the committee of jurisdiction, you're relatively limited in what reforms and changes you can make to laws. So to the degree, I think most of us agree that we need to be changing more authorities, National Emergency authorities, how much money is spent, how things are bought,
and what those processes are. Most of those debates are happening in the Authorization Act Bill. But the Appropriations Bill is certainly another really important bill that we should be active on as well.

Mandy Smithberger:
Recently, Congress has passed a number of what's called continuing resolutions, which are just keeping things as they're going and not having too many changes. So we've seen the appropriations process and the power of the purse be, unfortunately, a less effective tool. Then as far as last year, that was an interesting debate where we had, the Senate wanted a much higher level of spending. One of the ways that they were trying to play chicken to try and push those funding levels higher was to threaten to not have a bill or to have ... One of the things that was put forward was this idea of like a quote-unquote "skinny NDA bill", which I consider to be a skinny constitution that is not what our democracy demands, that we need to make sure that congress is robustly legislating. So far, it seems like there's going to be more bipartisan consensus on trying to pass a bill this year. So there are still a number of important debates I think that needs to happen to make sure that it's representing the will of the people.

Shoshana Abrams:
Thank you so much. Okay, a few other questions have rolled in. Also I want to say if you're on the phone, you can press star-six to unmute yourself and just state your name. You can interrupt us. It's okay. We know you don't have the ability to use the chat function. So I want to say that again. James Wagner said, "In the face of COVID-19 and trying to save money, in the vein of what CANA is trying, I guess in the house can PGO and others push for shifting money from the NDAA to the State Department, the Institute for Peace and other peace-building agencies?"

Mandy Smithberger:
Yeah, so for some of those, there certainly have been efforts to try and push more of that money towards the State Department in the past. I think give COVID tight now, at least congress is more so in a place of we need to be making sure that we're providing immediate relief for US citizens here. Well, I would look forward to the views of other people on this call. I've been a little disappointed with the Institute of Peace, they actually published a study advocating for more increased Pentagon spending. So I think that was a really good idea ... The Institute Peace was a really good idea that has not realized its dreams of what it should be. But unfortunately, I don't think the congress is quite in the place of even kind of debating that shift within to providing more aid and state. So that's certainly a place that we need to be looking at and making sure that we're getting, doing as much as we can to prevent these conflicts.

Shoshana Abrams:
Thank you. Okay.

Jeffrey:
Hello?

Shoshana Abrams:
Yes, go ahead.

Jeffrey:
Hello? This is Jeffrey from Birmingham, Michigan Friends Meeting. Mandy, I am very concerned that in the discussions of the NDAA, the numerous ancillary costs to our defense posture. What I mean by that is everything from before and after involved with defense, such as the health consequences, the veterans benefits, all kinds of additional expenses can easily, and I've looked into this, exceed a total of over a trillion dollars year after year. Yet everyone seems to be, what should I say, content with the starting definition of the NDAA. I don't understand why we cannot bring up these additional costs, which are inevitably associated with appropriations for military preparedness and action.

Mandy Smithberger:
Yeah, you think you bring up a great point. So I think, let's talk about reality. Then we'll talk about the legislative process. Again, where there isn't always common sense that comes to the legislative process side of things. I completely agree with you. Every year, we put together an analysis of what is our actual national security budget. So it does include the State Department, but it also includes the Department of Homeland Security, the cost of Veterans Affairs. That's how you really start to have a real debate about what are we spending on war and national security.

Mandy Smithberger:
Unfortunately too, the legislative process, there's some flexibility. The senate. But in the house, the way that they put together bills is really thinking agency by agency and not across the government as to what the real impacts are, though certainly, the nice thing about the National Defense Authorization Act is because it's one of the much passed bills, people attach all kinds of other things to it that may or may not be germane. This is something that is significant, is much more germane. So to the degree that there are ideas for how to better reform that area or to keep track of those costs, and even make the government be reporting it in that kind of way, I think there are real opportunities there as well.

Jeffrey:
Thank you.

Mandy Smithberger:
Thank you.

Shoshana Abrams:
Thank you. Great question. Thank you, Mandy. Okay, a couple other questions that have come. Mary says, "The President said today that he wouldn't sign an NDAA if included changing of names of Confederate military bases. Is this meaningful?"

Mandy Smithberger:
With the president, it's always a roll of the dice to see if it is going to be or not. I think a lot of that is going to depend on how quickly not only the house and senate pass their bills, but how long the conference process takes. But he is certainly trying to prevent those kinds of reforms from happening. Already the senate adopted and committee on a bipartisan basis that reform. In the house, they're on their way to doing so right now. So it's certainly where congress is. It's certainly where the American people are, I don't know if people here were able to see, but even relatives of those Confederates who have bases named after them think that it's time for a change. So I'm hopeful that that is not going to be an unnecessary and bigoted stumbling block.
Shoshana Abrams:
Thank you. Very diplomatic way of saying it, and I appreciate that. Okay. Janet has question about PGO. So given PGO's interest in protecting whistleblowers, how does the executive branch's attack on inspector general's figure into the campaign to amend the NDAA?

Mandy Smithberger:
Yeah, so that's an excellent question there. The main vehicles for that reform right now are actually happening in standalone legislation to strengthen the inspectors general system. But we are going to be seeing some reforms coming through the senate and Intelligence Authorization Act. It's going to be attached to the senate's version of the National Defense Authorization Act. There have been some efforts to strengthen whistleblower protections.

Mandy Smithberger:
I haven't seen as much as far as inspectors general being attached to that legislation, but that's certainly something I could see happening on the floor. Because as of now, it does not look like the standalone inspector general legislation is moving forward. I love how smart everyone is. The attacks on IGs are horrific, it's important to remember that this was a reform that we made in the wake of Watergate, and one of many reforms because we knew that we needed to have more accountability and that IGs worked for Congress and the executive branch, and that they're necessary for us to hold agencies accountable.

Shoshana Abrams:
Thank you. Yeah, we have some very intelligent and in the weeds people on the line, so we have some pretty in depth questions. I hope those who are not logged on the call, don't switch off. We'll go deep, and we'll come back out. So stick with us. Okay. Just had a question. Let me copy this. Sorry. It's hard to do both things. So our group in Seattle asked our group recently had a teleconference with Representative Adam Smiths' aids. Last year, Smith was actively trying to include the repeal of the 2002 Authorization for Use of Military Force and the NDAA. This year, we had hoped to try to include language preventing war with Iran, without congressional approval. His aid was non committal. When we saw PGO's report, Smith's House Armed Services Committee, NDAA, we were dismayed to see nothing related to this included. Do you have any suggestions for follow up? Is there no hope?

Mandy Smithberger:
I think there's hope. It's hard though, I'm not going to lie. It's really difficult. You all have done an amazing job on persuading representative Smith to be just much better on a number of these issues. But now, you need to build power around him. So that's about persuading members of the Senate Armed Services Committee. It's trying to find more Republicans who can support that position as well. The nature of our democracy is that whoever has the most votes win. That we need to keep on working to persuading people that we might not normally agree with to see if there are places where we can have more restrictions here.

Mandy Smithberger:
I think, unfortunately, they didn't have the power to keep those provisions in the conference bill last year and still have that legislation passed. The NDAA is the common sense place to have that debate. But thinking about are there other opportunities where we can advance this issue, this community has done an amazing job on Yemen, and so many of these other issues that I am confident you will prove me
wrong, that it's easier than it seems. But I think you have to build around people like Representative Smith that you can't just rely on your champions, you need to help them find some new friends too.

Shoshana Abrams:
Thank you. Okay. So Ralph asked, "There are indications that some Republican legislators are pushing back against some of the president's ideas and demands even though this is an election year. Does this improve the possibility for bipartisan action on aspects of the NDAA and appropriations? If so, to what degree might this improve the chances for getting some reforms we seek in the final bill?"

Mandy Smithberger:
Yeah, I think we are seeing some good bipartisan collaboration on the Confederate monuments issue or bases issue. We've certainly seen bipartisan collaboration. One of the other major issues has been the shifting of Pentagon money to the border wall and how the President has been able to do that through the national emergency powers. There's Republican legislation that they're trying to attach to the NDAA to narrow that kind of national emergency declaration. So I think there are some opportunities on some of the authorities and powers of the president that to be honest, it's probably been overdue for reform, but we're seeing just how gaping those holes are now. There's been progress on 2001 and 2002 AOM issues. There has been progress on the Iran war issue, but we still need to do more work. I think there's a lot of fear mongering and threat inflation that's occurring. Just a lot of education that you all need to keep doing with offices because they're hearing from the thread inflators two to three times, maybe 10 times more than they're hearing from you.

Shoshana Abrams:
All right. Well, that's a good case for us to get out there and lobby even more than we already are. So we worked on repealing the 2001, 2002 authorizations for use of military force last year, and that's something that we're still hoping to see happen. Are you good for a couple more questions? I don't want to exhaust you too much. Okay. Okay. Dave Wiley from Lansing says how does the NDA affect DLS CIO budget for the UN, UN peacekeeping, UNICEF, World Health Organization, organizations like that?

Mandy Smithberger:
Yeah. So typically it does not touch on those parts of the government though sometimes we've seen the House Foreign Affairs Committee have their like State Department Authorization Bill be attached to the National Defense Authorization Act. So then you've had those kinds of debates happening, but I don't believe they've been able to write that bill for a number of reasons this year. So probably the better vehicle for looking at that is going to be looking at the appropriations bills.

Shoshana Abrams:
Right. Thank you. So one last thing, we've had a couple questions about the authorizations for use of military force. We're asking for a little bit more of an update on what you know about the progress of repealing the authorizations for use of military force.

Mandy Smithberger:
Yeah. Hassan might be able to know even more than I don't see that at least coming up on the NDAA and committee. That's another kind of legislative tick that the House Foreign Affairs Committee has technically has jurisdiction over that issue. I'm not sure if they've waived it this year or not. But I certainly think that's something that Representative Lee is going to continue to be an amazing champion
on in the appropriations process. She's done a lot of great work, really convincing her colleagues on the committee who are Republicans as well that these reforms are overdue. So I think the issue is certainly making progress. It's about how do we get it over the finish line? Potentially, thinking about if we have a different president in place, are there authorities that we should be urging that president two years to just end those authorizations as well?

Shoshana Abrams:
Absolutely, thank you so much. I got a note from someone that we need to stop using acronyms so much. So I am also a problem with that. I told Mandy on our prep call, try not to use acronyms and then I’m doing the same thing. So National Defense Authorization Act, NDAA, AUMF, Authorization for Use of Military Force. We'll try and be better about that as we go. So thank you for the reminder, friends. Mandy, right before we let you go, I just want to thank you so much for joining us. I also wanted to just give you a moment to share any last thoughts. We went in deep in the weeds, so if you have any broad stroke thoughts that you could leave us with, that'd be wonderful.

Mandy Smithberger:
So I think what I would point to is that we're seeing with both a lot of polling, and we're starting to see more groups who don't normally engage on these issues starting to engage in this fight, and understanding that our militarized foreign policy is really damaging to our democracy. I'm really excited that younger people seem to have the same kinds of attitudes that we need to have more reform in this area. So I am hopeful that we can make a difference. It's really just making sure that our government is working for the people and not for the contractors. I think for too long, we have really let them be in charge of what's happening. I will throw my email into the chat box too. If people have other questions or want to learn anything else, I'm happy to answer questions. I'll be watching the rest of the NDAA mark up tonight. I'm on Straus Reform if anyone does Twitter, but thank you so much for all the work that you do. You make our country a better place.

Shoshana Abrams:
Thank you so much, Mandy. Enjoy your long night ahead of you. Thank you for joining us and sharing your brilliance. You probably have 243 as the number of participants writing emails to you soon. Thank you so much, Mandy. I really appreciate it. So I hope that was helpful for everyone. I also see some applause, Mandy, I know she's still on the line. Some people are giving you applause. So I really want to thank you all for going into this with us and for going deep on the policy and on the wank. We often talk about the methodology, but we don't explain how it actually works. So we wanted to bring Mandy on to kind of explain some of that. I hope that was enlightening for you, and that you can continue to engage with what the process looks like as you learn more about congress, as we all learn more about congress.

Shoshana Abrams:
So here's an update on the numbers. You all have lobbied a total of 169 times so far this year, which is just incredible. We've had 95 media pieces published this year. I want to give a special shout out to New Orleans, New Orleans and St. Louis, both new teams who had their first lobby visits in the last two weeks, and a big shout out to Oregon for having a meeting with many of the Oregon teams all together with Senator Mark Lee. That was really wonderful to see you all come together for that. Just incredible things happening around the country. Salt Lake City had a meeting with I think three new people that they've added to their team in the last couple of weeks in the last month. So thank you all for doing that work.
Shoshana Abrams:
I was doing a presentation. Then I had my colleague Justin pull some data, just to see how we're doing compared to last year, given that you're all lobbying virtually. We certainly saw a big dip in lobby visits in March when people weren't sure what was going on. But you all are back up to the numbers that we had last year, your lobbying just as not as much if not more than you were last year at this time. Even better than that, you're bringing more people into the lobby with you. So in terms of building that base, bringing more people into lobby, you're doing a really amazing job. I want to just acknowledge that and encourage you to do that more. So if you've had a lobby visit and first, let's do this. If you had a lobby visit in the last month, go ahead and put your team name into the chat. So if you and your team have lobbied in the last month, go ahead and put your team name into the chat.

Shoshana Abrams:
Colorado, Concord, New Hampshire, Boston, Berkeley, Salt Lake City, Milwaukee, New Orleans, Spokane, Boston, St. Louis, Eugene, Charleston, West Virginia, Madison, Charlottesville, more Eugene, Milwaukee, Frederick, Maryland, Seattle, Washington, Lansing. So I just want to share, it keeps going. Austin plus a letter to the editor. Congratulations, Austin, Santa Monica, a new team as well. So just know that you're in really good community as you do this work. I think it's really impressive to see Chapel Hill, Oberlin, Portland, Oregon, San Bruno, California.

Shoshana Abrams:
So we're really all over the country doing this work and you really are in community as you lobby around the country. So I want to make sure you all know that. You can send us your lobby reports. Please do that as soon as you finish because this information is critically important to Hassan and our lobbyists on The Hill. You can find the lobby report back form on the team toolkit. So that's FCNL.org/TeamToolKit. If you report that back to us, we are able to follow up with you and follow up with the office to make sure that we're providing any details that maybe the office was looking for and that we can build off your work. All right. Are you all ready to hear from Hassan? I'm seeing some smiles and nods. Wonderful.

Speaker 4:
Yes, ma'am.

Shoshana Abrams:
Wonderful. Well, Hassan, why don't you take it away with our policy update?

Hassan El-Tayyab:
Hey, thank you so much for Shauna, and thanks to our whole network here. This is really exciting. Big shout out to Mandy. That was fascinating. She is a wealth of knowledge and we're so lucky to have her. So as she alluded to, this has been probably the most action-packed day I can remember on The Hill in so long. We had the senate taking up legislation looking at the NDAA voting on the war in Afghanistan. Right as we started this call, the house was voting, the House Armed Services Committee was voting on cutting a billion dollars from nuclear weapons. So much is happening. It's been pretty exciting to follow and I've been trying to do this and do my work at the same time.

Hassan El-Tayyab:
So I just wanted to go over a little bit about what's been happening. I know we looked at the process, but let's take a look at the individual votes. So a few weeks ago, the Senate Armed Services Committee, they did mark up the NDAA. Unfortunately, it didn't have a ton of FCNL priorities on there. It didn't have anything on Iran. For a second there, I thought that Senator Kaine might try to get his or something about Iran in that markup, it didn't happen. Forgive me. National Defense Authorization Act, I'm going to try not to do the acronyms.

Hassan El-Tayyab:

So feel free to just ping me on that if I'm messing up. So after that, many amendments were filed, including Senator Udall's amendment to prevent unauthorized war with Iran, and many, many others also on Yemen, Afghanistan, stuff like that. But most of those were not made in order and that just means that they weren't brought up for a vote, unfortunately. It's been a pretty closed process. I want to give a shout out to Senator Bernie Sanders on the floor today. He mentioned that, and he said, "This is the greatest deliberative body," quote-unquote, that's how it's referred to. It needs to be more open and there needs to be some amendments offered for those things to be considered, so we can actually have the entire senate weigh in. I think that was a really important point.

Hassan El-Tayyab:

Just looking at the house, like I said earlier, they're doing the House Armed Services Committee markup, lots of amendments are being debated, talked about there. Later on tonight, I think we're going to get amendment to possibly end US support for the Saudi-led war in Yemen. If I may give a huge shout out to our advocacy team in Colorado, they did some personal outreach to Representative Crow's office, and he could potentially be the deciding vote on that amendment. I think that's so important that you all are doing work in districts, giving us information, we're passing information to you, and that's how a community stands together on this really crucial stuff. So hopefully, we'll have some good news on that later on. I'm crossing my fingers. Don't quote me, but I think he's going to come our way. That's what I've heard.

Hassan El-Tayyab:

So that's a little bit about the NDAA, I wanted to give a quick update on some of the sanction stuff we've been working on too. As folks know, we've been talking about the sanctions regimes that we've had in place on almost 39 countries. But obviously, we're focused on Iran here as advocacy teams around the country in the US. They've just done real, real harm to a lot of innocent people and healthcare providers all over the world and prevented the flow of humanitarian assistance. So we've been trying to find a bipartisan solution to some of this. We've landed on trying to get the administration to issue a temporary general license that supports humanitarian trade related to COVID-19, making sure that anybody that needs a test kit has access to a test kit, anybody that needs PPE or sanitizer or respirators or anything you need for COVID is available, even if we're not providing it.

Hassan El-Tayyab:

We just don't want to be in the way of other people providing that critical assistance. So we've decided that Democrats have already spoken out about this, and we are trying to get Republicans to speak out. I just wanted to say that there's been so many folks out there that have really helped this process. I want to tell a little story about one we had in Asheville, North Carolina team paying our office or they did a great lobby report and let us know that Senator Tillis' office and their staff there were really interested in this ideal, in this idea. So I followed up and did a meeting. We had a really positive meeting with that
office. You might remember her from last time, but Nygaar actually joined me and she's been coming with me on all these lobby visits. We sort of made the connection here with this FCNL community. So that's another connection.

Hassan El-Tayyab:
Oberlin team in Ohio, they did some lobbying as well. They got there Senator Portman staff to reach out to Senator Tillis' staff to try to figure out what's possible. I'm not saying we're necessarily all the way there. But the fact that we've got staff talking to each other for the first time about this, I think is a real win for FCNL and our whole community. So just saying that we sold your ... I don't want to say that, but we were working really hard here. I'm just so happy to be a part of this team. Now looking a little bit ahead to NDA in the house because I think that's going to be our big opportunity to pass legislation and to force the question on prohibiting unauthorized war with Iran. Now, that vote I believe is going to be on the week of July 20th.

Hassan El-Tayyab:
I am expecting that Kauna's amendment to prohibit funding for an unauthorized war with Iran will be on the floor. But I think we need to kind of work together to try to make sure that happens. I'm going to say in a second how we can do that. So the common language again, it's prohibiting funding for an unauthorized war with Iran and also specifies that the 2001 and 2002 AUMS or the authorizations for use of military force, don't authorize force against Iran. I think that's really important. Now on top of just asking, this is going to be the additional piece of the ask for folks here.

Hassan El-Tayyab:
Shoshana will be following up in the in the email after the call. Now we definitely want them to support that vote when it comes to the floor. But we also want to just make sure that we get a vote. So asking your member to reach out to House leadership right now, to ensure that we get a vote on prohibiting war with Iran is really critical. The House leaders that we need to prioritize are Speaker Pelosi, leader Hoyer, Chairman Smith, and especially Chairman McGovern, the Chairman of the Rules Committee. So just to make sure that we get that vote in order. Shoshana I'm sure will do a great job of spelling that out. But that's so critical right now. This is a really important time to be making lobby visits and reaching out because we only have a few short weeks before these votes happen. With that, I want to open it up to some questions.

Shoshana Abrams:
Thank you so much, Hassan. You said it all. I'm really glad to have you on this call and to be watching what's happening. Someone asked in the chat where we can watch the markup session. So if someone doesn't have plans tonight and wants to watch some sessions happen, where can people watch that?

Hassan El-Tayyab:
C-Span. You can go on C-Span and you can click Congress on the house. Maybe I'm wondering if Jim could find the link for folks. That's great. Yeah. I've been watching it all day. I've got a casting on my TV and working. It's been really great. But C-Span is a wonderful resource. You can watch all the hearings there in both the house and senate. I actually had two windows open up, I would mute one turn on the other one. I was going back and forth all day. So good question.

Shoshana Abrams:
Wow. What an exciting day. All right. James asked relief or I guess States Relief International is getting some aid through to Iran. It's something in the absence of our government or other's actions. Cheers to Nagar and Hassan and others. So some appreciation for your work. Tad and Alexandria asks, "Hassan, we are meeting with Gerry Connolly next week. Any thoughts about how we can be strategic on our visit?"

Hassan El-Tayyab:
Yeah, I think that's wonderful. I mean, kind of like I just said, and make sure that he votes when it comes to the floor. But more importantly, make sure that he reaches out to leadership on behalf of getting that amendment made in order on the house floor because I don't know if this is clear to folks. I should have been a little bit more clear at the top of my conversation with you all, but because of COVID-19, the process for actually getting votes on the floor during these large markups, they just take so much longer. So what they're trying to do is make way fewer amendments made in order that have to be voted and debated on. So getting one of those coveted votes is just really difficult. So having your member reach out to the house leadership right now is so important.

Shoshana Abrams:
Great, thank you. Earlier in the meeting today we had a comment from or a question from West Brain in Rogue Valley, Oregon. he says, "Senator Wyden is on board for the NDAA amendment. So exciting. Rogue Valley Advocacy team meets with Senator Wyden staff in DC tomorrow at 1:00 PM. What should we be asking him now?" He suggests maybe to be more public.

Hassan El-Tayyab:
Yeah, I think that's really good. Putting out a statement about how important it is to get an amendment through to prohibit unauthorized war with Iran I think really critical, and just urging that he reached out to any of the contacts he has in the house to express that as well, possibly even the delegation in his own state.

Shoshana Abrams:
Great. Thank you. Jim just put the link to to watch the mark up. So if you don't have plans tonight, you can go ahead and click into that to watch that after this call.

Hassan El-Tayyab:
I don't have plans tonight. I'm not even meaningful.

Shoshana Abrams:
Wonderful. So Larry Spears asked, "How fearful is Iran about a US war with Iran?"

Hassan El-Tayyab:
That's a good question. I think they're very fearful. I think tensions right now are extremely heightened. I think they'll be even more heightened in October right before the election. Folks maybe call it the quote-unquote "October surprise." We want to avoid that at all costs, and make it really clear that a bipartisan majority in congress don't want a war with Iran and the American people don't support a war with Iran. So as much as we can make it seem like this would be a real losing strategy for the Trump Administration to try to pull, I think is so important right now. On top of just these questions, I mean,
there's been a lot of talk about snapback sanctions and extending the UN arms embargo on Iran. So
tensions are very heightened right now, and we've got to do everything we can to make sure that
unauthorized war with Iran is completely taken off the table.

Shoshana Abrams:
Thank you. May Humen from Salem, Oregon asked, "What is the status of a possible bipartisan sign on
letter on the temporary license?"

Hassan El-Tayyab:
Great question. That's what we've been trying. I will say we've had maybe about a six or seven
discussions with Republican offices. I will tell you, not one of them has said, "We don't like the policy. There's an issue with the policy." I haven't heard that at all, which is actually pretty amazing. Normally,
we get some pushback about some flaw in our argument. That's not what we're getting. We're getting
more of a pushback about the politics of the situation, and how they're not sure that they want to be
the lead, they would support it.

Hassan El-Tayyab:
So if we can find the lead, I think we can put together a coalition of members to actually do something. Now, just so we're clear, we've been trying to get an all Republican letter not necessarily a bipartisan
letter, although we're open to a bipartisan letter, if there's Republicans that would like to join that
effort. But we think an all-Republican letter could be really powerful. We may at some point shift gears
to try to have it be a private letter to treasury if we're having a lot of trouble getting them to come out
publicly. But regardless, even if we don't get this, we're having really important conversations with staff. I will say there's some new staff at Rand Paul's office. We had a really positive conversation there. We
learned that some of the new foreign policy LA at Rand Paul's office in Kentucky has a real passion for
humanitarian assistance and making sure that gets in. We might not exactly win on the thing that we're
trying to do, but I think it's going to open up other possibilities at the very least.

Shoshana Abrams:
Absolutely. So it's part of that science, right? Science and art of organizing. Roger and John in Milwaukee
asked who is keeping the good amendments from coming up in the Senate. Is it Senator McConnell? Can
we do anything about this?

Hassan El-Tayyab:
Yeah, McConnell has really ensured that this is a pretty closed process on the Senate side, it's been very
difficult. Yeah, I wish there was more we could do. I think we have to keep lobbying our members to
speak out, especially if you have Republican senators right now, getting them to speak out on behalf of
having a more open process is really important. I wish I could say more on that issue. But it's been
difficult. So that's why we're trying to focus a lot of attention on the House side right now, because I
think we have more of a chance of getting things through there and then really pressing in conference.

Shoshana Abrams:
Great, thank you. So we have a just some gratitude from the Oberlin team, Oberlin, Ohio, "Thanks to
Hassan for coaching us on the TELUS Portman Connection." They're really excited about working with
you on that.
Hassan El-Tayyab:
They were fantastic. By the way, I loved chatting with them and that was a real treat.

Shoshana Abrams:
Wonderful. So Nancy Berman in New York asks ... Sorry, one sec. "Has there been any discussion in congress of Iraq's raids of Iran-backed militias?"

Hassan El-Tayyab:
I haven't really been hearing a lot of talk about that. It's getting drowned out. It's a very important issue. But I'm just not hearing a lot of conversations about that at the moment.

Shoshana Abrams:
Great. Anthony Robinson in Iowa says, "Senator Grassley has never been a big supporter on issues like no war with Iran. But we get some common ground with him on repealing the 2002 Iraq Authorization for Use of Military Force. Is it a good idea to try to get some public statement from him about 2002 Authorization for Use of Military Force in relationship to the NDAA or is that too much of a stretch?"

Hassan El-Tayyab:
I think that's a fantastic idea. It could just be in general, just having him come out with a statement saying that that should be repealed. On top of a statement, maybe having him do an op ed, I think would be wonderful. It could be in relation to the NDAA. I think that would be really timely, obviously. But even without that, just having a statement on its own would also be really powerful.

Shoshana Abrams:
Yeah, absolutely. I'll just say that, Heather, the lobbyists that we worked with last year, if you're a part of Advocacy Teams last year, is still working on those bills to repeal the 2001 and 2002 Authorizations for Use of Military Force. We have been seeing gaining support on those issues. So if that is something that kind of went a long way, you can continue to address that with your members of Congress. I think also the Heritage Foundation again came out with a report saying they support the 2002 AUMF being repealed. So that continues to be a source of commonality between our work and other conservatives on the subjects. Other questions, you can go ahead and put the questions in the chat. We have time for maybe one more. Jim put the answer to this one in the chat. But can you name the leadership again that we should urge to bring up the amendment?

Hassan El-Tayyab:
Yeah, absolutely. Great question. I think this is so important. So Speaker Pelosi, Leader Steny Hoyer, we need to make sure that Chairman Smith also gets the message because he's the head of House Armed Services Committee, and also Chairman McGovern, who is the leader of the Rules Committee. He gets to decide what amendments get on the floor and are they going to get a vote or just that whole process? Those four people have an incredible amount of influence over this process. If they're hearing from members saying, "We need to prioritize prohibiting war with us Iran in this NDAA," is a better likelihood that we're going to get our vote.

Shoshana Abrams:
Wonderful. David Ross says, "Can you include the link to the latest Heritage Foundation statement on AUMF?" I will find that and send that to you in the follow up email. So you all have that. Okay, and last question. A bunch just came in. I'm so sorry. We're not going to get to them all. I will include the names that-

Hassan El-Tayyab:
I already told you I don't have plans.

Shoshana Abrams:
But these teams, a lot of them are meeting as a team after this. I will send the names also in the follow up email. Someone was asking. So last question from Holly and Ian in Boston. Any chance the Udall amendment that we heard about last week and that you spoke about a little bit today will get a vote?

Hassan El-Tayyab:
I wish it were so. I don't think that's going to happen, unfortunately.

Shoshana Abrams:
All right, any last words of encouragement or thoughts?

Hassan El-Tayyab:
This is a powerful community. I am just thrilled to be working with you all. Over time, we've been able to deepen our power together and really work together on so many important issues. I continue to be amazed at how much we've been able to accomplish together. I hope we keep going.

Shoshana Abrams:
All right, well, thank you, Hassan, for keeping us up to date and giving us all the good information we need to lobby. If we didn't get to your questions, I see a bunch coming in right now. We will answer them. If you could just send me an email, and Hassan and I will work through, making sure all your questions are answered. Hassan, there's lots of things for you in the chat. So thank you so much for bringing all this good information to our network.

Hassan El-Tayyab:
Thank you all.

Shoshana Abrams:
Wonderful. Okay, so you have your action from Hassan, which is also on the action sheet, which is to meet with your representatives about the National Defense Authorization Act and include what we expect to be the Ro Khanna amendment on preventing war with Iran. Then the second part to urge leadership to make sure that we get a vote on that. So not just to vote for it itself, but also to urge leadership to make sure that the vote happens. We would love to have that happen on the floor as opposed to in committee. I think Hassan said this, but I'll say it again, we're expecting a vote in mid July, mid to late July, so the earlier you can get those lobby visits in the better, probably also worth noting that offices are going on recess. Hassan, do you know how long the recess is?

Hassan El-Tayyab:
I think it's two weeks. Jim, can you verify?

Shoshana Abrams:
I believe it's through the 17th. So Jim, tell me if I'm.

Jim:
Two weeks is correct, they are back on, it's June the 17th.

Shoshana Abrams:
Right. So you might have to do some finagling meeting between DC offices and district offices. There may also be a good chance to talk to your member of Congress at a virtual town hall as well when they're in district and home. So good things to keep in mind, prepare your questions and look out for those announcements for those town halls so that you can submit questions ahead of time, that often is what they do.

Shoshana Abrams:
Then the second part of the action sheet, because we want to make sure you stay busy, is to publish a letter to the editor about your visit. So this is a great relationship building technique to thank a member of Congress for meeting with you even if you didn’t get the result you wanted or even if they didn't agree to do the ask that you had asked. It's a good thing to thank them for meeting with constituents. I suggested some text in the action sheet so you can use that, if it’s helpful for you. Then if you get published, be sure to send that letter to the editor to the office to make sure that they know that you are publishing, and that you’re asking for this not just in a meeting with them, but in the whole community, and that will help strengthen your relationship with the office.

Hassan El-Tayyab:
Shoshana, can I just say that actually really helps me in my lobbying on The Hill. I often present them if it's related to our portfolio and say, "Hey, I just want to let you know that our constituents and your constituents, I should say, just published this awesome piece in the paper, and you got to see this." So I’m flagging that for members. So that's super helpful. It helps me also build a relationship. So I think it's good all around. I would just highly encourage people, take that step.

Shoshana Abrams:
Awesome. Great. So endorse from lobbyist himself. Be sure to name your member of congress in that letter to the editor. They pay attention to that. So good thing to do. Okay, so next national call is August 5th. July communicator calls are on the 9th and the 23rd. I want to thank you all so much for being with us tonight and for engaging in this work. I can see how committed all of you are to this mission. You're doing amazing, amazing work across the country. It's an honor to be in community with all of you. So if you can unmute yourself, I'd like to wish you all a good night. You can wish each other good night. Enjoy your meetings together.

Hassan El-Tayyab:
Me too.

Speaker 7:
Good night.

Speaker 8:
Hi.

Speaker 9:
Hi.

Speaker 10:
Okay, good to see you.

Speaker 11:
Thanks, everybody.

Speaker 12:
Everybody.

Speaker 13:
Good night, everyone.

Speaker 14:
Everybody, keep safe.

Speaker 15:
Hi to everyone.

Speaker 16:
Hi.

Speaker 17:
Good night.

Speaker 18:
Good night all.

Speaker 19:
Good night, everybody.

Speaker 20:
Good night.

Speaker 21:
Good night.
Speaker 22:
Hi.

Speaker 23:
Good night, everyone.

Speaker 24:
Unmute me.

Shoshana Abrams:
We have some singers.

Speaker 24:
No, I don't think so.

Speaker 26:
Hello.

Speaker 27:
Thank you.

Shoshana Abrams:
I saw Delsey. Hi Delsey.

Speaker 28:
Good night, thank you.

Speaker 29:
What are we doing?

Speaker 30:
You look beautiful.

Speaker 31:
Delsey there.

Speaker 32:
Thank you.

Speaker 33:
Rodney.

Speaker 34:
Unmute.