

# Advocacy Teams

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## Sample Letters-to-the-Editor for the 2024 Advocacy Teams Campaign

The following letters are designed to give you inspiration when writing and submitting your own letter-to-the-editor (LTE). Be sure to edit these letters to include your own voice, local examples, and adaptations that will speak to your specific Member of Congress. Each LTE you submit should be unique, written in your voice, and only submitted by you. And remember to specifically name your Congressperson by name to ensure that they read it. Finally, please visit [our website](#) for more tips on writing LTEs. Continue reading for three examples of LTEs that speak to different types of Members of Congress.

### Right/Fiscally Conservative

**Subject:** Stop Wasteful Spending & Prioritize Veterans

Dear Editor,

Our veterans are lacking in resources and support for their most basic needs such as employment, healthcare, and housing. Virginia is home to the third-highest number of veterans in the country, with 1 in 12 Virginians having served. Yet, Congress continues to prioritize the Pentagon budget without providing adequate support for our veterans.

Every year, Congress requires Pentagon officials to submit “wish lists” in addition to the annual budget request. This practice circumvents top-level vetting by Defense Department leadership to ensure that requests align with our national security strategy and exacerbates wasteful spending. Just this year, at least \$30 billion were requested for these unfunded priorities lists.

During his tenure, Rep. Cline has demonstrated his commitment to our veterans and championed bills that would support veteran needs. I would encourage Rep. Cline to cosponsor H.R.4740, Streamline Pentagon Budgeting Act of 2023 and Sens. Kaine and Warner to support the Senate companion. Repealing the statutory requirement for unfunded priorities lists is the

fiscally responsible choice – it still allows Pentagon officials to submit lists as needed and creates opportunity in our budgeting process for taking care of our veterans and communities.

Sincerely,

First Last, Hometown

### **Talking Points:**

- **Constitutional Issues:** Pentagon officials are circumventing the President and Defense Secretary's constitutionally prescribed role of Commander-in-Chief by submitting their own budget requests via the unfunded priorities lists.
- **Chain of Command:** The unfunded priorities lists are often submitted to Congress without top level vetting by Defense Department leadership.
- **Internal Conflict:** Unfunded priorities lists pit military services against each other as they attempt to secure additional funding, and contradicts the annual budgeting process that is based in joint cohesion across branches. This could have implications beyond the budgeting process.
- **Budget Process Impacts:** Unfunded priorities lists incentivize military branches to be deceitful in their regular budget requests by moving items they need into the unfunded priorities lists to have more wiggle room in their official budget request.
- **Fiscally Irresponsible:** The Pentagon budget exceeds \$800 billion, if an item isn't included in such a large budget, it shouldn't be a priority.
- **Wasteful Spending:** Unfunded priorities lists result in increased spending and potentially wasteful allocations. These mandated lists put pressure on Pentagon officials to submit lists regardless of actual need and without being subject to spending caps or other restrictions that budget requests must adhere to.
- **Optional UPLs:** Repealing the unfunded priorities list statutory requirement would not stop Pentagon officials from submitting unfunded priorities lists as needed.

*[Delisting the Pentagon's Unfunded Priorities List](#)* - National Taxpayers Union (2023)

*[Congress Pads Pentagon Budget with this One Weird Trick: Unfunded Priorities Lists](#)* - R Street (2024)

*[UPLs: The Latest Iteration of Backdoor Earmarking](#)* - Taxpayers for Common Sense (2022)

## Center/National Security

**Subject:** It's hot in Colorado!

Dear Editor,

The rising heat in Colorado is putting us at risk for heat waves, drought, and wildfires. Just this week we had heat advisories and the threat of severe thunderstorms. Our water supply, agriculture, and communities are not sufficiently equipped to handle the changing climate.

Despite the limited resources that our state has to address the environmental impact of changing weather, we are watching Congress prioritize military spending over our communities. Every year, Pentagon officials are required to submit "unfunded priorities lists" in addition to their annual budget request of over \$800 billion.

These "unfunded priorities lists" are secret lists that Pentagon officials submit to Congress without financial, programmatic, and strategic context and are not subject to the same level of oversight as the official budget. These "wish lists" have been consistently opposed by Pentagon leadership, including Defense Secretary Austin.

I applaud Rep. Crow for his commitment to strengthening our national security and addressing military-related climate issues, and urge him to cosponsor H.R. 4740, Streamline Pentagon Budgeting Act of 2023 and Sens. Hickenlooper and Bennet to support the Senate companion. We must redirect our spending to address the growing environmental issues in Colorado.

Sincerely,

First Last, Hometown

### Talking points:

- **Minimal Information:** Unfunded priorities lists do not follow specific format requirements, often don't include critical information such as financial, programmatic, and strategic context which is required as part of the annual budget request.
- **Lack of Transparency:** Unfunded priorities lists are not made available to the public on a regular basis, and the public only finds out about requests when they are leaked.
- **Special Interests:** Unfunded Priorities lists give special interests and opening to influence defense spending outside the regular budget process and without public knowledge.

- **Oversight:** Unfunded priorities lists make it harder for Congress to engage in oversight of Pentagon spending that isn't part of the official budget.
- **Pentagon Opposition:** Pentagon leadership, including Defense Secretary Austin and Comptroller Michael McCord, would like to see the unfunded priorities list requirement repealed.
- **Optional UPLs:** Repealing the unfunded priorities list statutory requirement would not stop Pentagon officials from submitting unfunded priorities lists as needed.

*Fact Sheet: The Problem with Unfunded Priorities Lists* - Project on Government Oversight (2024)

## Left/Human Needs

Subject: Pay for peace, not more war!

Dear Editor,

As the Israeli government continues its campaign in Gaza and the death toll rapidly approaches 40,000, our government is providing military and diplomatic support for Israel. Access to food, fuel, and humanitarian assistance is restricted in the Gaza strip and the U.N is warning of looming famine if urgent action isn't taken. Congress must stop greenlighting this tragedy and demand a ceasefire, de-escalation, and humanitarian assistance in Gaza.

The United States' funding for war has become unconscionable – from aiding Israel's campaign in Gaza, to an \$800 billion Pentagon budget, and unrestrained additional "unfunded priorities lists" requests. The Pentagon's "unfunded priorities lists" increase an already bloated Pentagon budget, circumvent the regular budget process, and prioritize war.

I'm grateful that Rep. Khanna has been a strong advocate for a ceasefire in Gaza. I would encourage Rep. Khanna to continue his support for peace and reduced military spending by cosponsoring H.R. 4740, Streamline Pentagon Budgeting Act of 2023. I would also urge Sens. Butler and Padilla to support the Senate companion. It's time to prioritize peace!

Sincerely,

First Last, Hometown

## Talking Points:

- **Excessive Military Spending:** Unfunded priorities lists increase the already bloated Pentagon budget, circumvent the regular budget process, and prioritize military spending.
- **Domestic Spending:** Unfunded priorities lists divert resources away from critical social programs and community needs such as healthcare, education, environmental sustainability, infrastructure, etc.
- **Impact on Taxpayers:** The average taxpayer is forced to subsidize Pentagon contractors to the tune of \$1,748 per year, according to the National Priorities Project. This is more than the national average rent, highlighting the significant financial burden placed on individual taxpayers to fund unnecessary military expenditures.
- **Endless War:** Congress must realign our national spending priorities away from war and towards promoting human rights and building a more just and equitable society.
- **Optional UPLs:** Repealing the unfunded priorities list statutory requirement would not stop Pentagon officials from submitting unfunded priorities lists as needed.

*\$30B for weapons and war vs human needs graphic* - National Priorities Project

*The Pentagon's Billion-Dollar Wish Lists\** - FCNL (2024)

*\*This blog notes the UPLs this year as adding up to \$26B, but we later found other lists that ramped it up to a little over \$30B.*