

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

March 12, 2020

The Honorable Mark Esper
Secretary of Defense
The Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Esper:

Following the reprogramming of February 13, 2020, which eliminated the entire \$1.3 billion appropriation for the National Guard and Reserve Equipment Account (NGREA), we have received additional information on the impacts of this reprogramming on the Illinois National Guard.

Each year, the Illinois National Guard identifies its top equipment shortfalls to the National Guard Bureau in order to compete for limited NGREA funds. For Fiscal Year (FY) 2020, the Illinois Army National Guard identified five areas of critical shortfalls: ten truck fork lifts, 280 tactical communications systems, 28 load handling systems, three low bed semitrailers, and 13 chemical-biological protective shelters.

The alarming shortfalls in these types of equipment in Illinois has a direct correlation with readiness to respond to Federal or natural disasters. For example, low bed semitrailers are needed to transport heavy equipment long distances, such as moving engineering equipment hundreds of miles to respond to an emergency in different parts of our State. Right now, the Illinois National Guard has less than 50 percent of its authorized number of low bed semitrailers on-hand.

We have been informed that the National Guard Bureau included 26 low bed semitrailers on its proposed 2020 NGREA spend plan. However, now that those funds have been seized to send to a border wall that Congress did not fund, the shortfalls in this important equipment will persist in Illinois and other states.

The diversion of NGREA has an immediate impact on the Illinois National Guard due to this shortfall not being addressed as has been planned. In addition, the diversion of funds will have continuing impacts because of the ripple effect of planned 2020 equipment purchases being deferred to later years, and plans for 2021 purchases likely being disrupted as well.

For example, the Illinois National Guard has a requirement for 13 chemical-biological protection shelters, used to shelter and treat people harmed by toxic substances. However, not one of these shelters is currently in its inventory. Additionally, the Illinois National Guard has an approved authorization for 779 tactical communications systems. These systems are needed for command and control of both warfighting and support units, but many of the systems on-hand are obsolete and unsuitable for use overseas. Currently, the Illinois National Guard is 204 systems short of its authorized level.

Every piece of equipment requested by the Illinois National Guard – as well as the National Guards of every other state – are intended to address an actual shortfall that impacts the readiness of the troops using it. We understand that the Department of Defense has made the argument that some NGREA funds from prior years has yet to be placed on contract. We reject this attempt to minimize the harm caused by this unjustified reprogramming.

If the Department is concerned about delays in spending funds that are available to it, one should look no further than the delays in spending military funding diverted to the border wall. Out of \$10 billion in funds that have so far been diverted to the wall, according to the Department’s own data, just \$668 million, or 6.7 percent, has actually been expended. The rationale of diverting needed NGREA funds for a project that does not need more money is simply not credible. The diversion of \$3.8 billion in FY2020 funds is even more puzzling since the funding would provide merely 57 miles of new fencing, with the rest of the money going to replace or supplement areas that already have border barriers in place.

We ask you to provide us with a specific plan for how the Department of Defense intends to address the identified and significant shortfalls in equipment for the Illinois National Guard in the wake of your decision to transfer NGREA funds to border wall projects that were never proposed to Congress.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
Vice Chairman
Subcommittee on Defense



Tammy Duckworth
Member
Committee on Armed Services



Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress



Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



Cheri Bustos
Member of Congress



Sean Casten
Member of Congress



Bradley S. Schneider
Member of Congress



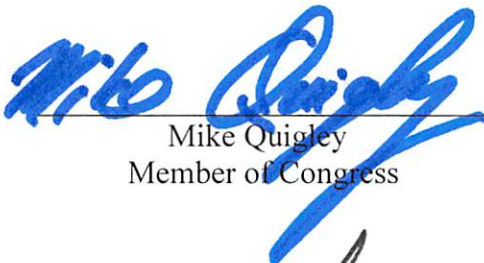
Bill Foster
Member of Congress



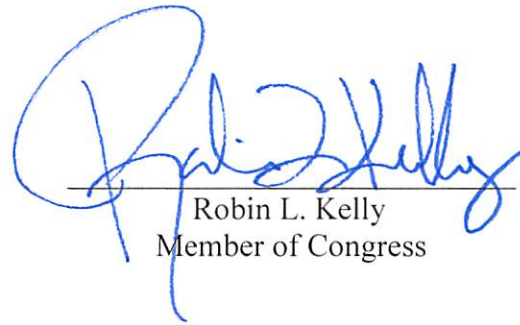
Daniel W. Lipinski
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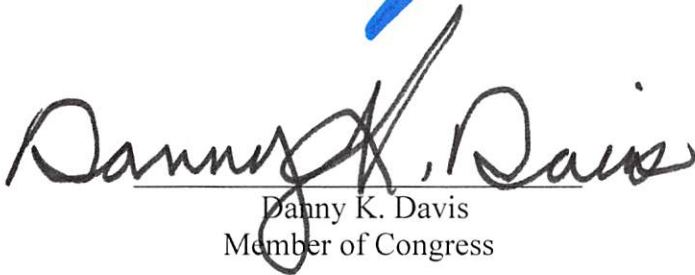
Jesús G. "Chuy" García
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