

TO: Editorial Boards, reporters, columnists

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SUBJECT: Congress, Senior Military Leaders at Odds Over Advanced Biofuel

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The Pentagon's top brass has made it loud and clear: Decreasing the military's dependence on oil and increasing its use of made-in-America energy sources like advanced biofuel is essential to the nation's security, the military's budget and the safety of our troops.

Yet **as early as this week**, Congress plans to vote on a version of the must-pass National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that contains amendments from Sens. James Inhofe and John McCain that would completely disregard the recommendations of our military's leaders and derail the military's biofuel initiatives.

Before it's too late, we hope you'll help show the public what's happening in Congress, and why the military should be allowed to pursue its biofuel initiatives, which call for the Air Force and Navy to get 50 percent of their fuel from biofuel by 2020.

It's not just NRDC saying this.

***[Defense Secretary Leon Panetta told members](#)** of the Senate earlier this year that derailing the military's biofuels plans "...could deprive commanders of the flexibility they need to meet tactical and operational needs and make us more exposed to potential supply disruptions and future price volatility of petroleum products."

***[Thirty-eight senators recently wrote Senate leadership](#)** noting their opposition to the "harmful and counterproductive" amendments to the NDAA that would derail the military's biofuels efforts, noting that doing so "could cause harm to our national security and military readiness while hindering national efforts to develop viable domestic alternative fuels."

***Numerous active and retired military leaders** who have served on the front lines note that the military's biofuel efforts are essential to improving national security, protecting troops and stimulating our economy - most recently in pieces [such as this one from a retired Air Force general](#) and this [one from a retired Navy SEAL](#).

There are numerous reasons why there is widespread support for military's biofuel initiatives. Here are three for starters:

National security

Dependence on a single fuel source – oil – exposes our military and our country to potential supply disruptions, as Defense Secretary Panetta points out. That vulnerability is exacerbated by our country's dependence on oil from foreign countries, some of which are hostile to us. Remaining shackled to the volatility of oil prices also can be disastrous for our military's budget: [Every time the price of a barrel of oil goes up \\$1, the Defense Department estimates it must come up with \\$130 million in unbudgeted funds](#). Those are funds that could otherwise go to weapons, supplies or pay for troops.

The economy

The military's leadership in biofuels would spur economic activity and help the United States to finally wean itself off of oil. The military has a long and successful track record of driving private industry economic transitions - think about the military's role in creating commercial aviation, the Internet and the GPS. [According to a report from Environmental Entrepreneurs \(E2\), an affiliate of NRDC, military biofuels initiatives could generate at least \\$10 billion of economic activity and create 14,000 jobs in sectors like agriculture, construction and transportation. This could have a ripple effect across the economy and also drive commercial availability of biofuel, which commercial aviation and transportation businesses badly want and need to help blunt costly oil price spikes.](#)

The environment

The U.S. military is the world's single-largest consumer of oil and gas. Any effort to reduce the carbon pollution that dirties our air, disrupts our climate and contributes to health problems must include leadership from the military. Military leaders uniformly agree that climate change and the problems that come with it – droughts, flooding, extreme weather, diminishing ice -- is a "threat multiplier" that increases instability in regions already notorious for their volatility and creates potential new national security hazards. Advanced biofuels help mitigate this risk. [If produced properly, advanced biofuels can dramatically reduce emissions from](#) planes, trucks, tanks and other vehicles that cause climate change.

BACKGROUND:

Every day, the U.S. military consumes about 300,000 barrels of oil that is subject to wild swings in international oil prices, seriously impacting the Pentagon's ability to make accurate budget projections. The military has identified ways to get a better handle on its fuel costs, and expanding its use of advanced biofuel is one of the primary ways.

By 2020, the Navy and the Air Force want to get at least half of their fuel from biofuel. Already the military has successfully demonstrated that it can fly every type of aircraft and power an entire Navy fleet with "drop-in" biofuels that don't require engine modifications and that don't decrease performance.

But advanced biofuels are still in the development stage, and at least for the moment their cost is higher than petroleum-based fuel. This makes the biofuel industry an easy target for the fossil fuel industry's lobbyists who want to preserve their profits and the status quo, as well as the politicians who are critical of the military's biofuel initiatives.

Two amendments to the current NDAA would derail the military's plans.

An amendment by Sen. John McCain of Arizona would literally require an act of Congress – that is, Congress must pass a law – for the military to build a refinery to produce the biofuel that it wants and needs.

A separate amendment from Sen. James Inhofe, the outspoken climate change denier from the oil-patch state of Oklahoma, would prohibit the military from buying biofuel until it costs less than fossil fuels, which have been heavily subsidized for the past century.

For more information, see, or to arrange interviews with biofuel experts, business leaders or former military leaders on this topic, please contact Bob Keefe at bkeefe@nrdc.org or 202.289.2373.