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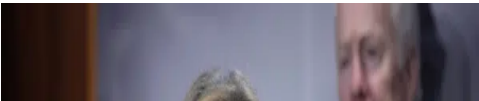
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Senate passes defense bill rescinding COVID vaccine mandate

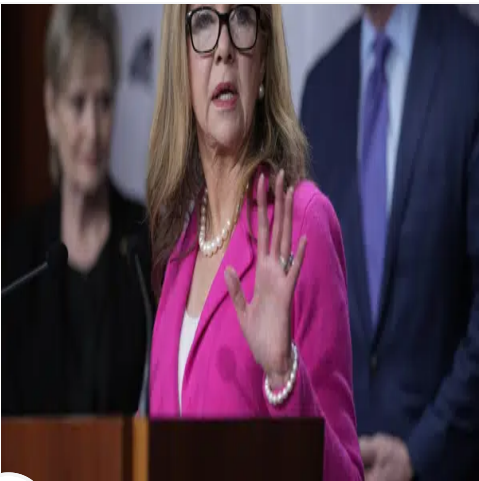
By KEVIN FREKING today



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WASHINGTON
(AP) — A bill

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mandate for members of the U.S. military and provide nearly \$858 billion for national defense passed the Senate on Thursday and now goes to President Joe Biden to be signed into law.

The bill provides for about \$45 billion more for defense programs than Biden

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more than last year's bill as lawmakers look to account for inflation and boost the nation's military competitiveness with China and Russia. It includes a 4.6% pay raise for



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Department's
civilian
workforce.

The Senate
passed the
defense policy
bill by a vote
of 83-11. The
measure also
received
broad
bipartisan
support in the
House last
week.

To win GOP
support for
the 4,408-
page bill,
Democrats
agreed to
Republican
demands to

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for service
members to
get a COVID-
19
vaccination.
The bill
directs
Defense
Secretary
Lloyd Austin
to rescind his
[August 2021](#)
[memorandum](#)



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Before approving the measure, the Senate voted down a couple of efforts to amend it, including a proposal from Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., to

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process for energy projects. The effort had drawn fierce opposition from some environmental advocacy groups who worried it would accelerate fossil fuel



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limit the
public’s input
on such
projects.

JOE
BIDEN

Manchin Biden sign
bid to bill to keep
speed government
energy open
permits through
to Dec. 23
reemerge
in 2023

Migrant Treasury
gather in Secretary
Mexico Janet
as end Yellen to
nears for visit sub-
US Saharan
asylum Africa
limits

Manchin, who

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Committee,
secured a
commitment
from Biden
and
Democratic
leaders last
summer to
support the
permitting
package in
return for his
support of a
landmark law

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Machin’s
legislation
sets deadlines
for
completion of
National
Environmental
Policy Act
reviews for
major energy
and natural
resource
projects. It
would require
courts to
consider
litigation
involving
energy project
permits on an
expedited
basis. It also
directs federal

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completion of
a natural gas
pipeline in his
home state
and Virginia
“without
further
administrative
or judicial
delay or
impediment.”

“We’re on the
verge of doing
something



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will be for
naught.
Because
without
permitting
reform, the
United States
of America is
more litigious
than any
nation on
earth,”
Manchin told
colleagues.

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Biden voiced
his support
for Manchin’s
legislation a

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Thursday’s
vote. He said
far too many
projects face
delays and
described
Manchin’s
amendment
“as a way to
cut
Americans’
energy bills,
promote U.S.
energy
security, and



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projects built
and
connected to
the grid.“

Not only did
some
environmental
advocacy
groups bash
Manchin’s
proposal, but
so did many
Republicans.
Minority
Leader Mitch
McConnell, R-
Ky., said it
didn’t go far
enough,
calling it
“reform in
name only.”

The

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the 60 votes
needed for
passage, 47-47.

An
amendment
from Sens.
Ron Johnson,
R-Wis., and
Ted Cruz, R-
Texas, also
went down to
defeat. It
would have
allowed for



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service
members
discharged for
failing to obey
an order to
receive the
COVID-19
vaccine and
compensate
them for any
pay and
benefits lost
as a result of
the
separation.

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“People
serving our
military are

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Over 8,000
were
terminated
because they
refused to get
this
experimental
vaccine, and
so I’m urging
all of my
colleagues to
support
Senator
Cruz’s and my



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But
opponents
worried about
the precedent
of rewarding
members of
the military
who
disobeyed an
order. Rhode
Island Sen.
Jack Reed, the
Democratic
chairman of
the Senate
Armed
Services
Committee,
said orders
are not
suggestions,
they are
commands.

“What

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pass this bill?
It is a very
dangerous
one,” Reed
said. “What
we’re telling
soldiers is, ‘if
you disagree,
don’t follow
the order, and
then just
lobby
Congress, and
they’ll come

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restore your
benefits, or
restore
everything.”

The
amendment
failed, with 40
senators
supporting it
and 54
opposing it.

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The defense
bill sets policy
and provides
a roadmap for
future
investments.
Lawmakers

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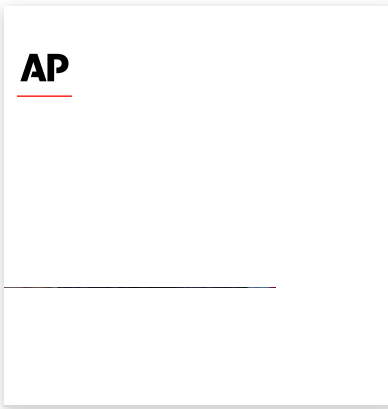
spending bills
to bring many
provisions to
reality. It’s
one of the
final bills
Congress is
expected to
approve
before
adjourning, so
lawmakers
were eager to
attach their



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The directive to [rescind the](#) vaccine mandate for service members proved to be among the most controversial provisions, but Democrats agreed to it to allow the bill to advance.

As of early this month, about 99% of the active-duty troops in the Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps



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and 98% of the Army. Service members who are not vaccinated are not allowed to deploy, particularly sailors or Marines on ships. There may be a few exceptions to

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exemptions
and the duties
of the service
member.

The
vaccination
numbers for
the Guard and
Reserve are
lower, but
generally all
are more than
90%.

Associated
Press writer
Lolita C.
Baldor
contributed to
this report.

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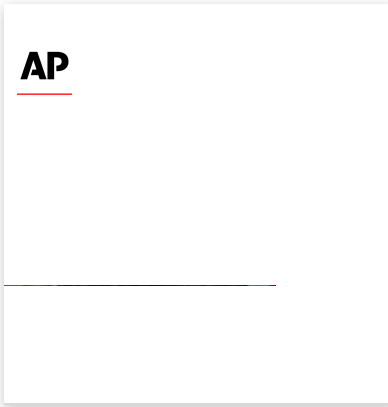
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