

119TH CONGRESS  
2D SESSION

**S.** \_\_\_\_\_

To protect the editorial independence of the Stars and Stripes news organization.

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IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

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Mrs. SHAHEEN (for herself and Mr. BLUMENTHAL) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on

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**A BILL**

To protect the editorial independence of the Stars and Stripes news organization.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Stars and Stripes Edi-  
5 torial Independence Act of 2026”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress makes the following findings:

8 (1) Stars and Stripes has reported on issues  
9 unique to members of the United States Armed

1 Forces, particularly those serving abroad, dating  
2 back to the Civil War.

3 (2) Stars and Stripes remains editorially inde-  
4 pendent of interference or censorship from outside  
5 its own editorial chain of command.

6 (3) A free and independent press is a corner-  
7 stone of democratic governance and is essential to  
8 transparency, accountability, and informed public  
9 decisionmaking.

10 (4) Congress has historically recognized Stars  
11 and Stripes as an independent journalistic organiza-  
12 tion serving members of the Armed Forces and their  
13 families overseas.

14 (5) Stars and Stripes provides unique and sus-  
15 tained coverage of issues affecting servicemember  
16 and veterans' quality of life, including housing,  
17 health care, pay and benefits, family readiness,  
18 training conditions, and the long-term impacts of  
19 military service.

20 (6) Such reporting elevates concerns and expe-  
21 riences that may otherwise receive limited attention,  
22 enabling policymakers and the public to better un-  
23 derstand the lived realities of members of the Armed  
24 Forces and their families.

1           (7) Independent war reporting and coverage of  
2 military operations demonstrate transparency and  
3 accountability to the American public regarding the  
4 human, strategic, and financial costs of armed con-  
5 flict.

6           (8) Transparent reporting on military oper-  
7 ations and conflicts strengthens public trust by en-  
8 suring that decisions made in the name of national  
9 security are subject to informed public awareness  
10 and debate.

11           (9) Maintaining a clear separation between De-  
12 partment of Defense public affairs activities and  
13 Stars and Stripes editorial operations is necessary to  
14 preserve confidence among servicemembers and mili-  
15 tary families in the accuracy and independence of re-  
16 porting provided by Stars and Stripes.

17           (10) The ability of defense journalists to oper-  
18 ate without censorship, undue influence, or retali-  
19 ation is essential to maintaining credibility, accuracy,  
20 and public trust.

21           (11) Protecting press freedom within the de-  
22 fense sector strengthens national security by pro-  
23 moting accountability, identifying inefficiencies or  
24 misconduct, and ensuring informed debate on de-  
25 fense policy.

1           (12) Members of the Armed Forces, Depart-  
2           ment of Defense civilian employees, and their fami-  
3           lies stationed overseas, including in combat zones  
4           and other remote locations, often rely upon Stars  
5           and Stripes as a primary source of independent  
6           English-language news and information.

7           (13) Members of the Armed Forces, Depart-  
8           ment of Defense civilian employees, and their fami-  
9           lies operate in information environments that are  
10          frequent targets of foreign adversary influence oper-  
11          ations, including disinformation, propaganda, and  
12          coordinated inauthentic behavior.

13          (14) Independent oversight and internal edi-  
14          torial review mechanisms, including the Stars and  
15          Stripes Ombudsman, support accountability and  
16          journalistic integrity.

17          (15) Congressional oversight is necessary to en-  
18          sure that Stars and Stripes is not subjected to cen-  
19          sorship, ideological influence, or political direction.

20 **SEC. 3. INDEPENDENCE OF STARS AND STRIPES.**

21          (a) PURPOSE.—The purpose of this section is to cod-  
22          ify the requirements related to the editorial independence  
23          of Stars and Stripes provided for in section 4.2 of Depart-  
24          ment of Defense Directive (DODD) 5122.11, dated Octo-

1 ber 11, 1993, and section 246.4(b) of title 32, Code of  
2 Federal Regulations.

3 (b) EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE REQUIREMENT.—

4 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Defense  
5 shall ensure that—

6 (A) editorial policies and practices of Stars  
7 and Stripes are in accordance with journalistic  
8 standards governing United States news media  
9 of the highest quality, with emphasis on mat-  
10 ters of interest to the Stars and Stripes reader-  
11 ship;

12 (B) Stars and Stripes' editorial operations  
13 are independent of the military chain of com-  
14 mand, military public affairs activities, or other  
15 external influences, and without censorship or  
16 propaganda;

17 (C) the Stars and Stripes publisher re-  
18 mains a civilian government employee with  
19 independent professional news media experi-  
20 ence, who manages and controls the day-to-day  
21 business and financial, operational, and admin-  
22 istrative activities, and provides editorial over-  
23 sight of Stars and Stripes;

24 (D) Stars and Stripes' reporters with ac-  
25 cess to Department of Defense installations are

1 authorized to cover events or activities open to  
2 those with installation access, even though com-  
3 mercial news media may not have the same  
4 unescorted access;

5 (E) Stars and Stripes is a digital-first  
6 news organization, but is also published in a  
7 print newspaper edition at a frequency and dis-  
8 tribution determined by the publisher to best  
9 serve its readership; and

10 (F) except as provided in paragraph (3),  
11 Stars and Stripes provides a free flow of news  
12 and information to its readership without news  
13 management or censorship from the Secretary  
14 of Defense or the Department of Defense.

15 (2) PROHIBITION ON WITHHOLDING OF UNFA-  
16 VORABLE NEWS.—The calculated withholding from  
17 publication in Stars and Stripes of news unfavorable  
18 to the Department of Defense, the military services,  
19 or the United States Government is prohibited.

20 (3) EXCEPTIONS.—

21 (A) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding the  
22 requirement under paragraph (1), Stars and  
23 Stripes shall not publish original staff-produced  
24 news stories based upon classified information  
25 or publish information that clearly endangers

1           the lives of United States personnel or would  
2           adversely affect national security.

3           (B) LIMITATION.—The exceptions under  
4           subparagraph (A) may not be construed to per-  
5           mit the calculated withholding of news unfavor-  
6           able to the Department of Defense, the military  
7           services, or the United States Government. Any  
8           security risk information shall not be withheld  
9           without concurrence from both the Stars and  
10          Stripes publisher and the relevant combatant  
11          commander.

12          (4) STARS AND STRIPES PERSONNEL.—The ex-  
13          clusion of civilian candidates for consideration for  
14          officer, journalist, or other Stars and Stripes staff  
15          positions is prohibited.

16          (c) NEWS CONTRACTING.—Stars and Stripes shall  
17          not be prohibited from purchasing, contracting for, or  
18          publishing news stories, features, syndicated columns,  
19          comic strips, and editorial cartoons from commercial news  
20          media services or sources.