

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1902

March 8, 2016

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Chairman of the Armed Services Committee
2208 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman,

As you know, last week, I testified before the House Armed Services Committee about the importance for the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) to provide fully American-made and sourced athletic shoes to enlisted recruits during initial entry, or Basic Training. I know this issue well because New Balance manufactures the highest quality athletic footwear in the world -- 100% American-made by 900 skilled, hard-working craftsmen in my District and by 2,000 workers in the Massachusetts 3rd District represented by Congresswoman Niki Tsongas.

Since 1941, the Berry Amendment law has required the Pentagon to only purchase completely American-made and sourced clothing, textiles, and footwear for our men and women in uniform. During the past few years, New Balance has invested millions of dollars to re-engineer its manufacturing operations to produce an athletic shoe 100% made in America, in full compliance with the Berry Amendment. At least three other domestic footwear companies are ready to follow suit as noted by the Secretary of Defense during 2014 testimony before the House Armed Services Committee.

Already, the Navy has made the decision to provide new recruits with "Assembled in the USA" New Balance shoes. While not 100% Berry Amendment compliant, these shoes are as close to Berry compliant as any being provided to recruits today. Recently, the Coast Guard decided to issue 100% Berry compliant shoes to enlistees even though it is not subject to the law. Additionally, Customs and Border Patrol offers its patrol personnel Berry compliant shoes.

Two of three New Balance Berry Amendment compliant platforms, the stability and neutral models, have passed the DOD's rigorous wear and durability tests. A recent Pentagon report entitled "Literature Review on Health Impacts of Running for Various Foot Types and Appropriate Shoe Characteristics to Address Recruits' Needs" concluded that enlisted recruits are best served by beginning Basic Training with new, high quality running shoes which are comfortable and fit properly -- the specific competitive advantages of wearing 100% American-made New Balance footwear. The study further concludes that injury risk increases when recruits wear lower quality minimalist running shoes during Basic Training.

Enlisted recruits are directly issued most of their supplies, gear, and equipment for Basic Training through the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA), including boots and dress shoes. Doing so avoids the inconvenience and approximately 30% additional cost to U.S. taxpayers of providing stipends to recruits and then requiring them to procure the items at the military Exchanges. Currently, new recruits are forced

to purchase their athletic shoes for Basic Training through this expensive roundabout resale system. Recruits are not provided with an array of choices in this process.

Frankly, I am concerned that the current system incentivizes some Exchanges to provide recruits, using taxpayer-funded cash allowances, with lower quality, less expensive, foreign-made shoes in order to maximize profit margins even though such shoes could increase the risk of injury.

Currently, U.S. taxpayers spend on average \$85 per pair of running shoes for new recruits through the costly Exchange markup and resale process. If issued directly through the DLA like most other supplies, gear and equipment, recruits could receive a pair of top quality, completely American-made athletic shoes for roughly \$74 per pair -- saving nearly \$1.7 million per year for U.S. taxpayers by providing our 151,000 brave new recruits each year with the highest quality running shoes in the world, 100% made in America.

In summary, I ask the U.S. House Armed Services Committee to include language crafted and submitted by me and Congresswomen Niki Tsongas in the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act which requires the Department of Defense to do what is fair and right, and to support U.S. manufacturing jobs -- not 30% military Exchange markups -- by providing enlisted recruits with fully Berry Amendment compliant and, thus, completely American-made athletic shoes.

Thank you,


Congressman Bruce Poliquin
Maine's 2nd District