

—Slug:.....COMM-0857.opin.view.boswell  
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—For section.....Voices/Viewpoint  
—Format.....Opinions  
—Dateline.....Brattleboro  
—Article Number:.....43297

**Notes from editor (not for publication):**

Line 36: As originally written, it implied Obama received the Nobel Prize after all those bombs dropped. Tom, I realized at the end of editing this that the crossover has already taken place, meaning that the prospects of any activity are very slim. I added an editor’s note with that context.

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 Defend our Guard, defend our democracy

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 For decades, Washington, D.C. has used and abused our  
3 National Guard to fight its wars without the popular consent of  
4 the American people. The Vermont Legislature needs to join a  
5 growing, nonpartisan movement of state governments to deploy  
6 our guardsmen legally and keep our Executive Branch in check.

####END SUBHED####

7 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

8 IF YOU ARE sick and tired of the United States fighting so-  
9 called forever wars — wars that seem to drag on for years or

10 decades with no stated goal in mind except to kill people who  
11 have never caused any harm to Vermont citizens — there is  
12 something you can do about it.

13         These wars that cause so much death and destruction  
14 technically don't even exist because they have never been  
15 formally declared. Yet they sap our local resources, particularly  
16 the National Guard, which is supposed to protect and defend us.

17         A good part of a solution to this dilemma is a bill sitting  
18 in the Vermont State House right now, waiting for your state  
19 legislators to sign on and grant it a hearing. It's called the Defend  
20 the Guard Act.

21         This state-based, nonpartisan legislation would prohibit  
22 the deployment of our National Guard into active combat  
23 without a formal declaration of war by Congress, as required by  
24 Article 1, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution.

25         Our Guard troops have a unique role in the military —  
26 both state and federal — as spelled out in this article of the  
27 Constitution. It requires that Congress declare war because it's the  
28 government body closest (and assumedly most responsive) to the  
29 people.

30         The Constitution then mandates that the president  
31 (commander in chief) is to prosecute the war.

32         It may surprise some people to learn that World War II  
33 was the last time the U.S. actually declared a war despite  
34 decades and decades of war in places like Korea, Vietnam, Iraq,  
35 Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia, Libya, Grenada, Guatemala, Chile,  
36 and, let's not forget, the present genocide in Palestine.

37         Our military under George W. Bush dropped 70,000  
38 bombs on five countries but we were not at war.

39         Barack Obama, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize  
40 in 2009, dumped 100,000 bombs on seven countries during his  
41 two terms without a declaration of war and won the for his  
42 efforts.

43 In his first year in office (of his first term), Donald Trump  
44 dropped 44,000 bombs, an average of one bomb every 12  
45 minutes.

46 During his second term in the White House, Trump's  
47 military interventions, according to the Council on Foreign  
48 Relations, include Iraq, Nigeria, Somalia, Syria, Yemen,  
49 Venezuela, and Iran. That's (at least) seven sovereign nations, but  
50 not quite enough to earn him the Nobel Peace Prize he so yearns  
51 for.

52 But the point here is that a half dozen presidents,  
53 Democrat and Republican, have made a bad habit of violating  
54 the U.S. Constitution and international law in pursuit of their  
55 mutual goals of U.S. hegemony on the world stage.

56 \* \* \*

57 THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT for this Defend the Guard Act  
58 legislation, of course, is that President Trump has deployed the  
59 soldiers and F-35 fighter jets of the Vermont Guard for his two  
60 latest military adventures: the attack on Venezuela and  
61 kidnapping of its president, and his current undeclared war  
62 against Iran, with his crony in crime, the state of Israel.

63 John Daniel "Raizin" Caine, a U.S. general and venture  
64 capitalist who became chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff last year,  
65 was quoted in a press release from March 2 as confirming that  
66 the Vermont Air National Guard was part of the buildup of forces  
67 that attacked Iran on the last day of February.

68 "This is not a single overnight operation," Caine  
69 [admitted](#). "[It] will take some time to achieve, and in some cases,  
70 will be difficult and gritty work."

71 Indeed. The Project on Government Oversight (POGO)  
72 [reported](#) that "the illegal war started by our executive branch in  
73 Iran is rapidly spreading and escalating — and the costs are  
74 ballooning."

75 POGO's defense experts estimate that the U.S. spent  
76 nearly \$630.6 million on Tomahawks missiles alone in the first

77 four days. The White House is already floating a request of \$50  
78 billion in supplemental funding.

79           Meanwhile, our National Guard troops are not available  
80 here at home to respond to forest fires, floods, or future  
81 pandemics if they are overseas fighting illegal and  
82 unconstitutional wars of aggression.

83           \* \* \*

84           THE DEFEND THE GUARD ACT in the Vermont Legislature is  
85 actually part of a national movement to pressure Congress to  
86 fulfill its Constitutional responsibility. The goal is to use the  
87 American principle of federalism to restore the balance of power  
88 between the executive and legislative branches and require a shift  
89 in foreign policy to curtail the governments' ability to wage  
90 endless war without Congressional oversight and accountability.

91           Other state legislative chambers that have already passed  
92 a similar bill include our neighbors in the New Hampshire House  
93 of Representatives and the Arizona and Idaho state senates.

94           In Texas, more Republican primary voters in 2024  
95 supported that state's Defend the Guard ballot measure than  
96 voted for Donald Trump. It was approved by 85% of voters.  
97 Defend the Guard legislation has now been introduced in 28  
98 state legislatures, supported by Democrats, Republicans, and  
99 Libertarians.

100           Darin Gaub, who served the U.S. military from the rank  
101 of private to lieutenant colonel, including seven overseas  
102 deployments, testified before a standing committee of the  
103 Montana House in 2023 in support of the Defend the Guard  
104 campaign.

105           "The U.S. Constitution as the supreme law of the land  
106 vests the power to declare war exclusively in the U.S. Congress,"  
107 he affirmed. "Congress has repeatedly abdicated its duty by  
108 unconditionally delegating its authority to the executive branch.  
109 This violates the separation of powers."

110           Gaub proceeded to tell the Montana legislators: "The  
111 president cannot declare and execute the war on their own.

112 That's something you see in dictatorships. [...] Today's  
113 expeditionary military mindset looks more like the time of the  
114 Roman Empire, where those in uniform served at the whim of the  
115 emperor, not at the will of the people."

116 Speaking for the Quincy Institute for Responsible  
117 Statecraft in 2021, Dan McKnight [said](#) the Defend the Guard  
118 movement was the "brainchild" of a member of the House of  
119 Delegates of the West Virginia Legislature, who has served as an  
120 Air Force intelligence officer across the Middle East. McKnight  
121 himself had served in the Marine Corps, Army, and Idaho  
122 National Guard and fought in Afghanistan.

123 "In my deployment to Afghanistan, I found the Guard to  
124 be the best trained of all," he reported. "For two decades of war,  
125 the National Guard has tried to live up to its motto of "Always  
126 Ready, Always There." But the undeniable fact is that every  
127 American soldier sent to nation-build in Afghanistan or patrol the  
128 streets of Iraq is one less person who can protect and aid his  
129 fellow Americans back home.

130 "Article 1, Section 8, Clause 11 of the U.S. Constitution  
131 empowers Congress (and they alone) with the power to make war  
132 on another nation. But since World War II, Congress has been  
133 content to obfuscate accountability and defer decision-making to  
134 the Executive Branch, which James Madison called "the branch  
135 of power most interested in war, [and] most prone to it."

136 "That, unfortunately, has been the result. The U.S.  
137 currently has active-duty soldiers in a total of 150 nations across  
138 the globe. In 65 of those nations, our troops are engaged in  
139 counterterrorism training missions; and in direct-fire combat  
140 operations in 14 countries. Meanwhile, seven countries are on  
141 the receiving end of drone strikes courtesy of the U.S. military. All  
142 without a declaration of war."

143 McKnight added: "Defend the Guard would not prevent  
144 the National Guard from deploying to other states to offer  
145 assistance, or participating in training missions overseas, or going  
146 into federal service for the reasons explicitly written in the U.S.

147 Constitution. [The legislation's] sole, narrowly defined purpose is  
148 to prevent the National Guard from being used in illegal wars  
149 and requiring that congressmen put their names on the dotted  
150 line before they ask our soldiers to put their boots on the  
151 ground."

152 In early 2024, Wendy Rogers, an Air Force officer and  
153 Republican state senator in Flagstaff, Arizona, stood up to  
154 champion the Defend the Guard Act.

155 "Our Founding Fathers were very clear on their  
156 intentions when they drafted our system of checks and balances  
157 in 1787," she said. "President George Washington said, 'The  
158 Constitution vests the power of declaring war in Congress;  
159 therefore, no offensive expedition of importance can be  
160 undertaken until after they shall have deliberated upon the  
161 subject and authorized such a measure.'"

162 For decades, Washington, D.C. has used and abused our  
163 National Guard to fight its wars without the popular consent of  
164 the American people.

165 "If it's a war worth fighting in defense of the United  
166 States," Rogers said, "there will be no difficulty in finding a  
167 majority of Congress to vote in favor, with the unified support of  
168 the American people, and the National Guard taking its rightful  
169 place as the backbone of the Armed Forces."

170 But, she continued, "if it is a war without the approval of  
171 the people's elected representatives, then it is an illegal conflict, a  
172 violation of the government's compact with the states, and a war  
173 that Arizona's National Guard should not fight."

174 Although I certainly wouldn't recommend him as  
175 someone to emulate, when Pete Hegseth was just a nominee for  
176 secretary of defense, he had this to say concerning the political  
177 activity of our neighbors to the east when they considered the  
178 Defend the Guard Act: "New Hampshire is simply pointing out  
179 that it's supposed to be Congress that declares war. It has become  
180 an executive branch function, and as a result unless the Congress

181 declares war, New Hampshire doesn't have to send troops for  
182 foreign wars. To me it makes a lot of sense."

183 \* \* \*

184 SO THERE you have it.

185 Given the person who nominated Pete — and who  
186 unfortunately sits in the White House now, an authoritarian, half-  
187 crazed, megalomaniac — it's probably due time for Vermont  
188 residents to assert states' rights and get behind the Defend the  
189 Guard movement.

190 It's time to contact your state legislators and encourage  
191 them to support the Vermont Defend the Guard Act ([H.355](#)), to  
192 add their names to sponsor it, and to do all they can to ensure it  
193 gets a fair hearing in the General Assembly.

194 The bill is in the Government Operations and Military  
195 Affairs Committee and is currently sponsored by Troy Headrick,  
196 an independent representing Chittenden-15 in the House of  
197 Representatives.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

198 **TOM BOSWELL** is a lifelong community organizer,  
199 journalist, and award-winning poet residing in Brattleboro.

200 Editor's note: The Vermont Defend the Guard Act remains in the  
201 Government Operations and Military Affairs Committee and at  
202 this point in the legislative session, its fate is grim, and it would  
203 have to be filed anew for the next biennium.

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

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