

CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 4200,
RONALD W. REAGAN NATIONAL
DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT
FOR FISCAL YEAR 2005

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, pursuant to House Resolution 843, I call up the conference report on the bill (H.R. 4200) to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2005 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe personnel strengths for such fiscal year for the Armed Forces, and for other purposes, and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 843, the conference report is considered read.

(For conference report and statement, see prior proceedings of the House of today.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER) and the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER).

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to come with my partner, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON), and offer for the consideration of the Members the Ronald Reagan National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2005, in simple terms, a defense bill for the troops of the United States who are serving in dangerous theaters around the world and troops and Guard together numbering over 2.5 million personnel.

This is a bill, Mr. Speaker, that is a joint effort, Democrats and Republicans have come together to put together this legislation, which I think is really a soldiers' bill, a people's bill, in large measure.

We have a 3.5 percent pay raise across the board. We have extension of new TRICARE benefits to Guard and Reserve. We have the new survivor's benefits, something we have never had before in our history, that allows a phasing out now of the offset that used to take place between a survivor of a military retiree, where they had to weigh that against their Social Security check. We have an increase in the receipt that disabled veterans will receive on the so-called concurrent receipt of their disability and their retired pay.

We have over \$700 million worth of armor for Humvees and over \$100 million worth of armor for trucks. We have a bill that has freed up the 24,000 housing units that were hanging in limbo for construction starts this year.

This bill, very simply, Mr. Speaker, is a great bill, and I hope that we can move the conference report through quickly for the consideration and approval of the Members and move it quickly to the President's desk.

I want to compliment my colleague, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr.

SKELTON), for working in a bipartisan manner in putting this bill together, as well as all the Members and all our great subcommittee chairmen who did such a wonderful job, and our ranking members and membership of the full committee.

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Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I join the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER) in strong support of this Defense Authorization Act. More than anything, it is a bill for the troops at a time when we are at war, the war in Iraq and the war against the terrorists in Afghanistan.

Let me commend my chairman, the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER), for his leadership in bringing the bill to completion. It was a lot of difficult, hard work, late nights; but it got done, and we are here. And I also want to applaud all the Members, Democrats and Republicans on the Committee on Armed Services, for their tireless effort on this bill.

I want to mention a couple of items of concern, however. The disappointments of course are in the process. I spoke strongly last May of our desire to delay the upcoming round of base closings; yet we were unable to obtain everything, and I am also disappointed with the conference outcome in the Colombia troop cap when our troops are so very thinly stretched across the globe.

But this very bill has at stake during wartime \$446 in defense. It is very, very important that we pass this this evening. This is probably the best piece of legislation that we have had for the troops, their families, and for military retirees in a long, long time. And at the end of the day, those who wear uniforms and their families who support them so well will be the ones who benefit from our efforts.

It eliminates the cap on privatized housing for military families, something so many of us have been calling for. This program allows private contractors to build housing on or near military bases, who then recoup their investment through rental payments. That has been a long, involved effort. It also involves additional health benefits for our troops who serve us proudly and with so much distinction. We extend TRICARE benefits to the non-active duty Reservists and Guard members who have been called and ordered to active duty on or after September 11, 2001.

We also provide for additional benefits for the survivors of those who have served. The bill eliminates the Social Security offset to survivor benefit payment plans, phasing it in over 4 years as opposed to what the Senate wanted to do. I have to give our friend, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS), special credit for his effort to have a discharge petition on this particular issue.

Finally, the conference report includes a series of provisions relating to Iraq that will require the administration to explain its policies and allow Congress to conduct better oversight of what is going on there. A strategic plan is required on the stabilization of Iraq. Policies and reports are required on the subjects of preventing the abuse of detainees in American custody and a new guidance mandated on the use of contractors for security functions. These are very, very important.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, this is not a perfect bill, but it is a very, very good bill. When we say we support the troops, when we put the bumper sticker on the back of our truck or car, this is saying it loudly and clearly: we support the troops to the tune of \$446 billion. All that they need, all that we can do is in here.

I applaud members of the Committee on Armed Services; and I thank the chairman, the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER). I think this is an excellent piece of legislation to move forward at this very, very dire and difficult junction in American history.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the vice chairman of the committee, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON).

(Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, let me, first of all, congratulate the chairman and the ranking member for an outstanding job in getting a bill before us. The gentleman from California (Chairman HUNTER) is tireless in his work on behalf of the troops, as is the gentleman from Missouri (Ranking Member SKELTON). I want to thank my ranking member, the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. ABERCROMBIE), for his outstanding cooperation on air-land issues.

I am not going to talk about the specifics of the bill, because my colleagues will, and I urge everyone to vote for it; but I am going to talk about an add-on provision in this bill that absolutely is outrageous to me.

I want my colleagues to listen, because it affects every one of their districts. Those Members in the other body added on a provision to our bill to reauthorize the Assistance to Firefighters Grants program. This has become the most popular program for Members of Congress and their districts. Through this program, over 3 years, we have distributed \$2.1 billion directly to fire departments; large, paid departments and small, volunteer departments, and that was done with bipartisan support. It was done without party politics.

For the reauthorization this year, when the other body put a provision in, we met, Democrats and Republicans, the distinguished minority whip, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER), the distinguished gentleman from New

Jersey (Mr. PASCRELL), the distinguished gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. ANDREWS), and the gentleman from California (Chairman HUNTER) was involved, the gentleman from New York (Mr. BOEHLERT) was involved, and the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. SMITH). And we reached a compromise to reauthorize this very important program, and we put in a nondiscrimination clause that would prevent volunteer firefighters from being discriminated against. Who can be against that? Even the paid firefighters in our cities, like those in the district of the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER), they want to go home as a volunteer to be a part of their community. The Members of the other body stripped that provision out of the bill.

So I urge my colleagues to tell their constituents across America that the other body does not care about volunteers. It was a carefully crafted provision that ended the discrimination against volunteers, that the paid firefighters in our cities want it removed so they could volunteer in our hometowns. And the other body took it out.

So I hope that every one of the 32,000 fire departments understands that this body, in a bipartisan way, delivered a solution that was fair, that allowed cities to have paid firefighters, but stripped out the provision to protect the volunteers. When the gentleman from California (Chairman HUNTER) went back to Ranking Member LEVIN, he said, tell CURT not to get his hopes up.

Well, let me tell you, Ranking Member LEVIN, every firefighter in Michigan is going to know what you did. Let me tell my other Senate friends. I am going to do a mailing to all 32,000 fire departments in this country, and I am going to thank the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER) and the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PASCRELL) and the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. ANDREWS) and the rest of the Republicans. But I am going to let the American firefighters know who put the screws to them in this bill.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). The Chair would advise Members that it is not in order to cast reflections on the Senate or its Members individually or collectively, and the Chair will enforce the rule.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the minority whip, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER).

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON), and I want to thank my friend, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON). There is nobody in this Congress, there is nobody in this country who has fought any more vigorously for firefighters, paid and volunteer, than the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON). It is an honor to work with him on these issues. I understand his passion, and I thank him for his work on behalf of the fire service of this country.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this conference agreement which supports our men and women in the Armed Forces and provides for the security of this Nation. It also specifically, of course, provides for the training and equipping of our troops engaged in the war on terrorism.

I am also pleased that this legislation contains a provision to reauthorize the assistance to the firefighters grant program. I want to thank the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER), and I want to thank the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON) on the fire service provisions in this bill for their support of that and for their leadership on this effort.

I also want to wish the gentleman from New York (Mr. BOEHLERT), who has been such a fighter on behalf of the fire services, a speedy recovery from his heart surgery. The gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON), the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. SMITH), the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PASCRELL), and the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. ANDREWS), all mentioned by my friend, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. WELDON) and their staffs have worked hard on this measure and their leadership for our Nation's fire and emergency service personnel and is appreciated by all.

I also want to thank my own staffer, Geoff Plague, who sits here with me, for his untiring and focused work on behalf of firefighters.

I am particularly pleased that this measure returns jurisdiction over the grant programs to the U.S. Fire Administration, which was widely praised for the effective manner in which it administered the program during its first 3 years. Last year, over the objections of many in this Congress, the program was moved and is now being returned, and I think that is to the benefit of the program. Again, I want to thank the gentleman from California (Chairman HUNTER) and the gentleman from Missouri (Ranking Member SKELTON) for their support in this effort.

While this is one of the most critical challenges our government faces today and one for which we have consistently sought increased levels of funding, it is not the objective of the Fire Grant program itself.

I also want to thank the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON) for his untiring efforts on behalf of our men and women in uniform, not only those who are on the front lines at the point of the spear, but also those who are here at home ready, willing, and able to go to support our efforts, to defeat terrorists, and to bring international security. The gentleman's work on behalf of those men and women has been extraordinary and appreciated by them. Again, Mr. Speaker, I intend to support this conference report, and I thank the chairman and the ranking member for their work to bring it to the floor before we leave and recess or adjourn for the elections.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Ohio

(Mr. TURNER), a very distinguished member of the committee.

Mr. TURNER of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my chairman, the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER), on his leadership and efforts in making certain that this bill, as he deemed it to be, is indeed the "year of the troops," supporting our men and women in uniform, making certain that we support our men and women in uniform with a pay increase, and making sure that they have the resources that they need.

The bill includes \$728 million in up-armor for our Humvees and protection against IADs, \$100 million for vehicle add-on armor kits. But also I am excited about the provisions that expand the health care to our Reservists and Guard. As the gentleman knows, I have introduced H.R. 2176, which would extend TRICARE health care benefits to our Reservists and members of our Guard. The GAO indicates that approximately 21 percent of all of our Reservists and Guard go without health care insurance.

This bill includes a TRICARE standard coverage for Reservists and Guard and their families who have been activated for more than 30 days since September 11, 2001, in support of a contingency operation; and then for every 90 days of consecutive active duty service, the member and their family are eligible for 1 year of TRICARE coverage with a nonactive duty status.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the leadership and dedication of the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER) to our men and women in uniform.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the ranking member on the Committee on the Budget, the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. SPRATT).

(Mr. SPRATT asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SPRATT. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 4200 and commend my colleagues, the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER) and the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON), for bringing this conference to a very successful conclusion.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to engage the chairman in a colloquy.

Mr. Speaker, the Conferees' Report in section 3303 contains a provision on the release of ferromanganese from the strategic stockpile, which is critical to steel production in the United States. Section 3303 contains a requirement that to release more than 50,000 tons of ferromanganese, the Secretary of Defense, among other requirements, must certify that the disposal will not cause undue disruption to the usual markets of producers and processors of ferromanganese in the United States. This could be considered a certification about future events regarding markets, and one could question whether the

certification of future events is possible.

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I ask the chairman if the conferees' intent in the meaning of this provision is that certification in this instance is the Secretary's best judgment about future market conditions and events.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. SPRATT. I yield to the gentleman from California.

Mr. HUNTER. Yes, we understand how important ferromanganese is for steel production in the U.S. We certainly do not intend to ask the Secretary to perform the impossible by forecasting the future with absolute certainty. We are just asking for his best judgment.

Mr. SPRATT. I thank the gentleman for that clarification.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 4200 and commend my good friends, Chairman HUNTER and Mr. SKELTON, for concluding this conference report.

Everyday our armed forces make great sacrifices to ensure that we are safe, secure, and free. In return, this bill provides a 3.5 percent across-the-board pay raise. It stops short of targeted pay raises for NCOs and warrant officers, which I supported, but it helps bridge the gap with the civilian workforce; makes permanent increases in imminent danger pay from \$150 to \$225 and family separation pay from \$100 to \$250 per month (these are initiatives I championed a year ago—I'm glad to see them finally be adopted); provides \$10 billion in military construction funds—keeping the Military Housing Privatization Program on track, and eliminating the program's funding ceiling.

The reserve component is being used in an unprecedented way and at an unprecedented rate. The Guard and Reserve make up approximately 40 percent of the force in Iraq, and others are stationed in Afghanistan and other critical locations at home and abroad. More than 173,000 have been mobilized for active duty service. Their service must be matched with meaningful benefits.

This bill provides enhanced TRICARE for reservists. It is not the full measure recommended by the Senate, but it is an improvement over current law. We can and should build on this beginning.

This bill also offers improved tuition assistance benefits.

In addition, this bill ends an injustice to the survivors of military retirees. H.R. 4200 phases out from October 2005 to March 2008 the current offset under the Survivor Benefit Plan, and increases the annuities paid to survivors of military retirees who are 62 years or older.

Recognizing the good efforts of my colleagues, Mr. SKELTON and Ms. TAUSCHER, this bill increases active Army and Marine Corps troop levels by 30,000 and 9,000 respectively. The Pentagon fought us every step of the way on this end-strength increase, but this is the minimum we can do to reduce the stress on our forces and ensure that we can meet military commitments in the future.

This bill also provides \$25 billion for the war in Iraq—enough to get through March of next year. We expect another supplemental request

early next year of \$50 billion—taking the total cost of the Iraq war well over \$200 billion.

The bill is not without shortcomings. The President, Senator KERRY and the 9/11 commission all agree that the gravest threat facing the Nation is nuclear terror. H.R. 4200 continues the Administration's pattern of underfunding CTR programs. This bill authorizes \$10 billion for missile defense, but only \$409 million to help combat the gravest threat facing our country. How can we justify spending \$10 billion on an unproven system developed to combat a relatively non-existent threat and only spend 4 percent of that amount on consensus greatest threat to the security of the American people.

The Conference Report does impose some welcome disciplines on that ballistic missile defense (BMD) program. The Pentagon's Office of Testing and Evaluation regains an oversight role. It is tasked with devising a realistic test regimen for BMD. In addition, each block of BMD will be subject to Selected Acquisition Report requirements. This means that each block will have baselines for cost, schedule, and performance, against which actual results can be measured. These are steps forward, and steps long overdue in a program of this magnitude.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3½ minutes to the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. HEFLEY), who chairs a very important committee on readiness.

Mr. HEFLEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 4200, the National Defense Authorization Act. I too would like to thank the chairman and the ranking member for their leadership on this committee. These are two people who really have their heart with the troops, who are out there doing the job for us as Americans, and they lead the committee greatly. I am so appreciative of the efforts of the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER) and the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON).

This Spring the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER) declared that 2004 would be the year of the troops, and he instructed us as committee chairman to focus what we did on the troops. What do they need? What will make them the best equipped and best trained fighting force in the history of the world. And that is what we tried to do in this bill.

The conference report before us today is crafted in that spirit, and I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting the troops by saying yes on the conference report today.

There are several items in the conference reports to which I would like to call attention, and I will do the one I am disappointed in first, and that is the BRAC provisions in here. We overwhelmingly in the committee voted, and have for the last couple of years, voted to delay the BRAC process for 2 years, and the reason for that is not parochial. It is because we do not think with the transition that we are going through in the armed services right now, in the war, that we have enough information to really make the decision that we will not be sorry for later. So we overwhelmingly in the House

and in the committee voted to delay it. But that did not stay in the bill.

The one BRAC provision which I am very pleased with the gentleman from New York (Mr. MCHUGH) put forward it is a very thoughtful provision and it will make the process work much better.

Second, this bill repeals the cap on the military housing privatization program effective immediately, ensuring that this extraordinarily successful program will continue to improve homes in which our service members and their families live. The House cast an overwhelming vote in support of the program this summer, and I could not be more pleased that we have found a way to allow it to continue. It would have been a tragedy if we had not done this.

Third, the bill authorizes more than \$10 billion, an increase of approximately \$450 million for military construction and family housing programs of the Department of Defense. By carefully applying these resources, the conference report provides for new facilities that will improve military readiness and enhance the quality of living for America's service members.

I would like to express my deep appreciation to the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. KNOLLENBERG) and the ranking member, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS), of the Military Construction Appropriations Subcommittee and their staffs for their hard work this year in what was often a very frustrating process. But they worked with the authorizing committee like the Appropriations Committee, and authorizing committees should work around this House, and have completed the military construction bill working together.

This bill also recognizes and rewards the equally patriotic and committed civilian workforce. Passage of the bill signifies America's continued and unwavering support for all of our military troops, active, Reserve, Guard, airmen, sailors, Marines. I ask you to support the troops. Vote "yes" on the Ronald Reagan National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2005. It is an act that you can be proud of.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. SNYDER), the ranking member on the Subcommittee on Total Force.

Mr. SNYDER. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER) and the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON) and also the gentleman from New York (Mr. MCHUGH), the chairman of the Subcommittee on Total Force. I think this is an excellent bill, and I encourage everyone to support it.

Mr. Speaker, one of the issues in the bill I also want to talk about is health care. One of the issues we face as a Nation is health care and the growing number of uninsured. We have 45 million uninsured, and it is growing. This is uninsured people for an entire calendar year. In the 2-year period, the

Commonwealth Fund says that over 80 million people have part of this time without health insurance. Since early 2001, we have had almost 4 million people lose their employer-provided health insurance.

I am from Arkansas. We have had several thousand people activated for deployment in our military forces. This occurred about a year ago. About 20 percent of them were not medically fit for military service. Think about it. The richest country of the world and 20 percent of our folks were not medically fit when they were activated.

Well, this also relates to health insurance because a lot of them do not have health insurance. People without health insurance do not keep up nearly as well with their health problems. Two years ago, the Congress and this country put a provision in TRICARE to help with this problem. And we said, and this is the current law, 90 days before an activation, a person who is activated goes on TRICARE with their family. It will extend 180 days after their activation deployment ends. That law is unchanged.

Importantly, what is in this bill is this: After the person returns, after 180 days at the end of their deployment, they are on TRICARE. They can make the decision to elect to sign up for TRICARE for themselves and their family as long as they are staying in the Guard or Reserve forces. For every 3 months of their deployment, they can sign up for a period of 1 year on TRICARE insurance if they want to pay 28 percent like all Federal employees do.

What does all that mean? It means, if you were deployed for a year, you come back, get your 180 days of free TRICARE. You can sign up and pay the 28 percent premium and get 4 years of health insurance for yourself and your family. I think this is a great incentive.

I rise in support of the defense authorization conference report. As the Ranking Member of the Total Force Subcommittee, I am proud of the accomplishments that we have achieved on behalf of device members, retirees and their families.

The bill includes a number of provisions that improve and increase benefits for military personnel, including the Reserves and National Guard. All of our men and women in uniform are making extraordinary sacrifices in support of the war against terrorism, and we need to recognize their contributions by providing benefits that will enable them to support a quality of life for themselves and their families.

I want to recognize the chairman of the Total Force Subcommittee, JOHN MCHUGH, and the Chairman of the committee, DUNCAN HUNTER, and the Ranking Member of the full committee, IKE SKELTON, for their efforts to complete conference before we adjourn this year.

Mr. Speaker, I want to share with my colleagues why it is important that we pass this conference report for the Armed Forces.

We increased end strength for the Army by 20,000 and the Marine Corps by 3,000 in fiscal year 2005; we provide a pay raise of 3.5

percent to all uniformed service members; we protect the commissary and exchange benefit; we include a number of provisions that seek to ensure that the Department and the Services are providing adequate monitoring, tracking, prevention, treatment and improved medical readiness for the forces; and we required the Secretary of Defense to develop policies and procedures on the prevention and response to sexual assault in the military.

Given the steadily growing demands on the Guard and Reserve, the bill includes a number of benefit enhancements that seek to recognize their contribution and provides incentives for them to stay in uniform.

We expanded duty health care coverage to non-active duty reservists and Guardsmen who were called or ordered to duty for more than 30 days since September 11, 2001, and who commit to continued service in the Selective Reserves after their releases from active duty; we made permanent several of the demonstration authorities that were implemented by the Department of Defense to address the health care needs of the reserves and Guard, such as transitional pre and post-health care coverage for activated reservists; we increased a number of bonuses and special pays available for the reserve and Guard; and we clarified that operational activities in the interests of national security can be conducted under Title 32, which allows Governors to address potential terrorist threats against our country.

The bill also addresses the highest priority for our military retirees and their survivors. We phase out the Widow's Tax over the next four years. No longer will survivors of military retirees have their benefits reduced when they reach age 65; and, we also provide immediate concurrent receipt to retirees who are also rated at 100 percent service connected disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, this is an important bill for our military personnel and it is imperative for those currently serving on the front lines in combat that we pass this bill before Congress adjourns.

I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3½ minutes to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON), the chair of the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities and overseas our special operators.

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, let me thank the chairman and the ranking member, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON), for the great leadership that has brought us to the floor now for the second time: first, to, of course, approve the bill; and now, to approve the conference report.

I rise in strong support of the conference report on H.R. 4200, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2005. I am pleased to report to my colleagues that the conferees have produced an outstanding bill. I thank our distinguished chairman, my good friend, the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER), for dedicating this year, as has been said before, as the year of the troops. Under his leadership and Senator WARNER's leadership, the conferees crafted legislation replete with initiatives to make significant improvements that will help our troops.

The bill will provide the resources and direction to better protect our men and women who are selflessly serving in dangerous conditions overseas, and we have not forgotten our valiant warriors in the Special Operations Command. For example, we authorized funds for several items on the SOCOM commander's unfunded requirements priority list and have authorized additional funding that would provide some necessary operational additional flexibility.

Second, the bill provides increased funding for technologies to help in combating terrorism, extremely important items.

Third, we continue to expand our successful initiative of last year to develop chemical and biological defenses, countermeasures and have provided additional funding for procurement of chemical and biological defense equipment.

The bill recommended by the conferees recognizes that we are, in fact, at war. American lives are at risk each day, and in fact, too many have already paid the ultimate sacrifice. This is an excellent bill, and I urge everybody to support it.

Let me bring up one other subject, Mr. Chairman, under the leadership of the Subcommittee on Projection Forces, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. BARTLETT), we have included language which speaks to a need going forward. Obviously, we have got great men and women in the armed services, but we have to be sure we can get them to the fight in a timely fashion.

The follow-on to the C-141 aircraft, our old workhorse, the C-17, has proven to be a marvelous weapons system. Initially, we committed to buy 110. We saw the need for additional ones, and in the meantime, we have increased the buy by 70 aircraft, making it total, by 2008, of 180 which will come off the line.

Since the beginning of this program we have known that we would need at least 220. And there is language in this bill, in report language, to encourage the Air Force for an additional buy of at least 57 aircraft, bringing the total to 222.

Mr. Speaker, let me just ask the chairman, this provision, I believe, is very important, and we have had this conversation before. We need to get to the fight in a timely fashion, and I believe, as does the chairman, that this additional buy is necessary to accomplish that goal.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. SAXTON. I yield to the gentleman from California.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, I would answer the gentleman that this aircraft has proved to be a superb performer and lift. We are behind on air lift. We need more air lift, and it is the perfect candidate for this job of expanding our air lift to the point where we can project power around the world in the way that we have planned and are today somewhat deficient.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that I have had numerous conversations with high level Air Force officials on this matter, and we want them to know that the language that is in the subcommittee chairman's language, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. BARTLETT), as well as in the Senate language in the bill passed in the other house is serious. This is a serious matter. And we hope that they will fully take it into consideration as they make decisions about how to move forward on this matter.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LORETTA SANCHEZ), the distinguished member of the Committee on Armed Services.

Ms. LORETTA SANCHEZ of California. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me time.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of the Department of Defense Authorization Conference Report. And I am pleased that the report includes a number of provisions that I have worked hard on in this committee. For example, it requires the Department of Defense to make recommendations about how to alleviate the financial burden that we have placed on many of our Guard and Reserve families. It calls for establishing joint training programs of military and civilian personnel for post-conflict reconstruction operations.

It expands the mission of the Task Force on Sexual Harassment and Violence at the service academies to look at sexual assault across all of our military services, and it requires the Department of Defense to analyze the legal codes that are currently being used to prosecute sexual assaults. We have to make sure that the morale of our soldiers, in particular our women soldiers, is not undermined by mistreatment within our own military.

There are elements missing from the bill that would have made this legislation even stronger. I am disappointed that we were not able to close the pay gap between the Guard and Reserves even more because our Guard and Reserves now comprise over 43 percent of our forces in Iraq.

I also wish that we could have done more to expand child care and family services for our service members. And I am also disappointed that we are going to go ahead with the development of a new nuclear weapon, the robust nuclear Earth perpetrator. This is particularly troubling at a time when we are asking other nations around the world to stop their emphasis on pursuing nuclear weapons. I think that we are sending a very mixed message here.

Overall, I think this is a great bill, and I thank the chairman, and I thank the ranking member for putting it together and for supporting some of the initiatives that I have been championing in the committee. In particular, I thank my ranking member.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from New

York (Mr. MCHUGH), the gentleman who has the responsibility of overseeing this 2.5 million person force wearing the uniform of the United States, a gentleman who oversees all of our personnel operations.

Mr. MCHUGH. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman for his gracious comments.

Like every other Member that has risen here today, I certainly want to extend both my appreciation and my admiration to the distinguished chairman of this full committee and his partner in this, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON), the distinguished ranking member, for the terrific work they did. The challenge in bringing this bill together is not disagreeing as to what needs to be done; it is deciding, of all those important steps we can and probably should take, which ones should we take now as we begin to work on a new agenda, almost immediately.

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I think the committees in both bodies have done a terrific job in doing that.

I also want to thank the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. SNYDER), our ranking member, who is my partner in our endeavor to try to provide those programs that are usually most associated with the welfare, the morale of our troops, of our brave men and women in uniform. It is so important at all times, but certainly in this period of great conflict and turmoil across the planet.

We have many good things in this bill, much of which has been discussed, and all of us are flattered on the subcommittee that members of the committee are deservedly, understandably, taking a great deal of pride in those.

There are a couple of things that may not have been mentioned as succinctly as they might have. One is the increase in end strength, Mr. Speaker, something that many of us have been working on for a good number of years, in our opinion, a key to alleviating the stress and the operations and the personnel tempo that our Guard and Reserve and our active components have been under;

A 23,000 total in the next fiscal year increase to the Army and to the Marine Corps, a 3.5 percent increase in basic pay for members of the Armed Forces, a continuation of the year-by-year commitment that this committee has made to making life in the military a little bit more livable;

Permanent increases in imminent danger pay and family separation allowance;

Those very modest but very important kinds of pays that recognize that when a member is away at war, he or she is paying a price, but of course, so are the families back home who miss their loved ones as they are out doing the hard work of freedom.

We have talked about the increased health care benefits that are so impor-

tant that play into readiness but also are critical to the fairness as we are in an era of increased utilization of the Reserve component and, as the gentlewoman from California said so correctly, are playing such a vital role, such a high percentage of our war on terror, and on and on and on.

Lastly, I would like to mention a \$7 billion program, a program that we will, in 4 years, reverse years and years of inequities and injustice. The Social Security survivor benefit plan offset will be corrected, something that the veterans service organizations have made their number one priority in this bill, and this Congress and this committee did it.

So I urge all my colleagues to join in support of what is a terrific bill in critically important times.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I take pleasure in yielding 1 minute to the gentlewoman from Missouri (Ms. MCCARTHY).

(Ms. MCCARTHY of Missouri asked and was given permission to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. MCCARTHY of Missouri. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 4200.

I also rise to thank the gentleman from Missouri for his efforts on behalf of the men and women who serve our country now and in remembrance of those who have served our country in the past. The gentleman from Missouri made it possible to put within the National Defense Authorization Act a provision to recognize those who served our country in World War I.

The Liberty Memorial is that landmark which is designated as America's foremost World War I memorial in this legislation. It is a powerful tribute to those who served and gave their lives for freedom.

By recognizing America's foremost World War I memorial, the Liberty Memorial in Kansas City, world leaders from the war have come repeatedly to Kansas City, to dedicate it 78 years ago and to renew it currently, and generations for the future will come to the memorial and understand better the war that was fought and why it was important.

I thank the gentleman.

I rise in support of H.R. 4200. The Liberty Memorial in Kansas City, MO, is the Nation's only museum devoted exclusively to preserving the memory and teaching the lessons of World War I. A provision in the National Defense Authorization Act would bestow upon one of the city's most historic landmarks, recognition as America's foremost World War I memorial.

When the site for the Liberty Memorial was dedicated on November 1, 1921, the main Allied military leaders spoke to a crowd of close to 200,000 people. It was the only time in history that these leaders were together at one place. In attendance were LTG Baron Jacques of Belgium; GEN Armando Diaz of Italy; Marshal Ferdinand Foch of France; GEN John J. Pershing of the United States; and ADM Lord Earl Beatty of Great Britain.

The city of Kansas City, the State of Missouri, and thousands of private donors and

philanthropic foundations have contributed, and continue to contribute, millions of dollars to build and restore this national treasure.

The Liberty Memorial has been a landmark in Kansas City for 78 years. It is a powerful tribute to those who served, and those who gave their lives for freedom. I was proud to work with Representative IKE SKELTON, the distinguished ranking member of the Armed Service Committee, to include this provision in the National Defense Authorization Act, to reaffirm our Nation's commitment to educating current and future generations about the lessons of World War I.

I thank the gentleman from Missouri.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. EVERETT), who oversees our strategic forces in the Subcommittee on Strategic Forces.

(Mr. EVERETT asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. EVERETT. Mr. Speaker, I want to also start by recognizing the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER), our chairman, an old-time friend of mine and I think probably the most patient chairman I have ever served with in my 12 years in Congress. His skill in leading this committee has been outstanding.

And we have the contributions also of the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON).

I rise in support of the conference report to accompany the fiscal year 2005 National Defense Authorization Act. This legislation supports the administration's objective while making significant improvements to the budget request. The gentleman from California's (Chairman HUNTER) theme of supporting the warfighter is retained throughout the entire measure. Moreover, our national security investment must continue the development of transformational capabilities of future systems, and this conference report meets that goal.

In the area of military space, the Department of Defense has embraced the benefits space provides to our warfighter. Unfortunately, DOD has experienced significant trouble on several high-priority programs. I look forward to working with DOD to correct areas of concern and ensure their success for the future.

However, I am equally concerned over our congressional actions that have cut Space-Based Radar and Transformational Communication Satellites to anemic levels. This cannot continue if we are to be serious about moving to the future and continuing the transformation of our combat operations.

Within Atomic Energy Defense Activities, the bill funds the National Nuclear Security Administration at the budget request. The conference report includes reductions for directed stockpile work, while adding \$50 million for infrastructure upgrades, much needed I might add.

The conferees have fully funded cleanup activities at \$6 billion for defense site cleanup. We have taken a sig-

nificant step towards resolving the waste incidental to reprocessing matter, which will allow for further clean-up to go forward at several sites across the country.

The conference report also makes substantial changes to the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program administered by the Department of Energy. Specifically, this program, designed to help sick former atomic weapons workers, has been shifted from the Department of Energy to the Department of Labor. In addition, the conference report establishes Federal compensation payments to resolve long-standing problems with the lack of a willing payer under existing State Workers' Compensation.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not recognize my ranking member, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. REYES) for his contribution, and the remainder of my Members on both sides of the aisle, staffs. I think we faced some of the most difficult policy decisions in the House Committee on Armed Services, and I want to express my appreciation for their hard work in protecting this Nation's security.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I take pleasure in yielding 4 minutes to the gentleman from Washington (Mr. DICKS), a senior member of the Committee on Appropriations.

(Mr. DICKS asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. DICKS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Missouri for yielding the time, and I would like to talk about tankers, a subject that has been very important to me, and I want to compliment the conferees for the agreement that was reached on this important issue.

I would like to engage the chairman, if I could, just in a discussion. It is my understanding that we have in this bill an authorization for the procurement, no leasing, but the procurement of 100 tankers; is that not correct?

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. DICKS. I yield to the gentleman from California.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, the gentleman is correct. There is \$100 million that authorizes SECDEF to procure 100 tankers on a multiyear basis.

Mr. DICKS. Right, and it is my understanding that on the question of support work that that will be re-competed; is that not correct?

Mr. HUNTER. Any support work, since we are not doing a lease, support work obviously is entirely appropriate that that be competed, and I know that there are organic depots, as well as private sector, that look forward to engaging in that.

Mr. DICKS. Mr. Speaker, there are a number of studies that the Secretary of Defense has ordered. Those studies have to be completed, and then the Secretary will make a decision based on the information, especially the

analysis of alternative study; is that not correct?

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, the gentleman is absolutely right, and the language that was in from the other body that had very large barriers to early production, that is, requiring that we go with the totally new production activity, that we not engage in a low-rate initial production, that LRIP be done away with, and a provision requiring bringing in outside competitors, which to me means bringing in a foreign bird which is manufactured by Airbus, all of that language was stricken. So what we are left with in this conference report is an authorization for the Secretary to utilize \$100 million, which presently exists, for the multiyear procurement of 100 tanker aircraft.

Let me tell the gentleman, we need those tanker aircraft. The old Eisenhower aircraft are not going to last us much longer, and the projection of American air power requires that we have a fleet of new birds ready to carry American force projection around the world.

Mr. DICKS. Mr. Speaker, I certainly agree with everything that the chairman said. The most important point is that we do not have to go back and have another procurement, because if we did that, it would take years and years before we would start getting the tankers; and I believe it is the position of this Congress that this is going to be built by an American company. So I want to commend the gentleman.

I also want to say that every plane that bombed in Iraq and Afghanistan had to be refueled multiple times, and what I worry about is a shutdown, if we had a failure.

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. DICKS. I yield to the gentleman from New Jersey.

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, I would just like to make one point, and I talked about the C-141s wearing out a little while ago. We replaced them. We are in the middle of the buy to replace the C-141 with a C-17.

When the average person looks up in the air and sees a military aircraft, they do not very often think about these planes wearing out. Well, these planes are over 40 years old, and as a matter of fact, the Air Mobility Command was just forced to put down or take out of service almost 30 of these KC-135 aircrafts, the aircraft that we are trying to replace, because they are worn out, they are corroded, they are old, and we are unable to use them safely.

Mr. DICKS. Mr. Speaker, this is one of the most important systems we have for projecting U.S. power around the world, and tankers and EA6Bs, we just cannot go to war without those two things, and that is why this is so important.

I rise today in support of this conference report. I would like to commend Chairman HUNTER and Ranking Member SKELTON on reaching a final agreement with the Senate on

this complex and vital legislation. I would also like to express my personal thanks to both of you, and to the rest of the conferees, for working out a fair compromise on the issue of aerial refueling tanker aircraft.

The conferees on the Defense Authorization bill have given the green light to a 100 aircraft tanker program using multi-year procurement authority. The agreement would not allow the leasing of these aircraft, but it would get the tanker procurement program started in FY05 and ensures the costs savings to the taxpayer of entering into a newly negotiated multi-year contract for 100 aircraft. The agreement also requires that maintenance of these aircraft be competed, with government workers being given a chance to perform the work. I strongly support this compromise.

The provisions in this bill, when combined with the \$100 million Tanker Replacement Fund established in the FY05 Defense Appropriations bill, ensure that the Secretary of Defense will have the money and the authority to begin a tanker program next year. Although this is later than the Air Force, and this Member, preferred, it is still important progress, because the Air Force desperately needs to begin replacing these aircraft.

All of the KC-135 refueling aircraft that the Air Force flies today were produced between 1957 and 1963. The youngest of these planes are now over 40 years old. They are riddled with corrosion and 29 of them were recently grounded due to problems with their engine struts. At the same time, our aerial refueling capability is an increasingly important part of our military capability. These aircraft are what make this country a superpower, capable of projecting power around the world. Every aircraft that flew into both Iraq and Afghanistan for air strikes had to be refueled multiple times. The danger if we don't begin to replace these planes is that we could have a block failure, which could ground over 900 of our refueling aircraft. That would cripple the military of this country, and ground our Armed Forces at a time when they are deployed around the world. That outcome is simply unacceptable.

I also want to take note of the excellent work the Armed Services Committee has done in this bill by raising the cap on the Military Housing Privatization Initiative. This program is essential to the quality of life of the Armed Forces. By raising the cap on this program, we will ensure that it can continue through fiscal year 2005 and beyond. As we meet here today, this program is building hundreds of new homes for soldiers at Ft. Lewis in Washington. I've visited these new homes. They are very attractive well-built homes, and the soldiers and their spouses are very excited about this program.

I would also like to thank the chairman and ranking member for authorizing a military construction project in my district to relocate the Fox Island Naval Laboratory. The conference report authorizes an \$18 million project to relocate this facility, a move which will substantially improve the security and capability of this facility. The first phase of the project, nearly \$7 million, was approved by the House earlier this year.

I urge every Member to vote for this conference report.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, I think it is appropriate we follow this discussion with the gentleman who chairs the Subcommittee on Projection Forces,

which oversees the projection of aerial forces as well as naval forces around the world. I yield 2 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from Maryland (Mr. BARTLETT).

Mr. BARTLETT of Maryland. Mr. Speaker, many thanks to our great chairman and ranking member for a job well done.

Our subcommittee portion of H.R. 4200 will provide the men and women in the Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force with better tools now and in the future to meet the challenges to win the war on terrorism and ensure continued U.S. Naval superiority.

One reason for that is the dedication of the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. TAYLOR). I am grateful for our strong and cooperative relationship. I am also very pleased by the hard work of all of our colleagues on the Subcommittee on Projection Forces. I want to add a very special thanks to our very good and hardworking staff.

One of the most important provisions in this bill is a shipbuilding initiative to strengthen the ability of America's shipyards to compete in the global marketplace.

The LHA(R) amphibious assault ship program initiative will ensure that the Navy and Marines will benefit from improved capabilities while stabilizing America's industrial base capacity. It would not have been possible without the leadership of the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. TAYLOR) and Secretary Young.

Other shipbuilding initiatives include commencement of the LCS, Littoral Combat Ship, and the DD(X) advanced destroyer programs and a modernization program for the DDG-51 Aegis destroyer.

The bill supports modernization of the B-2 bomber and the development of the JSF, Joint Strike Fighter.

This bill is critical to meet the challenges and demands placed upon our armed services to prevail in the global war on terrorism. It strikes a fine balance between modernization of existing weapons programs and platforms and the development of new systems. This is an extraordinary challenge.

The surest path to peace is to prepare for war. With H.R. 4200, we take important steps to equip our forces for the future. I urge all of my colleagues to support H.R. 4200.

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Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I take pleasure in yielding 3 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. REYES), who is the ranking member on the Subcommittee on Strategic Forces.

(Mr. REYES asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. REYES. Mr. Speaker, I thank the ranking member for yielding me this time, and I congratulate him and my good friend, the chairman, and the great staff on both sides of the aisle for a great job on this bill.

Mr. Speaker, as ranking member of the Subcommittee on Strategic Forces,

I rise in support of this bill. The chairman of our subcommittee, the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. EVERETT), and I agreed on most of the issues that came before our subcommittee, but on those few issues that we did not agree on, the debate was always cordial and respectful. And I want to thank my good friend and colleague, Chairman EVERETT, for his leadership and for his friendship. I thank him so much for working to get this done.

In conference, our subcommittee had jurisdiction over legislation that will greatly improve the lives of tens of thousands of Cold War heroes and their families. In 2000, Congress enacted the Energy Employee Occupational Illness Compensation Program Act, which set up two different programs, one administered by the Department of Labor and one by the Department of Energy. To eliminate many flaws in the DOE program, this conference report transfers the DOE program to the Department of Labor, establishes a clear compensation system, and ensures that workers will receive their medical benefits and compensation for lost wages by making it a mandatory spending program.

These workers may not have worn military uniforms, but they built the weapons that deterred the Soviet Union throughout the Cold War, and they were literally poisoned while doing this. I thank my colleagues on both sides of the aisle and in both Chambers for working to fix these important programs.

I also want to speak to another very important issue to all of us that was handled by the Subcommittee on Military Readiness on which I also serve. Almost half of our military family housing units are rated today in very poor condition. Our conference report tackles this shameful problem by saving the military housing privatization initiative. This program was nearly killed by budget resolutions in both Chambers, which neglected to make budgetary headroom that needed to be lifted so that the statutory cap on spending would provide that growing room.

A number of us have been fighting to rescue this program all year long. I am proud to say we finally prevailed, and tonight the program is saved and military families will have their housing renovated and, in some cases, rebuilt. If we had not eliminated the limit, however, the privatization housing program would have reached the cap within a couple of months and our efforts to eliminate substandard military family housing, which we all very much care about within the United States, within the next 5 years would have been derailed.

Mr. Speaker, this bill contains many, many items. I support most of it. And while I disagree with a few, the fact that we are finally and fairly compensating our sick Cold War workers and the fact we are rescuing the privatized housing program, and thus helping

50,000 military families over the next 2 years alone, makes this bill worth supporting.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all my colleagues to support this bill.

Mr. Speaker, as Ranking Member of the Strategic Forces Subcommittee, I rise in support of this bill. Chairman EVERETT and I agreed on most of the issues that came before our subcommittee, but on those few issues where we did disagree, the debate was cordial and respectful. I thank my friend and colleague, Chairman EVERETT, for his leadership.

In conference, our subcommittee had jurisdiction over legislation that will greatly improve the lives of tens of thousands of Cold War heroes and their families. In 2000, Congress enacted the Energy Employee Occupational Illness Compensation Program Act, which set up two different programs—one administered by the Department of Labor and one by the Department of Energy (DOE). The Labor program focused on DOE employees with three specific diseases: chronic beryllium disease, silicosis, or cancer caused by radiation. The DOE program was for workers who suffered from illnesses other than those three diseases. The DOE was charged with helping these workers recover lost wages through their state workers' compensation system.

By all accounts, the Labor Department has efficiently covered medical costs and provided compensation to those affected workers or their survivors under their charge. Unfortunately, the DOE program was conceptually flawed and wrought with incompetence and mismanagement. To date, 25,000 workers have filed claims with the DOE, but relatively few have had their claims processed—and even fewer have received any compensation.

To eliminate the many flaws in the DOE program, this conference report transfers the DOE program to the Department of Labor, establishes a clear compensation system, and ensures that workers will receive their medical benefits and compensation for lost wages by making it a mandatory spending program. These workers may not have worn military uniforms, but they built the weapons that derailed the Soviet Union throughout the Cold War, and they were literally poisoned while doing so. I thank my colleagues on both sides of the aisle and in both chambers for working to fix these programs.

I want to speak to another important program handled by the Readiness Subcommittee, on which I also serve. Almost half of our military family housing units are rated in poor condition. Our conference report tackles this shameful problem by saving the Military Housing Privatization Initiative (MHPI). This program was nearly killed by budget resolutions in both chambers which neglected to make budgetary headroom needed to lift the statutory cap on spending. A number of us including SOLOMON ORTIZ, JOEL HEFLEY, CHET EDWARDS, and IKE SKELTON, among others, have been fighting to rescue this program all year long. I am proud to say that we finally prevailed. If we had not eliminated the limit, the privatized housing program would have reached the cap within a month or two and our efforts to eliminate substandard military family housing in the United States within the next five years would have been derailed.

Mr. Speaker, this bill contains many items. I support most, and I disagree with a few. But

the fact that we are finally and fairly compensating our sick Cold War workers and the fact that we are rescuing the privatized housing program—helping 50,000 military families over the next two years alone—make this bill deserving of bipartisan support.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume to thank the gentleman from Texas (Mr. REYES) for his outstanding work and for going time and again to the war-fighting theaters in Afghanistan and Iraq, and all our Members who did that throughout the year to get information to help put this bill together.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 1½ minutes to the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. SMITH), who was a very distinguished outside conferee from the Committee on Science.

(Mr. SMITH of Michigan asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman for yielding me this time, and I thank the ranking member, the staff, and the rest of the members for doing a good job on this bill. I am an outside member because my Subcommittee on Research on the Committee on Science overseas the U.S. Fire Administration, and this legislation reauthorizes the Fire Grant program.

By the end of this year, we will have 25,000 fire grants awarded in the United States, and I understand that every congressional district will have had a grant to a fire department in their district or operating for their district.

Volunteers in the United States cover most of the fire protection for areas of the United States. One concern in this fire grant bill reauthorization was that the Senate rejected an offer by the House to encourage volunteers. Let me tell you what happened. In the language in our House bill we had a bipartisan provision that said you cannot discriminate against full-time firefighters volunteering when they go back to their home districts. We were told that the IAFF opposed and that it would be thrown out and the Senate conferees would rather have no fire grant program than have that language in the bill. So sadly for volunteers that language is not in the bill.

But everybody should understand that volunteer firefighters are incredibly selfless, putting their lives at risk for usually no reward greater than the knowledge that they are making their community a safer place. Many career firefighters actually get their start as volunteers, only joining the paid department after they have attained a basic level of training and experience. The fire grant program is an excellent program. Volunteers in the United States add enormously to our first-line home protection and volunteerism should be encouraged.

Passage of this legislation will extend the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program through 2009. The fire grant program was started 5 years ago in this bill. It has dramatically improved public safety in this country.

Through fiscal year 2003, nearly 17,000 fire departments have received assistance to purchase vital equipment, vehicles, and training, and it is estimated that an additional 8,000 will receive grants this year.

The fire grant program is extremely effective for our homeland defense. Grants are distributed based on the recommendations of panels of nonbiased firefighters, who rank grant applications based on merit. The funding goes straight to the departments that need it most without being held up by political considerations, complex formulas or bureaucratic red tape.

Unfortunately, the reauthorization will do nothing to protect career firefighters from being discriminated against for volunteering during off-duty hours. Many career firefighters who volunteer in their home communities when they aren't at work are actually harassed for doing so. In some career fire departments, volunteering can even be grounds for termination. The House bill to reauthorize the fire grant program, H.R. 4107, included important language prohibiting a fire department that receives grant funds from discriminating against, or prohibiting its members from engaging in volunteer activities during off-duty hours.

A provision was unanimously supported by the bipartisan leaders of the House Congressional Fire Services Caucus. Unfortunately, we ran into a brick wall when we got to conference. The Senate conferees were prepared to forgo reauthorizing the fire grant program altogether if the volunteer nondiscrimination language was included. Their position didn't even budge when we offered to compromise by simply calling for a study on the issue.

Volunteer fire departments are vital in protecting small communities, especially in rural areas like my hometown of Addison, Michigan. Volunteer firefighters are incredibly selfless, putting their lives at risk for no reward greater than the knowledge that they are making their community a safer place to live. Many career firefighters actually get their start as volunteers, only joining a paid department after they have attained a basic level of training and experience.

It is unfair that any volunteer would be told that he or she must choose between a job and volunteering to protecting their friends and neighbors. They should be able to provide their invaluable skills, knowledge and expertise to their hometown departments without harassment and retribution from employers. Eliminating volunteer firefighters would compromise safety in thousands of communities across the country like my own that simply do not have the resources to maintain anything but a volunteer or combination fire department.

And yet a provision that would have protected these noble public servants was unacceptable to our counterparts on the other side of the Capitol. What compelling argument was it that convinced them to risk reauthorizing the fire grant program? How did they become so intractable as to be willing to turn their backs on a program that they have a strong history of supporting, even over a study?

The International Association of Fire Fighters, IAFF, established the position that the Senate conferees ended up adopting. The IAFF opposed passage of H.R. 4107 because of the volunteer nondiscrimination provision. This isn't surprising seeing as their own constitution prohibits members from volunteering.

I think they figure that if you get rid of all the volunteers, municipalities will be forced to hire new full time union members. Maybe this makes sense to union lobbyists in Washington, but it doesn't seem fair to the thousands of career firefighters that choose to volunteer out of a sense of civic duty, and it reflects poorly on the Senate conferees who sided with the IAFF over rank and file firefighters and the interests of public safety.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). Once again the Chair would admonish Members that it is not in order to cast reflections on the Senate or its Members individually or collectively.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes and 20 seconds to the distinguished gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLER), a great member of the committee who is considered to be the godfather of the survivor benefit program that we have manifested in this bill.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time. I have never been godfather of anything, so I thank him very much; and, Mr. Speaker, I do rise to express my overwhelming support of this conference report.

With the passage of this conference report tonight, the "widows' tax" will die. It will die a year and a half more quickly than any other SBP bill that has ever been proposed because this amendment was vigorously supported by our chairman, the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER), chairman of the Subcommittee on Total Force, the gentleman from New York (Mr. MCHUGH), and defended amidst the Senate provisions with the House conferees.

This is an authorization measure of which this body can be proud. In less than 4 years from now, we will have fully restored SBP to what was promised from the beginning to America's surviving spouses. Since coming to this body, I have been working this issue, and so have many others. It has been nothing if not a team effort, and the time is right for this reform.

There are hundreds, if not thousands, of people who deserve to be recognized and thanked for their efforts. Nearly 80 percent of this body has cosponsored one of my two SBP bills in this Congress. The House Armed Services staff has worked at times literally around the clock to see this effort through. My colleagues on the Committee on Armed Services and on the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and a host of others have all participated in Special Order hours, press conferences, letters of support, and in town hall meetings in districts across our country.

And, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank our Republican leadership for hearing our call on the urgency and the need for this reform. And I thank our President for meeting twice with VSOs on this issue, once in the oval office and once aboard Air Force 1.

To my constituents, whose letters, calls, faxes, e-mails, and personal comments over the last 3 years have kept us motivated to realize this goal, I am proud to represent northwest Florida here in the Nation's capital, and I am thankful in the aftermath of Hurricane Ivan's devastation throughout the State of Florida, I am able to bring this victory home to the Emerald Coast.

But it is not just the 3,200 survivors in my district who are one step away from seeing an increase in their monthly checks next year, Mr. Speaker. A quarter of a million military widows nationwide are part of this victory. This has been a grass-roots campaign in the truest sense, and I thank every American who has been a part of that.

Mr. Speaker, this Republican-controlled Congress has exceeded even my expectations. This is the kind of wrong we came to Washington to right, and I am proud to stand here with my chairman in full support of this measure and urge all my colleagues to vote in favor of this resolution.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I continue to reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the very distinguished gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GINGREY), who has done great work on the Committee on Armed Services.

Mr. GINGREY. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of the fiscal year 2005 Defense authorization conference report, and I would like to thank and commend the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER), our chairman, and the ranking member, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON), and the staff of the Committee on Armed Services for their tireless efforts in support of our soldiers, our sailors, airmen and Marines who are bravely defending us at home and abroad.

Mr. Speaker, this is the year of the soldier, and this "soldiers' bill," as the chairman describes it, does a remarkable job of covering a wide scope of issues that are vitally important to our armed services. From improving the Survivor Benefit Program to a 3.5 percent across-the-board pay raise, this conference report addresses the most pressing needs of our troops in a very trying time for America.

For our Reservists who have been activated, this bill will provide TRICARE standard coverage for them and their families while they are working to get their feet back on the ground when they return home. For every 90 days consecutive active duty service, the Reservists and their families are eligible for 1 year of TRICARE coverage while on nonactive duty status.

For our deployed soldiers, this conference report contains \$728 million for new up-armored Humvees, \$100 million for vehicle armor kits, and countless other provisions to protect our troops on the ground.

I am also grateful for the work the House Committee on Armed Services

has done to fund the F/A-22 program this year. The funding for 24 planes will go a long way towards providing stability for the program and ensuring that America maintains air dominance for the foreseeable future.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the chairman and the ranking member of the committee for their hard work on this bill.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, how much time do I have remaining?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from California has 2 minutes and 40 seconds remaining; the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON) has 7½ minutes remaining.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. BARRETT).

Mr. BARRETT of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to thank our chairman, the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER), and the chairman of the Subcommittee on Strategic Forces, the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. EVERETT), for their strong leadership and hard work to ensure our national defense continues to be second to none in the world.

I would like to particularly thank and acknowledge their invaluable assistance, as well as that of the conferees and their staffs, including Bill Ostendorf and Hugh Brady, for their efforts and long hours to finalize the important details in section 3116 of the conference report to H.R. 4200.

This section allows the Department of Energy to fully process harmful nuclear waste currently being stored in aging tanks at DOE sites in Idaho and South Carolina in a timely and cost-effective manner that protects the environment.

I have no doubt that section 3116 provides the necessary and proper protections for my constituents in South Carolina because it requires the DOE to follow objective performance criteria and to continue to work with State authorities to ensure cleanup standards are strictly followed.

Again, I wish to thank the distinguished chairman for working with members of the South Carolina delegation, including Senator LINDSEY GRAHAM, the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. DEMINT), the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. CLYBURN), and particularly my colleagues on the Committee on Armed Services, the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. WILSON) and the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. SPRATT), to provide a safe and cost-effective means to protect our environment and communities from dangerous nuclear wastes. I urge my colleagues to support the conference report to H.R. 4200.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I continue to reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield the balance of my time to the gentleman from California (Mr.

CUNNINGHAM), my seat mate from San Diego, the great Top Gun.

Mr. CUNNINGHAM. Mr. Speaker, who are the men that support our military? It is the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON), it is the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER), it is the men and women on this committee.

And who are they? Mr. HUNTER's dad, R. O. Hunter, was a Marine. DUNCAN fought in combat. His son just got back last weekend to greet a wife and his children.

□ 2000

I saw mothers march in a protest at the Republican convention that had lost their sons. I was not angry. I felt remorse and hurt for those people that we lost.

I rode on an airplane with a young man named Eddie Wright. He is a Marine that lost both his arms. Eddie Wright, when I fastened his seat belt, he would not let me help him eat. He said, Duke, one thing a Marine learns how to do is eat, and he was trying to do that with his prosthetic arm. He felt guilty about not being able to go back to his troops.

Supporting defense is more than just this bill. It is people like IKE SKELTON, SILVESTRE REYES, DUNCAN HUNTER, the men and women in both bodies that care. This is a good bill. It is more than a bill. It means life, and it means death. Thank you to both of you.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

The remarks of my friend from California (Mr. CUNNINGHAM), who is a distinguished war hero in his own right, cause me to wish to say a word or two about those who wear the uniform and about those who wore the uniform.

Mr. Speaker, every Sunday morning, I have the pleasure of being with a group of men from my hometown of Lexington, Missouri, most of whom are veterans of wars of yesteryear, heroes in their own right, Marines of Vietnam, Army, Navy, my friend Vic Cosner who saw the very worst of battles in Europe during the Second World War.

We owe it in this Congress under the Constitution that charges our committee and charges this body with raising and maintaining the military to produce and care for and train young men and young women who can take the place of those who so nobly served our country in the past. That is what we are doing today.

A special thanks to our chairman, DUNCAN HUNTER, who worked tirelessly with us well into the evening to produce this bill and got it to the floor. A special thanks to every member of the Committee on Armed Services, Democrat and Republican, and the unsung heroes of all of this is the tireless effort of the staff of the Committee on Armed Services. We could not do it without them. We thank them so very much.

Mr. Speaker, I had a rare privilege 3 weeks ago of being able to address the

new sailors who had just graduated, were graduating, from the Great Lakes Naval Training Station, Great Lakes, Illinois. MARK KIRK, our fellow Member of Congress, invited me for such an event. I spoke to them, and I thanked them, and I also read a letter to the graduates that my father had written his mother in 1918 from that very same Great Lakes before he proceeded on to serve aboard the USS *Missouri* of the day. I want everybody to know that those young sailors, men and women, stood so tall, and you could see the pride in their faces, but even more proud were the parents and the families, thousands of them, to see the some 900 brand new American sailors become part of the fleet.

So what we do in our own way here is to legally provide and maintain, but more than that, I think this effort and what we have done for those in uniform and the families, major steps to help them along the way. Cicero, the great Greek orator, said that gratitude was the greatest of all virtues. I hope that the efforts that we do today will show a bit of gratitude from this body to all of those young men and women who wear the uniform of the United States of America.

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today disappointed but not surprised by the Bush Administration's escalating lack of interest in housing, and the rising affordable housing crisis impacting millions of families nationwide.

As we all know, housing is not only a basic human right but it serves as an economic engine for the market, and the foundation for intergenerational wealth building in many of our families.

Mr. Speaker, this Administration has put inconsequential energy into homeownership for the few; while people on the cusp of becoming homeowners, lifetime renters, and many in public housing are deliberately left behind.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development's budget has severe proposed cuts for 2005; and it's sad when housing advocates hope Congress passes a Continuing Resolution to keep funding level, instead of hoping for a better, bigger budget.

The Administration cut public housing funding dramatically. By HUD's own admission, the President's proposed budget cuts at least \$1.63 billion from baseline programs.

For example, the Community Development Block Grant program's funding has fallen by some 9 percent in real terms since the Bush Administration took office.

The Bush FY'05 budget for HUD zeroed out several programs, including: the Brownfields program, the Rural Housing and Economic Development program, and the Empowerment Zones programs.

The Bush budget also rescinds \$675 million in funding for Section 236 projects; a program that supports elder housing services; and cuts in public housing lead paint eradication grants by \$35 million.

And what is most concerning is the Bush Administration's efforts to cut and block grant the Section 8 program.

The Bush Budget for 2005 would cut \$1.633 billion from the level needed just to renew all expiring Section 8 vouchers. This is the equivalent of funding for 231,260 voucher holders, families, veterans, and our elderly.

Block granting and cutting funding for Section 8 has a series of ripple effects.

The Bush proposal forces housing authorities to reduce the level of subsidy provided to voucher holders, by eliminating the requirement that the subsidy be based on a family paying no more than 30 percent of their net income for a fair market rental unit in their community.

The Bush proposal eliminates the "targeting" of scarce voucher resources to those in need—by dropping the requirement that 75 percent of new vouchers go to "extremely low income families", including those below 30 percent of local area median income.

The immediate consequence of the "Section 8 Dismantlement" proposal is the disruption of families' lives.

The Bush budget cuts and block granting will lead housing agencies to reduce desperately needed assistance, increase family rent burdens, stop helping families on waiting lists, and revoking previously-awarded vouchers to families who are still searching for a home.

A serious, longer-term consequence of the Section 8 block granting is the erosion of hard-won landlord and lender confidence in the program. This results in more and more landlords renting at fair market values that are guaranteed instead of extending a helping hand to those who are most in need.

Our failure to respond to local housing circumstances and costs has already led to some local agencies' inability to continue voucher assistance for currently-assisted families. Loss of assistance for these families can easily translate into homelessness, a condition that the Bush Administration and countless cities across the country have vowed to eradicate.

The continued dismantling of basic and necessary programs which provide affordable housing for average people must be stopped.

We must stop allowing the Administration to get away with making housing only a privilege for the few, because we all recognize it should be a basic and fundamental right for all.

Mr. Speaker, let's pass a real housing budget that reflects our commitment to providing affordable, quality housing for all and reverse the trend of the BAD Bush Budgets of the past.

Mr. BUTTERFIELD. Mr. Speaker, while I support the many strides forward the Department of Defense Authorization will represent, I must rise to note my great concern about a provision regarding the Outlying Landing Field OLF proposed for Washington and Beaufort counties in North Carolina.

I share the concerns of the community that the proposed OLF would displace 74 property owners, take 30,000 acres off the local property tax rolls, and could have a negative impact on the quality of life in the area. I also share the concern that the project could reduce the potential for tourism and economic development.

The funding was removed by the House, but the Conference Committee elected to retain the funding language. Washington and Beaufort Counties, along with environmental groups, are in litigation to avoid the OLF development. They were successful and the federal courts have ordered the Navy to cease all OLF development activity, pending the outcome of legal challenges to the Washington County site. More recently, the federal district

court rejected a plea by the Navy to reverse or narrow the scope of the injunction.

The Washington County OLF site is strongly opposed by many elected officials, citizens groups and by major North Carolina agricultural, property rights and conservation organizations. I stand with them in opposing this site.

While I oppose the inclusion of this funding, I cannot vote against fulfilling the needs of our brave fighting men and women. Under the bill we finally eliminate the social security offsets to the Survivor Benefit Plan payments for the spouses of military retirees; increase the number of troops for the Army and Marines; improve housing for our military men and women; and, create a reimbursement program for soldiers who were forced to buy their own body armor. These are just a few examples of the many accomplishments attributed to the bill.

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support the reforms to the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program, EEOICPA, included in H.R. 4200, the FY05 Defense Authorization Act.

When EEOICPA was enacted in 2000, hopes were high. My constituents who became ill as a result of their work with radioactive materials felt that help was finally on the way. Four years later, the snail's pace of claims processing at the Department of Energy has only further hurt these workers.

Today, however, Congress will enact crucial EEOICPA reforms. All valid claims will be paid by the Department of Labor, thereby eliminating the need for claimants to go to state workers compensation systems. This also eliminates the need for a willing payer, which until now has been a significant roadblock for rewarding meritorious claims. Most importantly, funding the medical and workers' compensation benefits in this program will be mandatory. This ensures that the fate of our nuclear workers will not be subject to the whims of the annual budget.

These veterans of the Cold War have waited long enough to be compensated for the illnesses they incurred while serving their nation. I applaud these reforms, and I will continue to monitor the program closely to ensure that it works as intended.

Another significant change to the EEOICPA in this bill is that former uranium workers who were compensated under the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act will now be eligible for payments under EEOICPA, and will now receive assured payments rather than relying on discretionary appropriations. This is a promising step in the right direction for uranium workers, and I look forward to continuing work on the RECA program to address the needs of other qualifying groups, such as the downwinders.

I would like to thank the numerous people who worked incessantly on these reforms. It is my hope that these reforms help get this program back on track.

Mr. MEEHAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2005. As the Ranking Member of the Terrorism and Unconventional Threats Subcommittee, I believe that the product before us today is, on the whole, a solid bill.

The House Armed Services Committee pledged to make this year the "Year of the

Soldier." Our soldiers are performing heroically despite the worsening conditions in Iraq. This Administration failed to get them the equipment they needed, the international support to relieve the burden on them, and the clear plan to win the peace.

After a year in which our military has been strained and overstretched like never before, I'm pleased that this legislation takes important strides toward honoring our heroes and strengthening our forces.

I'm pleased that this legislation authorizes critical force protection resources, including an additional \$572 million in funding for Up-Armored Humvees and \$250 million for add-on armor kits. It also includes a provision that would allow the Secretary of Defense to cut through red tape and rapidly field in-demand equipment when our troops need it.

Additionally, I'm pleased that my colleagues recognized the need to address the gaping holes in oversight of civilian contractors. The prisoner abuses at Abu Ghraib prison were an ugly example of what can happen without proper oversight.

This conference report includes the Contractor Accountability Act, which I introduced in May to ensure that non-Defense Department contractors are covered by the Military Extraterritorial Jurisdiction Act.

Finally, the bill makes many important quality of life improvements for our troops and veterans.

It phases out the Survivor Benefit Penalty over a four-year period and includes a 3.5 percent across the board pay raise for military personnel.

It also authorizes a much-needed increase in active-duty endstrength of 30,000 soldiers and 9,000 Marines. This administration has over-stretched our military to the breaking point. We need to increase the size of our volunteer military.

With respect to the Terrorism Subcommittee's mark, several provisions in this portion of the bill deserve praise.

First, I'm pleased we included a number of recommendations to streamline and accelerate the development and acquisition of technologies to combat terrorism.

Additional resources are provided in a number of areas: including chemical and biological research and detection.

The conference report also includes a provision I offered with Mr. TURNER of Texas to improve the manner in which we develop and acquire medical countermeasures against biological warfare agents.

I do not support every provision in the authorization bill.

I remain concerned about cuts to DARPA and several information technology programs.

I'm also very disappointed that the Hate Crimes Language was dropped. The Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act will strengthen the ability of Federal, State and local governments to investigate and prosecute these vicious crimes. It is supported by more than 175 law enforcement, civil rights, civic and religious organizations as well as many bipartisan members of this Congress.

The bill also is silent on providing TRICARE benefits to non-active duty Reservists. I strongly supported the Senate provision that would have ensured that all Reserve Component members receive access to health care: Unfortunately, this language was also dropped.

We will be back fighting for these priorities. But for now, I urge my colleagues to join in me passing this bill.

Mr. HYDE. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this conference report. I believe that this important legislation provides the necessary resources and policy guidance to protect America's national security. I congratulate the gentleman from California, the Chairman of the Armed Services Committee, Mr. HUNTER, for his usual outstanding work in putting this important legislation together.

I want to address one provision in particular, section 1225, regarding commercial exports of defense articles and services to the United Kingdom and Australia.

For the first time, we will give our two closest allies in the war on terror preferential treatment in the U.S. licensing process. By requiring regulations to accelerate export licenses for these countries—rather than eliminating licenses as some had proposed—this provision establishes exactly the right balance: we will wisely maintain control and supervision over weapons shipped through commercial channels while the war on terrorism continues. But we require the State Department to do it rapidly, and ensure that longstanding allies who fight alongside our armed forces are always at the head of the line.

I would note that section 1225 allows other Federal departments or agencies to seek referral of licenses when the defense article or service being exported involves classified information or when exceptional circumstances apply. As a conferee on this section, I expect that referrals to other departments or agencies would be granted under the "exceptional circumstances" clause, among other reasons, when the proposed export involves items related to the war on terror or affects U.S. non-proliferation policy. Additionally, it should be absolutely clear that the "exceptional circumstances" clause does not prejudice referrals to those departments or agencies seeking referrals on law enforcement grounds.

Mr. ORTIZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2005. We are all proud of the tremendous sacrifice our military members make for the defense of our country. Our 1.4 million active duty service members, and an additional 875,000 citizen soldiers—National Guardsmen and reservists—are serving the nation under the most arduous of conditions in Iraq and Afghanistan. We owe these Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines a tremendous debt of gratitude for the service they provide in our defense. Their sacrifice is an honor to our nation; it is our responsibility to provide for their readiness.

I would also like to take time to recognize the thousands of government service civilians and private individuals who support the readiness of our service members and our military. Their sacrifice is sometimes overlooked but their jobs are vital to the continued success of our armored forces in this time of war. We could not fight and win without them and I thank them for their dedicated service to our national defense.

This act provides for the immediate needs of our Armed Forces and we have proactively considered their future needs as well. In this global war, we must not lose sight of the challenges we face in maintaining our readiness in the future. Our military has been engaged in combat for nearly three years. The equipment

and weapons systems our service members fight with has taken a tremendous beating in the harsh conditions of Iraq and Afghanistan. As this conflict drags on we must remain steadfast in our resolution to fully man and equip our maintenance and support activities to deal with battle damaged and worn out vehicles and weapons systems while at the same time we begin to transform our forces to new weapons and mobility systems.

I am very pleased that we were able to eliminate the cap on the privatized housing program. I was a co-author of the original provisions to establish the privatized housing program in the 1996 Defense Authorization bill. This is a "win-win" program that builds quality family housing for our troops and their families much more quickly than we could through the regular family housing construction process. The Budget Committees put this program in grave jeopardy by refusing to include any way to eliminate the cap in the budget resolution, but I am proud that our committee, on a bipartisan basis, was able to save the program. If we had not found a way to eliminate the cap, new housing for almost 50,000 families over the next two years would have been delayed indefinitely.

Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed that the House did not stick to its position, validated by a bipartisan majority on the House floor, to delay BRAC for two years. The Army is in the midst of restructuring itself. We are bringing two divisions home from Europe. We are revising our warplans to support new strategies and are still reviewing the division of labor between our active duty forces and our reserve components. Last but not least, we are still at war in Iraq.

With this many unknowns, I think it is irresponsible to push forward with BRAC. The House position to delay it for two years was the more prudent and responsible approach, and I am sorely disappointed that this provision was dropped in conference.

Mr. Speaker, we have done our best to provide for the Readiness of our Armed Forces who so selflessly serve in the defense of our Nation. I commend our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines and civilians and thank them for their service.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this act and I yield the balance of my time.

Mr. ORTIZ. Mr. Speaker, I am so disappointed in the result of the conference report, whereby they caved into the Senate language on BRAC, when the House made a significant statement to delay BRAC for 2 years.

We passed that matter by nearly 100 votes in the full House. Yet the conference ignored that. I am deeply disappointed. Since we conceived BRAC in 1989, the United States has sent troops abroad 24 times . . . to nearly every continent on the planet.

Our interests in democracy, in protecting other democracies and allies, in our own self-defense, as in Afghanistan . . . or building democracies as in Iraq . . . are global. That means our military forces stand on the wall far and wide in a dangerous world . . . and our interests are everywhere danger can gather.

We are at war . . . and there is a lot of uncertainty over the resources we need. Congress cannot fly blind, we need to fully evaluate our global posture situation . . . and we must hear the analysis on that before we allow BRAC to proceed. The war in Iraq—and the

war in Afghanistan—are not the only unknowns we face. As Chairman HUNTER advocated and I supported—this bill increases our troop levels by 39,000.

We are also considering major movement of troops from South Korea and Europe back to the U.S. . . . So, where will we put them? You do not close major components of your military infrastructure while you are still unsure if you need it . . . and world events yet to happen over the next few years will dictate that need. The most-often heard arguments in favor of BRAC are that there is excess space we do not need, and it will save us money. I respectfully disagree with both prospects.

As for excess space . . . that could be a possibility in peacetime . . . maybe . . . but not now . . . not when the nation is at war. It's not entirely accurate to say we have excess space—does anybody know the current workload for our maintenance and repair? There is no excess space at the depot in my district. That will likely not change if the operations tempo continues at the present pace.

While I know we hear about cost savings associated with BRAC, I profoundly disagree with DoD estimates . . . mostly because they are not all-inclusive. For instance, in a recent GAO Report, the opening letter notes that DoD calculates net savings based on eliminating/reducing personnel and base ops . . . and the cancellation of mil con projects. That's it. Really? So the math doesn't include the astronomical cost to clean up the surrounding environment? The cost of clean up continually streaks upward.

I suppose if you leave out all the costs, it would appear to save money. But Congress should insist the Pentagon include all those costs if we are serious about understanding any savings in this. A GAO report presented to my Readiness Subcommittee says: "BRAC rounds have generated substantial net savings . . . for the Department. We have . . . viewed these savings estimates as imprecise for a variety of reasons, such as weaknesses in DOD's financial management systems that limit its ability to fully account for the costs of its operations; the fact that DOD's accounting systems . . . are oriented to tracking expenses and disbursements, not savings; the exclusion of BRAC-related costs incurred by other agencies; and inadequate periodic updating of the savings estimates that are developed."

As a member of this Congress, I'm more interested in the savings TO THE TAXPAYER than to the Department. So while the math provided by the Pentagon certainly shows on paper what they think will be savings, that math is only as solid as ALL the information on which they base decisions.

Another consideration in this discussion is the fact that the Department of Homeland Security has not nearly grown up into what it needs to be. It is a brand new, major reorganization of all the national assets that protect our families and the country. DHS may need to use some elements of the current military infrastructure as they determine future needs. It will be much harder to reacquire a property for the government if we dispose of it through BRAC.

At the end of the day, we'll be OK in this war—but we need ask the question: are we going to need additional training facilities? Training has been a concern in Iraq . . . we may need facilities a BRAC could close to use

for training. When Congress designed a BRAC for 2005, we were at peace. Now we are at war, and near a BRAC that could very well dispose of military assets we will need again—either for a growing military or for DHS.

We didn't have to be tied to this schedule . . . we should not be sheep. This is the most bipartisan of matters. After many years in politics, I've discovered when friends on both sides disagree with you . . . you've hit the middle.

On another matter, I am pleased that the conference did restore funding for Military housing. The idea for public-private military housing was born in Kingsville Texas—after BRAC 95. The community wanted quality low-cost housing for area Naval bases. The idea was this: private developers would build quality homes for sailors and their families—and sailors would pay rent through their housing vouchers.

The program was so wildly successful; in 1996 Sec. Perry implemented it service-wide. The need is still enormous—service members and their families are still often in condemned or insufficient housing. It is a shame we had to beg and beg to get the conference to include this provision to keep our brave soldiers—and the families they leave to fight in wars beyond our shores—in housing that is not condemned.

I reluctantly signed the conference report, because it's too important not to. But I remain deeply offended that the House position on the matter of delaying BRAC was ignored by the conference.

Mr. LARSON of Connecticut. Mr. Speaker, as the Ranking minority member of the Committee on House Administration, I rise today in support of the two provisions in the DoD Authorization Conference Report for FY05 that are under the jurisdiction of my committee. The first provision addresses an innovative electronic voting project and the other highlights the need to support absentee voting.

Earlier this year, the Department of Defense cancelled the Secure Electronic Registration and Voting Experiment SERVE project. SERVE is a \$22 million pilot program that was designed to test the reliability of Internet voting for 100,000 military personnel and civilians living overseas. Some academics have questioned the security of the system. I agree that any problems should be addressed before we move forward with Internet voting, but this is a very worthy project. If the military can send coded information to installations and battlefields around the world, we should be able to send votes across a secure, private system.

Fortunately, the Election Assistance Commission EAC is now charged with moving the SERVE project forward. Formed by the Help America Vote Act to serve as the clearinghouse for matters relating to elections and the voting process, the EAC is certainly the body best suited for this task. Specifically, it is responsible for establishing guidelines and helping the Secretary of Defense in carrying out the project.

Historically, it is our military that has led the way for our country. Not only in times of trouble, but it has also led the way in technological advances. The military has the opportunity to lead the way again in technology, but this time, in the voting booth. It deserves the opportunity to participate in this landmark electronic voting program.

I encourage the Secretary of Defense to provide the EAC with the additional funding

needed to carry out this directive. I also encourage the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) to continue working with the EAC on electronic absentee voting by absent uniformed service and overseas voters casting ballots abroad and others areas where they may have expertise.

The second provision will expand the use of the federal write-in absentee ballot to absent uniformed service voters that have not received voting materials from their state within the deadline prescribed by their state. This will give the absent uniformed service voter the opportunity to participate in the democratic process that they are defending.

Mr. Speaker, I support the inclusion of these provisions in the Conference Report.

Mr. ISRAEL. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 4200, the FY 2005 Department of Defense Authorization Conference Report. I commend our Chairman and Ranking Member and all of the conferees for their leadership and hard work.

This is an important bill for troubling times. As I have said often, thank God we live in a nation, which gives us the right to agree with a decision to go to war, the right to disagree with that decision, even the right to remain silent. But no one has any right at all to forget the courageous men and women who answered the call when summoned, who sacrificed by serving.

What is our obligation to them, Mr. Speaker? It is to make them a priority in our hearts as well as our budgets.

We also have an obligation to give them all the tools and resources they need. Not just hardware, but software. Not just situational awareness that tells them where an enemy is and what the enemy's firepower is, but the cultural awareness that tells our troops who the enemy is and what its will power is.

That is why I am especially proud that the conference report included two amendments that I offered.

While the brilliant speed with which our forces toppled the Taliban and the regime of Saddam Hussein demonstrates the unrivaled technological and professional superiority of our military, the current situation on the ground would seem to suggest that we haven't given enough attention to the "full spectrum" of operations that they will face.

My amendment will look at how U.S. military's education and training program is preparing soldiers to meet the challenges of an era when our enemy is just as likely to be a tribal warlord as a trained infantryman and how we deal with the battlefield after the battle.

A second amendment, Mr. Speaker, formally recognizes the courageous actions of Army Specialist Joseph Darby, who was brave enough to notify his superiors about the abuses at Abu Grayb when no one else was. He is a true American hero.

These are truly dangerous times. We are involved in a struggle that we cannot lose. On behalf of our men and women in uniform and all they are doing to keep America safe, I strongly support passage of this conference report.

Mr. CASTLE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 4200, the "National Defense Authorization Act of 2005." I am pleased that Congress was able to complete work on this important bill prior to recess. As an outside Conferee to H.R. 4200, I am particularly sup-

portive of the education provisions in the bill before us today.

There are a number of provisions in H.R. 4200 that will help local schools better serve students in military families. For example, we ensure that school districts can continue to count federally-connected students who reside on the military base as on-base students for the purposes of calculating Impact Aid payments in cases when federally-connected students temporarily move off-base to live with a relative or family friend and when both of their military parents are deployed for active duty. The provision will also ensure that school districts continue to count federally-connected students who reside on-base as on-base students for the purpose of calculating Impact Aid payments for six months after the death of a military parent.

In addition, we have increased the amount of aid local schools will receive that are impacted by the presence of military installations, as well to increase funding to help school districts provide special education services to certain dependent children with severe disabilities.

Finally, with respect to the education provisions, we were able to establish the National Security Education Program to provide resources for scholarships, fellowships, and institutional grants in higher education. The program's mission is to lead in the development of the national capacity to educate U.S. citizens, understand foreign cultures, strengthen U.S. economic competitiveness, and enhance international cooperation and security. In our ever growing world economy, I believe these provisions are imperative to ensure that U.S. citizens have a solid understanding of other nations.

Mr. Speaker, Congress recognizes the sacrifices and contributions our courageous soldiers have made in the war against terrorism. Hopefully, the "National Defense Authorization Act of 2005" will go far in supporting our military efforts and protecting the freedoms that we all enjoy.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). Without objection, the previous question is ordered on the conference report.

There was no objection.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the conference report.

The question was taken; and the Speaker pro tempore announced that the ayes appeared to have it.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks on the conference report on H.R. 4200.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

DIRECTING THE CLERK TO MAKE TECHNICAL CORRECTIONS IN ENROLLMENT OF H.R. 4200, RONALD W. REAGAN NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2005

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Speaker, I offer a concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 514) directing the Clerk of the House of Representatives to make a technical correction in the enrollment of the bill H.R. 4200, and ask unanimous consent for its immediate consideration in the House.

The Clerk read the title of the concurrent resolution.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

The Clerk read the concurrent resolution, as follows:

H. CON. RES. 514

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring). That in the enrollment of the bill (H.R. 4200) to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2005 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe personnel strengths for such fiscal year for the Armed Forces, and for other purposes, the Clerk of the House of Representatives shall make the following correction: in section 714(b), strike "Section 1974g(a)(2)(E)(i)" and insert "Section 1074g(a)(2)(E)(i)".

The concurrent resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

WAIVING REQUIREMENT OF CLAUSE 6(a) OF RULE XIII WITH RESPECT TO CONSIDERATION OF CERTAIN RESOLUTIONS

Mrs. MYRICK. Mr. Speaker, by direction of the Committee on Rules, I call up House Resolution 832 and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the resolution, as follows:

H. RES. 832

Resolved. That the requirement of clause 6(a) of rule XIII for a two-thirds vote to consider a report from the Committee on Rules on the same day it is presented to the House is waived with respect to any resolution reported on the legislative day of October 8, 2004, providing for consideration of disposition of a conference report to accompany the bill (H.R. 4837) making appropriations for military construction, family housing, and base realignment and closure for the Department of Defense for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2005, and for other purposes.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from North Carolina (Mrs. MYRICK) is recognized for 1 hour.

Mrs. MYRICK. Mr. Speaker, for the purpose of debate only, I yield the customary 30 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. FROST), pending which I yield myself such time as I may consume. During consideration of this resolution, all time yielded is for the purpose of debate only.

Mr. Speaker, last night the Committee on Rules met and passed this