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Salazar
Scott (VA)
Tancredo

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (during the vote). Members are advised there are 2 minutes remaining in this vote.

□ 1333

So the resolution was agreed to.

The result of the vote was announced as above recorded.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

RESIGNATION AS MEMBER OF PERMANENT SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following resignation as a member of the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence:

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, DC, December 12, 2007.

Hon. NANCY PELOSI,
Speaker, House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR MADAM SPEAKER: I hereby tender my resignation from the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence effective at the close of business today.

Sincerely,

ALCEE L. HASTINGS,
Member of Congress.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the resignation is accepted.

There was no objection.

CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 1585, NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2008

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, pursuant to House Resolution 860, I call up the conference report on the bill (H.R. 1585) to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2008 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes, and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to rule XXII, the conference report is considered read.

(For conference report and statement, see proceedings of the House of December 6, 2007, Book II at page H14495.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON) and the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Missouri.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks on this conference report.

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

There was no objection.

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

I rise today in strong support of the conference report on H.R. 1585, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008.

I must tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I'm so extremely proud of the members of the Armed Services Committee, of all of those who worked hard in and out of the Armed Services Committee to make this happen. And a special thanks to the fantastic staff that we have supporting us, Erin Conaton, Bob Simmons, who is the leader of those on the other side of the aisle regarding the staff, and everyone just pitched in so very, very well.

Mr. Speaker, this is a good bill. As a matter of fact, I think it's the best bill in decades that this Congress has put forward. It's good for our troops, good for our families, it will help improve readiness of our Armed Forces, and it will bring new significant oversight to the Department of Defense in areas where oversight was sorely needed in the past.

Let me begin by saying that the Armed Services Committee has remained committed to a tradition of bipartisanship, and we appreciate that, and we have all throughout the year.

Special thanks to our ranking member, the gentleman from California (Mr. HUNTER) and today to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON) who's been such a great help through the years.

When the 110th Congress began, we laid out, from the Armed Services Committee, six strategic priorities, and we have met them in this legislation. The bill before us is the culmination of our efforts. It addresses strategic priorities in important ways. It includes a 3.5 percent across-the-board

pay raise, it protects the troops and their families from escalating health care fees, and includes well over 100 other measures, both large and small, regarding quality of life. It is especially important because it adopts the elements of the Wounded Warrior Act which passed this House earlier in the year 426–0. And I think that that, in and of itself, is a major victory for those in uniform.

It addresses readiness. It establishes a new, high level board of military officers, the Defense Materiel Readiness Board, to grapple with the growing shortfalls confronting the Armed Forces. The bill allocates $1 billion to a Strategic Readiness Fund.

The bill will bring much needed oversight to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It does so by instituting new reporting requirements developed on a bipartisan basis.

The bill builds on the successful passage of H.R. 1, which fully implemented the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission. H.R. 1585 authorizes the funding required to carry forward that act by continuing, and this is important, and expanding the Department of Defense's cooperative threat reduction program and the Department of Energy's nuclear nonproliferation programs. Mr. Speaker, these programs address perhaps the single largest threat to the American homeland, the threat of nuclear terrorism and other weapons of mass destruction, and we address that very carefully in this bill.

We also include $17.6 billion for the mine resistant ambush vehicle, which is known as MRAP, to protect our troops in Iraq and in future conflicts. It does a great deal in the area of funding for our various ships, including production of two *Virginia*-class submarines per year by 2010, and adds eight C–17s to meet the needs of the demands of global power projection.

One of the most important elements of this bill, in addition to the money and the hardware, is a requirement that the Department of Defense perform a quadrennial review of its roles and missions. The first time this was addressed, and the last time it was addressed thoroughly, was back in 1948 at the behest of President Harry Truman and his then Secretary of Defense, James Forestal. The review we require in this bill causes a full examination as to whether the Department of Defense is truly developing the core competencies and capabilities to perform the missions assigned to it and whether those capabilities are being developed in the most joint and efficient way by the military services. Much has changed since 1948. Technology has changed and has blossomed and mushroomed, and that's why it's important that we update, by way of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense, the Key West agreement that was met back in that year of 1948.

I am very, very pleased with this bill, Mr. Speaker. I think that history will say that this one was a comprehensive, if not the most comprehensive, Defense authorization bill that our Congress has passed in decades.

Mr. Speaker, I include in the RECORD, regarding the Key West agreement of 1948, a statement by Sam Rushie, who is the supervisory archivist of the Truman Library in Independence, Missouri.

On December 19, 1945—3 months after the end of the Second World War—President Truman recommended to Congress that the War and Navy Departments be unified in a new Department of National Defense. In his statement to Congress, Truman declared, ''One of the lessons which have most clearly come from the costly and dangerous experience of this war is that there must be unified direction of land, sea and air forces at home as well as in all other parts of the world where our Armed Forces are serving. ''We did not have that kind of direction when we were attacked four years ago—and we certainly paid a high price for not having it.''

On May 13, 1946, Truman met with Secretary of War Patterson and Secretary of the Navy Forrestal, and he urged that the Army and the Navy reach a compromise on the problem of unification.

The President's proposals were finally enacted on July 26, 1947, as the National Security Act, the main feature of which was the establishment of a unified Department of Defense. That same day, the President issued Executive Order 9877, an attempt to define the functions of the Army, the Navy, and the newly created Air Force within the unified National Military Establishment. However, bickering between the services continued, especially over issues that the Executive Order had failed to address specifically. Many of these issues concerned the functions of the Navy. The Army regarded the Navy's Marine Corps as a rival for control of combat operations on land; similarly, the Air Force viewed Naval Aviation as an infringement on its jurisdiction over air operations.

In an effort to resolve these conflicts, Secretary of Defense James Forrestal summoned the Joint Chiefs of Staff to a meeting at Key West, Florida in March 1948. Following suggestions made by Forrestal, the Joint Chiefs drafted a directive entitled ''Functions of the Armed Forces and the Joint Chiefs of Staff,'' popularly known as the ''Key West Agreement.'' Forrestal submitted this proposal to the President in late March. On April 21, 1948, the President issued Executive Order 9950, revoking his earlier executive order. This cleared the way for the Secretary of Defense to issue the new directive that same day.

With modifications, the Key West Agreement continues to govern responsibilities within the armed forces to this day. In contrast to the broad language of the earlier executive order, Forrestal's directive specified the primary and secondary responsibilities of each branch of the service. In a tenuous compromise, it was agreed that the Navy would not establish a strategic air component, but would be permitted to have aircraft carriers and use its aircraft against inland targets. (This was interpreted by the Navy as an endorsement of the projected new supercarrier, the USS *United States*.) The Air Force would retain primary responsibility for strategic air operations and air defense. At the same time, it was agreed that the Marine Corps would be preserved, but would be limited in size to four divisions, and would cooperate with the Army in planning amphibious operations.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by very, very sincerely thanking my good friend from Missouri, Chairman SKELTON, for the great leadership that he has provided in the months past in writing the original version and then shaping the bill and then using his steady hand to guide us through the conference, of course with the help of my good friend, Ranking Member DUNCAN HUNTER. Both of these leaders provided great direction for us, and I might say that the product of their work is here today. I agree with the chairman, that this is a very, very good bill, and I am very fortunate to be able to stand here today to say how important I think it is that we all support it.

□ 1345

Unfortunately, Ranking Member HUNTER could not be here today, but I know he is very proud of this conference report as well. I'd like to thank all of the subcommittee chairmen and their ranking members for their hard work and leadership. It is responsible for almost 1,500 pages that this bill contains. And the staff that helped make this a reality, obviously Members would not have been able to be here today if it were not for them either.

This is a good, bipartisan bill. Last Thursday, the House Armed Services Committee filed this conference report after an overwhelming majority of conferees signed the report. Seldom in my career here have I seen this kind of agreement among Members on the bill. Our subcommittee chairmen and their ranking members will provide a detailed summary of the bill, so I will only highlight a few key areas.

Most importantly, this bipartisan bill takes care of the brave men and women serving our country at home and abroad. It authorizes $506.9 billion in budgetary authority for the Department of Defense and the national security programs of the Department of Energy. Additionally, it supports current operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere in the global war on terrorism by authorizing $189.4 billion in supplemental funding for operational costs, personnel expenses and procurement of new equipment for fiscal year 2008.

This amount provides for end-strength growth in both the Army and the Marine Corps, continuing initiatives started several years ago by the Armed Services Committee, by authorizing increases of 13,000 Army and 9,000 Marine Corps active duty personnel to sustain our required missions.

Additionally, this conference report authorizes a 3.5 percent pay increase, as the chairman remarked earlier. These pay raises for all members of the Armed Forces for 2008 are extremely important.

We talk a lot about quality of life and here we're doing something about it. Some of the initiatives in this legislation continue successful, practical programs such as the Commander's

Emergency Response Program, which is working well in battlefields in Iraq and Afghanistan. Other initiatives reinforce good legislation that the House has already passed, such as the Wounded Warrior legislation to address the challenges that face our recovering servicemembers and their families. Still others modify existing authorities or establish promising new programs and new policies.

Some of the new programs and policies include these:

Providing $17.6 billion for the mine resistant ambush protected vehicle, an armored vehicle which will save lives going forward; setting guidelines for all private security contractors operating in Iraq and Afghanistan and other areas where we have combat operations. And we know from recent news reports how important this provision is.

We also authorize eight additional C–17s to support the intratheater lift requirements and meet the airlift needs for the increased end strength in the Army and Marine Corps.

We added major acquisition reform initiatives, such as establishing new responsibilities for the Joint Requirements Oversight Council and mandating that new acquisition programs be aligned with the missions of the Department and the competency and capability of the service proposing the program.

And finally, we acted to elevate the chief of the National Guard bureau to a four-star general and adopted many of the recommendations of the Commission on National Guard and Reserve Corps.

Just as importantly, this legislation avoids contentious language, such as the hate crimes provision, which would have put our bill at risk of a Presidential veto. I want to acknowledge the leadership of Chairman IKE SKELTON, whose hard work in shepherding this vital legislation through the conference has guaranteed that our servicemen and women will get what they need, and they will get it when they need it.

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

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to my friend and colleague, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. ORTIZ), who is the chairman of the Subcommittee on Readiness.

Mr. ORTIZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this conference report on the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008, and I want to thank Chairman SKELTON and Ranking Member HUNTER and the members of the full committee and the staff for doing a great job.

The bill before us begins to address our growing concerns about the readiness posture of our Armed Forces; yet the breadth and the scope of our readiness has been deeply damaged by virtue of operations and many years of ignoring this problem. Our troops and their equipment have been stretched by extended combat operations, and the strain is evident in declining readiness, shortfalls in training and difficulties in equipping our forces.

These problems have grown to immense proportions, and this bill is a significant step to reverse the decline and to rebuild our military. Included in the bill are some significant readiness policy initiatives and investments that will help restore the readiness posture of our military.

First, this bill establishes a Defense Readiness Production Board to identify critical readiness requirements and to mobilize the defense industrial base to speed up the production of military equipment. This board will bridge the gap between readiness needs and resources to help repair our worn-out equipment.

The bill also creates a $1 billion Strategic Readiness Fund to give the board and the Department of Defense the ability to rapidly attend to pressing readiness needs.

This bill begins to address other shortfalls in maintenance and training by providing $250 million for unfunded training requirements and an additional $150 million to restore aviation maintenance shortfalls.

And we're very concerned about the readiness of our National Guard. Our bill requires the Department of Defense to begin measuring the readiness of National Guard units to support emergencies in their home States, such as the recent tragic tornadoes in Kansas. These readiness reports will allow the Congress and each State's Governor to evaluate the needs of each State and address problems before a disaster occurs. To help restore the shortfalls, the bill includes a $1 billion investment in National Guard equipment.

We also include provisions that require plans and reports to Congress on reconstituting our prepositioned war stocks. We also authorized more than $21 billion for military construction, family housing and to implement base realignment and closure. These funds include money to support grow-the-force initiatives for the Army and Marine Corps and to provide facilities to accommodate new recruits and missions.

Other significant provisions include proposed changes to the National Security Personnel System, depot initiatives and numerous important policy initiatives by the Department of Defense.

This is a good bill, and I am pleased to have helped in some way in shaping this bill. It reflects our bipartisan desire to improve readiness and to provide for the men and women in uniform.

I ask my colleagues to support this bill.

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Chesapeake, Virginia (Mr. FORBES), the ranking member of the Readiness Subcommittee.

Mr. FORBES. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from New Jersey for yielding and for his leadership on the Armed Services Committee throughout the years.

I rise today in strong support of the conference agreement for the 2008 National Defense Authorization Act. I also want to take a moment to thank Chairman SKELTON and Mr. HUNTER for their leadership and hard work in getting us to this point.

This conference report is the culmination of 102 House Armed Services Committee hearings, a comparable number of informational briefings and untold hours of debate and discussion with our friends in the Senate. This bill reflects our strong and continued support for the brave men and women of the United States armed services, and I thank both of these gentlemen for moving forward a robust, bipartisan Defense authorization bill.

I also want to thank Mr. ORTIZ, my subcommittee chairman and good friend, for his outstanding leadership of the Readiness Subcommittee.

This conference report provides funding authorization and support for our military and civilian personnel serving in the global war on terrorism while at the same time seeking to reverse declining trends in readiness.

Major highlights include: It provides $18.4 billion for the Army and $8.6 billion for the Marine Corps to address equipment reset requirements. It provides $980 million for critical National Guard equipment. It authorizes $1 billion for the Strategic Readiness Fund. It establishes the Defense Materiel Readiness Board. It requires quarterly rating and reporting of National Guard readiness for homeland defense missions. It provides a 3.5 percent pay increase to our men and women in uniform. It increases the end strength in the Army and the Marine Corps to improve readiness and meet the threats of the 21st century. It authorizes $2.8 billion in military construction funding to support these end-strength increases. And it authorizes funding to examine the national security interagency process. As many of you know, this is an issue that is overdue for reform, and many of us are pleased to see this begin to be examined more closely.

Mr. Speaker, we are all very aware that our continued global presence and ongoing combat operations are taxing current readiness levels. We also know that all of the military services are facing aging equipment inventories and are in need of recapitalization and modernization funding. Striking the balance between sustaining readiness today and ensuring a healthy, ready force tomorrow is a vast and complex challenge. This conference report strikes a good balance between sustaining what we've got while ensuring a well-trained, all-volunteer force with modern equipment will be available in the future.

This conference report deserves your support.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, it gives me pleasure to yield 4 minutes to the

gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. TAYLOR), my friend who is the chairman of the Subcommittee on Seapower and Expeditionary Forces.

Mr. TAYLOR. Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by thanking our chairman, IKE SKELTON, for the phenomenal job he's done for looking out for the men and women in uniform this year.

I want to thank my ranking member, ROSCOE BARTLETT, for his incredible cooperation, and I want to thank all the members of the Seapower Subcommittee.

I also want to thank the other committee chairmen who, to a man or a woman, transferred funds from their jurisdiction to try to help in our efforts to rebuild America's fleet.

Of all the services, I think it is fair to say that the Bush administration has been the least favorable to the United States Navy. It has shrunk by about 50 ships on George Bush's watch. We're trying to turn that around.

With this year's bill, we're very proud of several things we've done. We've funded one Virginia class submarine and advanced funding for a second. We've funded one Littoral combat ship, one amphibious assault ship, a dry cargo vessel, a high speed vessel. We've completed funding for two Arleigh Burke destroyers, one amphibious assault ship, and we have started the full funding of an additional carrier.

We have long lead funding for three TAKE cargo ships, and Mr. Speaker, again with the great help of ROSCOE BARTLETT, we have in here language that says the next generation of warships, surface combatants, will be nuclear-powered to lessen our Nation's dependence on foreign oil.

I would encourage every American to read a great book on the New York Times best sellers list called ''Halseys Typhoon,'' and it talks about the Christmas typhoon that hit the fleet off of the Philippines in 1944, the needless loss of vessels. But the event that triggered the fleet's sailing into that typhoon was the need for the fleet to refuel their destroyers when the destroyers were caught low on fuel. The destroyers got caught in this storm. Three of them foundered needlessly, and had those vessels been nuclear-powered with a 30-year supply of fuel on board, that never would have happened.

To this day, we have only five oilers in the Pacific. Any clever, future foe of the United States, the first thing they're going to do is try to sink those oilers. And the Department of Defense strategy of wishful thinking that this isn't going to happen isn't good enough.

So because of future combat needs, things like rail guns, the growth in power, demand for things like electronics, and above all, to have the ships that guard our carriers to have the capacity to stay with the carriers for 30 years, as far as their fuel needs, we're very, very proud of that.

We're very happy that the Guard Empowerment Act will become law, and I want to thank my colleague TOM DAVIS for encouraging me to sponsor that, and I want to thank him for cosponsoring it. It will raise the chief of the National Guard bureau to four stars. It will see to it that either the commander or the deputy commander of the northern command will be either a Guardsman or Reservist.

And I can tell you, having worked with General Steven Blom in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, I cannot think of a finer human being to be the first person as a National Guardsman to wear four stars.

□ 1400

I want to thank the subcommittee for their work on the fielding of mine resistant ambush protected vehicles. A year ago right now, the administration had only asked for 400 of those vehicles. Because of the work of the subcommittee, because of the case that was made to the American people, there will now be 15,000 of them built, and it will from the day it's fielded save lives and save limbs. There are young people in Mississippi graveyards who would be alive today if we had fielded them sooner, but at least it's getting done now.

So, Mr. Chairman, thank you for the great work you've done. I want to thank my fellow subcommittee chairman. And above all, I want to encourage the House to support this very important measure.

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3½ minutes to the gentleman from Hagerstown, Maryland (Mr. BARTLETT), who is the ranking member of the Seapower Subcommittee.

Mr. BARTLETT of Maryland. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008. As ranking member of the Subcommittee on Seapower and Expeditionary Forces, I would like to thank the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. TAYLOR), chairman of our subcommittee, for his wisdom and profound concern for the safety of our servicemembers and the security of the United States.

Further, I would like to recognize our chairman, IKE SKELTON, and our ranking member, DUNCAN HUNTER, for their continued leadership and support. This bill contains farsighted provisions which I believe are critical to this Nation's future security, none of which would have been possible without the steadfast advocacy of these visionary leaders. Thank you.

I also want to recognize the superb staff without whom this bill would not be possible.

There are a handful of provisions in every annual defense policy bill that stand apart in terms of their impact. This conference report is no different. This year the Congress has clearly established that it is the policy of the United States to utilize nuclear propulsion for all future major naval combatants. It is a vital step to secure our Nation's national and energy security.

Nuclear propulsion for naval ships is the right thing to do from economic, combat effectiveness, homeland defense, and energy policy perspectives. Without congressional action, budgetary pressures would forever prevent the Navy from making this farsighted commitment to its future.

Studies have consistently shown that life-cycle and operational costs are lower for nuclear propulsion in large combat vessels, such as cruisers. The most recent naval study shows that the break-even cost for a nuclear fueled cruiser is $60 per barrel of oil. It's now about $90. What's more, the National Petroleum Council projects future shortfalls in the supply of oil clear through 2030.

Last spring, a DOD Office of Force Transformation and Resources commissioned report found that the risks associated with oil will make the U.S. military's ability to rapidly deploy on demand ''unsustainable in the long run.'' It said it is ''imperative'' that DOD ''apply new energy technologies that address alternative supply sources and efficient consumption across all aspects of military operations.''

Congress has responded. As recently as last year's Defense bill, Congress found that the Nation's dependence upon foreign oil is a threat to national security and that other energy sources must be seriously considered. It noted the advantages of nuclear power, such as virtually unlimited high-speed endurance, elimination of vulnerable refueling, and a reduction in the requirement for replenishment vessels and the need to protect those vessels. Congress directed the Secretary of the Navy to evaluate integrated power systems, fuel cells, and nuclear power as propulsion alternatives within the analysis of alternatives for future major surface combatants.

The Navy is conducting such an analysis for the next generation cruiser. However, in hearings this year, our subcommittee saw no evidence that the Department of Defense was seriously willing to consider making the investments required to enable that future. Quite simply, the conferees decided that we could waste no further time because these investments must begin to be made next year for the CG(X) next generation cruiser. Therefore, this conference report requires integrated nuclear propulsion for future major combatants.

This conference report reflects a fair and balanced treatment of the remaining issues facing the United States Navy and Marine Corps, and I respectfully ask full support for this very important bill.

Mr. TAYLOR. Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask unanimous consent to thank Captain Will Ebbs and Ms. Jenness Simler for the outstanding job they did in helping the Seapower Subcommittee this year and have them reflected in the RECORD.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, first let me thank my friend from Mississippi for the historical reference back to 1944 regarding the fuel situation, and I think that the subcommittee is making a substantial contribution in requiring the nuclear ships that it does.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to my friend and colleague, the chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, the gentleman from Arkansas, Dr. SNYDER.

Mr. SNYDER. Mr. Speaker, prayers and praise for our men and women in uniform do not fulfill our responsibilities to provide for the common defense. Every military family deserves the support of every American, and we act today in this Defense bill to provide that support.

No Defense bill is perfect. No Defense bill finishes the work. But this Congress comes together today in a bipartisan manner with a good bill.

Three quick points. First of all, I want to thank Mr. SKELTON and Mr. HUNTER for their leadership and the work that they have done on this year's Defense bill. I also want to acknowledge the presence of Mr. SAXTON, who has announced his retirement and is in his last term and is providing leadership today, as he often does, of this committee.

Second, I am very pleased to see the improvements in the GI Bill for our Reserve component members. It has been grossly unfair that some of our Reserve component members have not been able to get GI Bill benefits when they have left the service.

And, third, thanks to Mr. MCHUGH and Mrs. DAVIS and others, we have very good provisions in this bill, the so-called Wounded Warrior provisions, that will make life easier for those of our men and women in uniform who are hurt or become ill overseas.

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. THORNBERRY).

Mr. THORNBERRY. I appreciate the gentleman's yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this conference report. It is one of the few examples of bipartisan work that has been produced so far in this Congress, and I think it is worthy of every Member's support.

I want to specifically mention some of the provisions within the jurisdiction of the Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare Subcommittee, which has been very ably led by the gentleman from Washington (Mr. SMITH), following in the tradition of the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON). Both of them ask tough questions, but they always put the interests of the country first.

The cutting edge of our battle against terrorists are the folks of the Special Operations Command, and this bill fully authorizes the requested funding for those assigned to our toughest missions. The bill also improves SOCOM's acquisition and contracting authority.

SOCOM is a unique entity set up specifically by Congress with unique authorities, including the ability to buy its own equipment. Now, that is resented by some, and this provision in this bill is intended to make that explicitly clear. But I think all of us on the subcommittee agree that if it is not made clear by this provision, then we will come back and do more next year.

This bill continues the authority to fund projects in our work with others. It is an important part of this war against terrorists to work with and through other forces, other individuals, and the funding authority that allows that to happen is continued here.

I especially want to express my appreciation to the subcommittee chairman, Mr. SMITH, that this subcommittee has again continued in Mr. SAXTON's work to develop a deep understanding of the ideology that drives radical Islamic terrorism and how best we can counter it. As much money, time, and effort has been put into that issue since 9/11/2001, I don't think we're to the bottom of it yet.

In addition, this portion of the bill provides more strategic direction and efficiency to our research and development efforts. For example, it adopts the Defense Science Board recommendation that requires Strategic Plan for Manufacturing Technology program to try to make sure that equipment goes from the laboratory to the field where the soldiers can use it in an efficient and effective way. And in IT, it makes acquisition more responsive to the pace of technological change. I believe we have a lot more work yet to go in that area, but we have also worked in that most unconventional of warfare areas, and that is through cyberwarfare where this country is being attacked every day by folks over the Internet. Our military and the rest of our government, I think, is just beginning to come to grips with the significance of that issue and how best to deal with it.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a perfect bill, but I think it is a good bill and it should be supported by all Members.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to my friend the gentleman from Washington (Mr. SMITH), who is also the chairman of the Subcommittee on Terrorism and Unconventional Threats and Capabilities.

Mr. SMITH of Washington. I thank the chairman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by echoing the comments of my colleague from Texas (Mr. THORNBERRY) and also thanking him for his outstanding leadership on our subcommittee. It's been great to work in a bipartisan fashion with Mr. THORNBERRY; with Mr. SAXTON, the former chairman; and the other members of the committee. And I will not repeat all that Mr. THORNBERRY just said because I agree with it completely. The priorities that he laid out of our subcommittee, focusing on supporting the Special Operations Command in their lead in the fight against al Qaeda and terrorism; focusing on science, technology, and all the issues that he raised are exactly what we are trying to confront. I have enjoyed working with him on those issues and look forward to continuing to do so because, as he mentioned, we have certainly made progress but there is a lot more work to do. Our Special Operations Command needs all the support we can give it in its effort to fight al Qaeda, to understand that enemy and then use its forces to the best of its ability to combat it. And I think understanding those issues is enormously important. It has been a huge priority of our subcommittee.

I also want to thank the chairman of the full committee, Mr. SKELTON. It is a great honor to have worked with him during my 11 years in Congress and certainly a great honor to work with him as the Chair, and I think he has produced an outstanding bill, in particular the focus on the troops. I have traveled with the chairman before, and I know that this is always at the top of his priority list, how we are taking care of the troops and their families. This bill does that. It protects them, active duty, Guard and Reserve. It makes it a priority to make sure that we are meeting their needs, and I know that is primarily because of his leadership, and I thank him for that. I also thank the other subcommittees who were directly involved in that.

Lastly, I want to point out how important it is that this bill also recognizes the fight we are currently engaged in in Iraq and Afghanistan. It goes to the issues that are most important to those troops. Funding the MRAPs, trying to come up with ways to combat IEDs, making sure they have the body armor and the up-armored Humvees they need to confront those threats. It has been a huge priority of this committee, and particularly Mr. TAYLOR and Mr. ABERCROMBIE, to make sure that we fund our troops that are in the field right now with the priorities that they most need because they are the ones facing the most direct threat right now.

I have always been proud to be a member of this committee, and I'm very proud of the bill that we have created. I urge every Member in this body to support it. I think it's an excellent piece of legislation.

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 4½ minutes to the gentleman from Rehoboth, Alabama (Mr. EVERETT), the ranking member of the Strategic Forces Subcommittee.

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

Mr. EVERETT. Mr. Speaker, I want to start by recognizing the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON) and my great friend from California (Mr.

HUNTER) for their work on this bill. I also want to recognize the fact that the gentleman from Missouri, this is not his first bill but it's his first Defense bill as chairman of the committee, and I congratulate him.

I rise in support of this conference report to accompany the Fiscal Year 2008 National Defense Authorization Act.

The bill includes funds for European missile defense interceptors and radars and encourages the administration to seek a reprogramming request once agreements with host countries are reached.

The bill establishes policy to defend against Iranian ballistic missile threats and seeks greater missile defense cooperation with Israel. It also authorizes an increase of $65 million for the Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense. The bill authorizes GMD, THAAD, and KEI at the budget request, and airborne laser funding is increased to just $35 million below the budget request.

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In the area of military space, the bill requires the Secretary of Defense and the Director of National Intelligence to develop a space protection strategy. The importance of space to the economy and to modern-day warfighting is often overlooked. In light of the Chinese antisatellite test last January and other threats to space, we must place a greater priority on the protection of our Nation's space capabilities.

Within the area of atomic energy defense activities, the bill reflects general bipartisan agreement, particularly in its authorization of the Reliable Replacement Warhead Program cost and design activities.

And finally, Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I didn't recognize the gentlelady from California, who chairs the Strategic Forces Subcommittee. She demonstrates skillful leadership in her first year as chairman, and I want to congratulate her. This bill would not be what it is without her leadership.

I also must recognize my fellow subcommittee chairmen, Members on both sides of the aisle, and their staffs. I think this subcommittee handles some of the most difficult policy decisions in the House Armed Services Committee, and I want to express my appreciation for their hard work in protecting our Nation's security.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, I would like to have a colloquy between myself and Chairman SKELTON.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, the government has eliminated the use of non-GSA-approved lock bar file cabinets and outdated mechanical locks for storage of classified information in accordance with national security policy. However, under current Federal regulations, contractors are not required to phase out this old equipment until 2012. This results in less robust security and more government spending to protect classified information handled by contractors.

Although the Department of Defense has taken measures to meet these requirements internally, it is evident that the defense contractor community is behind the implementation of the required locks and safes. The committee has taken an interest in this matter of securing classified information now for several years. Rather than wait another 5 years, I believe DOD should have a plan in place to ensure that contractors are in full compliance with the regulations.

Mr. SKELTON. Will the gentleman from Alabama yield, please?

Mr. EVERETT. I yield to the gentleman from Missouri.

Mr. SKELTON. I thank the gentleman, and I do appreciate his concern on this issue. Protecting classified material of course is the utmost importance, and the standards for protecting this material should be consistent across government as well as industry. In that regard, I intend to work very closely with my friend, the gentleman from Alabama, on the issue, starting with the request of the Department of Defense to obtain their plans for meeting the 2012 deadline for phasing out containers used by defense contractors that have not been approved by the GSA.

Mr. EVERETT. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman would yield further, I thank him for his commitment to work with me on the matter.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to my good friend, the gentlelady from California, who is also the chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Strategic Forces, Mrs. TAUSCHER.

Mrs. TAUSCHER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of the conference report on H.R. 1585, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008.

I want to thank Chairman SKELTON and Ranking Member HUNTER. I especially want to thank the Strategic Forces Subcommittee ranking member, Mr. EVERETT, the distinguished gentleman from Alabama. Many of the very fine initiatives that we produced in this bill were started by Mr. EVERETT when he was chairman, and I thank him for his cooperation and for his leadership.

I want to especially thank our excellent staff for all of their hard work for what is, I think, one of the finest Defense bills that we have been able to produce.

Mr. Speaker, as chairman of the Strategic Forces Subcommittee, I have worked with my colleagues over the course of this year to incorporate four priorities into the conference agreement before the House today.

First, this bill aims to foster and frame a crucial discussion about nuclear weapons by establishing a congressionally appointed bipartisan commission designed to reevaluate the United States' strategic posture. The commission will provide valuable recommendations to Congress regarding the proper mix of conventional and nuclear weapons needed to meet new and emerging threats.

Second, the bill takes a prudent step to slow key Department of Energy nuclear weapons initiatives, including the development of the Reliable Replacement Warhead. The conference agreement limits RRW activity in fiscal year 2008 to a design and cost study and reduces RRW funding by $38 million out of a total request of $119 million, more than a 30 percent reduction.

The conference agreement also rejects the proposal for a new plutonium pit production facility, or consolidated plutonium center, in the President's budget request. None of the $24.9 million proposed for the CPC is authorized.

Third, the bill funds ballistic missile defense systems that will protect the American people, our deployed troops and allies against real threats while shifting resources away from longer term, high-risk efforts. The bill authorizes $8.4 billion for ballistic missile defense programs of the Missile Defense Agency, a reduction of $450 million from the President's request.

The conference agreement reduces funding for the proposed European missile defense site by $85 million, and requires final approval by the Governments of Poland and the Czech Republic and an independent study on alternative missile defense options for Europe before construction may begin.

The conference agreement also charts a path forward to provide the President with options for a conventional prompt global strike, consolidating funds requested for the Conventional Trident Modification into a new, defense-wide research line for prompt global strike.

Finally, we are boosting funding for space capabilities that deliver near-term benefits to the warfighter and improves space situational awareness and survivability.

Mr. Speaker, this bill strikes a balance between near-term needs and long-term investment, and it creates the means to help bring our nuclear weapons policy into the 21st century.

I urge my colleagues' strong support on this legislation.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair will note that the gentleman from New Jersey has 10½ minutes remaining, the gentleman from Missouri has 9½ minutes.

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from New York, the ranking member of the Military Personnel Subcommittee, Mr. MCHUGH.

Mr. MCHUGH. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I've said on occasions in the past in similar situations that it's always a source of great pride for those of us who have the honor and the opportunity to serve on the Personnel Subcommittee that when many Members come to the floor in support of both this and past authorization bills,

one of the things that they cite most often are those initiatives emanating out of the Personnel Subcommittee, and I think that's for a very good reason. Because all of us, certainly in this Congress, but particularly in the House Armed Services Committee, recognize that for all of the things that make this Nation great, particularly for all of those things that make our military the greatest that has ever walked the face of the Earth, the one irreplaceable component is those who wear the uniform and those who, of course, love and support them, their spouses, their children, their families. And in that regard, I want to add my words of thanks to, of course, the distinguished chairman, the gentleman from Missouri, our ranking member, Congressman HUNTER, but also to Dr. SNYDER, who started the year off as the chairman of the Personnel Subcommittee, who went on to other challenges and, fortunately for all of us, turned the reins over to the very able hands of the gentlelady from California (Mrs. Davis).

As in years past, Mr. Speaker, this bill is rich in provisions that recognize the value of our military men and women in service and the need to support them, and to enrich the quality of lives of both those individuals and, of course, their families. And I suspect you have heard today, and rightfully will continue to hear, Mr. Speaker, of all of those good things; 3.5 percent pay raise, one-half percent above what the President requested, and more importantly, over the past 9 years, the continuation of our effort to reduce that gap between civilian pay and military that started at 13.5 percent. And with this 3.5 percent, it will move it down to 3.4 percent. More needs to be done, but good progress.

It critically increases end strength, which is such an important component in the high pace of operations and personnel tempos. It increases the Army by 13,000, the Marine Corps by 9,000; again, work that needs to be continued, but a good step on such an important problem.

The report also contains important provisions of the bill that Dr. SNYDER and I had the honor of helping to initiate, that was later picked up by the committee and so many others to round it into a great provision to respond to the disgraceful conditions that we all learned about at Walter Reed and end the frustration that exists between the DOD and veterans retirement and disabilities systems. And it includes as well several recommendations from the President's Commission on Care of America's Returning Wounded Warriors, better known as the Dole-Shalala Commission.

From active to Reserve, this is a great bill and it deserves all of our support.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to my good friend and colleague from California, who is the chairwoman on the Subcommittee on Personnel, Mrs. DAVIS.

Mrs. DAVIS of California. I want to thank my distinguished chairman for his leadership.

Mr. Speaker, while the holiday season is a time of joy for most Americans, it can be a very difficult period for our servicemembers and their families. When I sit down with members of our all-volunteer force, whether it's in my district or in the mess halls in Iraq, I'm very aware of the stress military service can have on our servicemembers and, of course quite specifically, on all of their family members as well. The stress of being deployed over the holidays can only be more difficult.

Mr. Speaker, a vital component of our strong national defense is the ability to care for members of our force, as well as recruit and retain men and women to serve in the military. To quote the first Commander in Chief, ''The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive the veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their Nation.'' With this bill, current and future generations of servicemembers will know that their Nation cares for their sacrifice.

Mr. Speaker, why is this bill important to men and women in uniform? It provides a 3 percent across-the-board pay raise for our troops. The compensation we provide our servicemembers must remain competitive with the private sector.

We were also successful in making major improvements to the Reserve Montgomery GI Bill. For the first time there is a 10-year portability in benefits for Reservists so they can continue to receive educational assistance after they separate.

Additionally, this bill will help services recruit and retain desperately needed health care professionals by prohibiting any further conversion of military medical professionals to civilian positions.

Mr. Speaker, most importantly, the mental health needs of our troops continue to grow, and this bill includes a number of provisions that will improve access to quality care for members and their families. The creation of Centers of Excellence on TBI and PTSD is just one example.

This report also includes a number of the recommendations from the Dole-Shalala Commission, including an expansion of the Family and Medical Leave Act to cover family members of those on active duty so they can care for wounded servicemembers on extended leave for up to 26 workweeks. Family members will no longer have to choose between keeping their jobs and caring for a wounded loved one.

This bill addresses one of the concerns Members have heard from their constituent Reservists, early retirement. The bill would reduce the age at which a member of the Ready Reserve can draw retired pay below the age of 60 by 3 months for every aggregate 90 days of active duty performed under specified circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, there is so much more I wish we could do for our men and women who serve, but I feel that this bill represents the best efforts of this body to provide for our Nation's Armed Forces and their families.

I would like to thank my predecessor, Representative SNYDER, and ranking member, Representative MCHUGH, and the Personnel Subcommittee staff for all of their hard work on this conference report.

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Minnesota, a retired U.S. Marine Corps colonel, Mr. KLINE.

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Mr. KLINE of Minnesota. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today along with my colleagues in strong support of this legislation. At a time when our Nation is at war on multiple fronts, we must maintain a strong commitment to these brave men and women in uniform who stand in defense of our Nation. This legislation takes a responsible, forward-looking approach to the funding of our current operations and provides for the needs of our American heroes.

In addition to the things already mentioned by my colleagues, such as an increase in end strength and the very important pay raise, I am particularly pleased at the inclusion of two important legislative provisions that I introduced earlier this year, the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program and authorization for assignment incentive pay for National Guardsmen unfairly denied this benefit.

The Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program nationalizes a program created by the Minnesota National Guard. Through experiences drawn from the deployments of smaller units to Iraq and Afghanistan, the Minnesota Guard developed a unique combat veteran reintegration program with a focus on supporting servicemembers and their families throughout the entire deployment cycle.

With this focus, the Minnesota Yellow Ribbon program has proven an effective means to prepare every combat veteran and their family for a safe, healthy and successful reintegration. This multifaceted program includes workshops and training events at 30-day, 60-day and 90-day intervals for servicemembers following their demobilization.

This bill also moves us toward fixing a major disparity among Minnesota National Guardsmen. Congress created assignment incentive pay to recognize the hardship of prolonged mobilization periods for Reservists and Guardsmen called up under partial mobilization authority. The military services, however, deploy Guardsmen and Reservists under other mobilization authorities.

Through no fault of their own, many Minnesota National Guardsmen who served in Bosnia and Kosovo were mobilized using different authorities. When these same soldiers, many of them senior non-commissioned officers, were asked to deploy with their fellow Guardsmen to Iraq in 2006, those who had served in Kosovo were given $1,000 a month in assignment incentive pay while those who had served in Bosnia were not. Clearly this is not fair. I am very pleased that this legislation recognizes that and rectifies this disparity.

Mr. Speaker, I would encourage all of my colleagues to join me today in voting for this important legislation that supports our troops.

Mrs. TAUSCHER. Mr. Speaker, I am happy to yield 1 minute to my friend and colleague the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. ANDREWS), a particularly articulate and thoughtful member of the Armed Services Committee.

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

Mr. ANDREWS. I thank my friend for yielding, and I congratulate our Chairman SKELTON on his great job in getting this bill done and our ranking member, Mr. HUNTER.

People criticize the Congress, I think justifiably, because they think we don't get anything done and we can't ever agree with each other. Well, this bill shows that we can get things done and we can agree with each other. There are many strongly held opinions about the war in Iraq, pro and con. But I think there is unanimity. We should show the people who wear the uniform of this country our appreciation by raising their pay. And this bill does that 3.5 percent across the board. I think there is unanimity that when we send our young men and women into harm's way, they should have the best protection. And this bill puts $17.6 billion, the highest ever, into up-armored vehicles and protective gear for the troops in the field. I think there is unanimity that says that when someone is wounded in the service of this country, he or she should never be forgotten, ever, when they are in the VA health care system. So there is unanimity here for the Wounded Warrior Act.

This bill is well worth supporting because it shows the broad support in this Congress for the men and women who serve this country, and I urge a ''yes'' vote.

Mr. SAXTON. I yield 1 minute to my friend, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. TURNER).

Mr. TURNER. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to thank Chairman SKELTON and Ranking Member HUNTER for their leadership in completing the conference report for FY08 National Defense Authorization Act.

On December 6, Chairman SKELTON announced that an agreement had been reached on the conference report stating that ''this bill supports the troops, restores readiness, and improves accountability.''

I would like to point out that this bill includes a key policy provision that directly supports our troops. This bill will amend the Service Members Civil Relief Act to protect the children and custody arrangements of servicemembers deployed in a contingency operation. This provision is important because it protects our deployed troops from courts that have been overturning established custody arrangements while a servicemember is serving our country in a contingency operation such as Iraq or Afghanistan.

Today, I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of this bill because it provides the child custody protection that our deployed troops deserve. Much is asked of our servicemembers, and mobilization can disrupt and strain relationships at home. This additional protection is needed to provide them peace of mind that the courts will not undertake judicial proceedings considering their established custody rights without them. This amendment protects them, and it protects their children.

Mrs. TAUSCHER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to my friend and colleague the gentlewoman from Arizona (Ms. GIFFORDS), a member of the Armed Services Committee and a conferee on this bill from the Committee on Small Business.

Ms. GIFFORDS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of the Fiscal Year 2008 National Defense Authorization Act. As a member of the Armed Services Committee, led by Chairman SKELTON, I am pleased to vote for a comprehensive bill that bolsters military readiness, supports our military families, and makes sure that we have strong national security.

In southern Arizona, I represent two major military installations and thousands of military personnel. Having visited with troops both at home and abroad, I am well aware of the challenges our men and women in uniform face. New recruits at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base and Fort Huachuca currently earn just $18,000 a year. Many of them have families. This bill recognizes their commitment and gives them a 3.5 percent pay increase.

Our military is facing a retention crisis. In this time of war, our armed services must have the best and brightest. We must retain those men and women by providing them the best training, equipment, and support possible. From southern Arizona to Afghanistan, we have to ensure that our men and women are ready to face any challenge.

I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support our troops and our national security by voting for this essential legislation.

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself 3 minutes.

I want to say a word on behalf of the Air Land Subcommittee. I want to first thank our great subcommittee chairman, Mr. ABERCROMBIE, the gentleman from Hawaii, for his outstanding work and for his great cooperation on our subcommittee.

The major highlights of the Air Land Subcommittee's portion of this bill provide aircraft providing multiyear procurement authority for the CH–47 helicopter program; ensures continued development of two options for the propulsion system for the Joint Strike Fighter; authorizes $2.3 billion for eight badly needed C–17 aircraft; and allows the Air Force to proceed with their request to divest 24 C–130E and 85 KC–135E aircraft. These retirements will greatly help the Air Force. The aircraft are grounded or are unable to be used in combat operations.

The land forces under our subcommittee benefited from several areas of upgraded armor: the mine resistant ambush protected MRAP vehicles; the up-armored Humvees; the body armor that we provide in the IED fragment armor kits are very important elements of the bill. We also authorized $3.4 billion for the Army's future combat systems.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Defense continues to have acquisition directives that are rarely followed. This is not a good thing. Requirements for advancement through research and development to procurement, these provisions are routinely waived by the Department of Defense. It is hard to know if acquisition policies actually work if we rarely follow them.

Mr. Speaker, the conference report takes steps to address some of these issues, and I am encouraged by some of the things that I have recently seen and heard coming from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics.

Mr. Speaker, this conference report supports our military men and women and provides them with the equipment they need while at the same time taking steps to redress acquisition concerns of Congress. This conference report certainly in this regard deserves all of our support.

Mrs. TAUSCHER. Mr. Speaker, I am happy to yield 1 minute to my friend and colleague the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. CARNEY), a conferee on this bill from the Committee on Homeland Security.

Mr. CARNEY. Mr. Speaker, I do rise today in support of the 2008 Defense authorization bill, H.R. 1585. This bill addresses many of the problems facing our military, as we have seen today.

As we know, the bill has many strong provisions. I would like to take a moment to address one in particular, increasing education benefits to our National Guard and Reservists. The GI Bill has provided education to many of our Nation's fine and honorable men and women. Indeed, in my own family, I grew up knowing what a difference it could make. Unfortunately, the GI Bill has a provision which excludes our National Guard and Reservists from receiving their GI Bill benefits after they have left the military.

One of my first actions in Congress was to introduce bipartisan legislation

to give the National Guard and Reserve members up to 10 years to take advantage of their GI education benefits. This proposal is similar to the benefits extended to active duty members of the military.

Under current law, a Guardsman or Reservist loses their benefit when they decide to leave the service or shortly thereafter. The National Guard and Reserve are becoming indistinguishable from active duty now, and these men and women serve their country only to return to realize their education benefits are set to expire. This legislation fixes that, and I am proud to be a sponsor.

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, may I inquire of the Chair as to how much time is remaining on each side.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. ROSS). The gentleman from New Jersey has 2½ minutes remaining and the gentlewoman from California has 3½ minutes remaining.

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. AKIN).

Mr. AKIN. Mr. Speaker, the authorization bill that is in front of us here today stands in some contrast to other pieces of work of this last year. It stands in contrast because it isn't dolled up with all kinds of partisan and very controversial kinds of things. It's a bill that is just quietly getting the job done.

I think the Members of the House, both Republican and Democrat, should be pleased with the quality of what has been put together. It does the job. It funds our troops. It lays out the proper kinds of equipment and spending priorities that are absolutely necessary for the defense of our country. I'm thankful that we were able to reject the hate crimes legislation that had no part on this bill, that was done also by this House for standing strong, and what was just the simple accomplishment of the job of funding Defense and providing for the defense of our country, so hats off to the staff, and hats off to the different people that were able to put this together.

Mrs. TAUSCHER. Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to yield 1 minute to my friend and colleague the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. WALZ).

Mr. WALZ of Minnesota. Mr. Speaker, I thank Chairman SKELTON and Ranking Member HUNTER for bringing this good piece of legislation to the floor.

This bill, H.R. 1585, fulfills our basic duty in this Congress to provide for the national defense. There are several important pieces of this legislation that are particularly meaningful to me as a 24-year veteran of our Army National Guard. There is an amendment in here to address the issue of the Federal tuition assistance program that too many of our returning servicemembers are unable to use. It also includes an important provision that we worked on in the VA Committee on making sure the electronic medical records between DOD and VA truly do become seamless. Finally, there is a very important repeal of changes that were made to a 200-year-old piece of legislation, the Insurrection Act, that Mr. DAVIS from Virginia and I worked on with our Nation's Governors that will restore individual State control over their National Guard units.

These provisions are only a small part of this bill. There's a needed pay raise and expanded care and research into TBI for our returning warriors. This legislation is packed with provisions to make good on this Congress' promise that we will keep every single promise to our veterans and make them a priority.

Our most precious resource in our national defense are those servicemembers who are willing to risk everything to defend this Nation.

I urge my colleagues to support this.

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

Mrs. TAUSCHER. Mr. Speaker, I am happy to yield 1 minute to my friend and colleague the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. ALTMIRE), a conferee on this bill from the Committee on Small Business.

Mr. ALTMIRE. Mr. Speaker, I want to highlight two specific provisions that are included in this landmark legislation that we are discussing today.

This bill contains legislation that I, along with Congressman TOM UDALL, offered as an amendment during initial House consideration of this bill. It will allow military families to use family and medical leave time to manage issues such as child care and financial planning that arise as a result of the deployment of an immediate family member.

This bill also contains the language from my bill, H.R. 1944, that requires the VA to operate a comprehensive program of long-term care for rehabilitation of traumatic brain injury, which has become the signature injury of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. It also creates and maintains a TBI veterans health registry.

These provisions will directly impact and improve the lives of our brave men and women in uniform and their families. I am proud that they have been included in this bill.

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, may I inquire of the chairman as to how many additional speakers he has.

Mr. SKELTON. It appears we have no additional speakers except myself.

Mr. SAXTON. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time. First let me, again, sincerely thank Chairman SKELTON for the great job that he has done here bringing us to the floor with this bill today.

Mr. Speaker, President Ronald Reagan used to say that all of the things that Congress does are important and all the programs that we fund are great programs and important programs. But then he would say, ''But none of that really matters much if we don't have a good system to protect the American people and our national security.'' I have kept that in mind ever since I was a freshman here, because that was when I heard him say that.

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I believe that this bill today carries on that same kind of tradition, because we work together as Republicans and Democrats, understanding that we have a finite amount of money and resources to put toward our national security, and therefore it's incumbent upon us to do it the best way we can.

We do face a multitude of threats to our way of life and our national security interests, and as legislators, we therefore must accept that it is our responsibility to ensure that our brave men and women in uniform have the best available tools at their disposal to combat those threats and protect those interests.

The provisions of this bill go a considerable way in demonstrating that kind of support. And so I urge all Members to support this bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, before I make my closing remarks, I would yield 1 minute to my friend from Iowa, a member of the Armed Services Committee, Mr. LOEBSACK.

Mr. LOEBSACK. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank especially Chairman SKELTON for yielding 1 minute. I want to thank Chairman SKELTON and Ranking Member HUNTER for their bipartisan leadership on this bill. I am proud to work with them to restore the readiness of our military, support our deployed troops and their families, and increase the oversight of our ongoing presence in Iraq.

Our National Guard and active duty forces are stretched to the breaking point. This bill takes great strides to address this critical issue to ensure our Guard are properly trained and equipped to respond to threats both home and abroad. Moreover, this legislation includes an amendment that I offered with Representative CUMMINGS of Maryland which requires General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker to report to Congress every three months on the status of military operations and political reconciliation in Iraq. Such oversight is crucial to our ability to find a new way forward in Iraq.

I urge my colleagues to support this vital legislation, and I thank Chairman SKELTON once again for allowing me to speak for 1 minute.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Missouri is recognized for 30 seconds.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, we have a good number of provisions that have not been fully discussed today, including contracting reform and acquisition reform. We did speak of roles and missions. But I wish to stress, Mr. Speaker, of the years I have had the privilege

of serving in this body, this has to be the best, most comprehensive, troop-friendly, family-friendly and readiness-friendly bill that we have ever had.

When it first came to the House before we had our conference, it had a very, very strong vote here, and, Mr. Speaker, I hope we have as strong a vote when we seek the final passage on this bill today.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, I commend the gentleman from Missouri, Mr. SKELTON, chairman of the Committee on Armed Services, for his leadership in bringing the Conference Report on H.R. 1585, the ''National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008,'' expeditiously to the House floor. This legislation includes critical program and funding authorizations for the men and women in our Nation's armed forces.

This Conference Report contains several provisions that fall under the jurisdiction of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, including provisions that affect the Federal Aviation Administration, the United States Coast Guard, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the General Services Administration. I have no objection to the inclusion of most of these provisions.

I rise today in opposition to one provision in the final Conference Report that significantly affects the responsibility of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, ''Corps.'' Section 2875 rewards the city of Woonsocket, RI, for failing its statutory obligation to operate and maintain its local levee by shifting responsibility for this now-failing levee to the Federal government. Current law provides that operation and maintenance responsibility for flood control projects is a non-Federal responsibility. However, this section requires the Corps to conduct any repairs or rehabilitation of the existing structure, including its replacement.

This provision is bad policy, because it establishes the precedent that the Federal government will assume responsibility for failing flood control systems, which according to the Corps, may include an inventory of roughly 15,000 miles of levees and other flood control structures, nationwide.

This provision also creates the false impression that communities that sign contractual obligations with the United States, through the Corps, can have these contracts overturned by congressional action if the community can convince one Member of Congress that the community lacks sufficient resources to meet their operation and maintenance responsibilities.

The Corps is often called upon to construct flood control projects, in partnership with a non-Federal interest under a normal cost-sharing agreement. Once the project is completed, the responsibility for long-term operation and maintenance is transferred to the non-Federal interest. With the exception of the projects along the Mississippi River that are part of the Mississippi River and Tributaries project (MRT), the Corps is typically not responsible for operation and maintenance of flood control projects.

The Corps currently has responsibility for operation and maintenance of navigation projects. For these projects, the backlog for operation and maintenance of existing Federal responsibilities is roughly $4 billion annually, but appropriations for operation and maintenance have hovered around $2 billion. The result is that roughly 50 percent of vitally needed operation and maintenance responsibilities of the Corps are not being met, and are deferred to future appropriations. To shift additional operation and maintenance responsibilities to the Corps is unwise and is likely to impair the ability of the Corps to carry out its existing obligations for operation and maintenance.

During pre-conference negotiations, I proposed to provide the city of Woonsocket with some flexibility related to the cost of operation and maintenance of this project, but not a permanent blanket waiver of operation and maintenance.

I proposed two solutions, which I believe would have addressed the concerns of the city of Woonsocket. Unfortunately, the Senate was unwilling to compromise, and both proposals were rejected.

Both proposals would have authorized the Corps of Engineers to assume greater responsibility for the reconstruction of the failing levee system, but would have continued the long-term operation and maintenance responsibilities for the city of Woonsocket. I believe that both offers were made in the spirit of compromise without violating fundamental statutory and contractual responsibilities of the non-Federal sponsor. Both offers would have allowed the city of Woonsocket to start fresh with a structurally sound flood control system, provided that the city retained its obligation to operate and maintain the levee system.

I continue to believe that this shift of operation and maintenance responsibility is bad policy that will worsen the backlog of deferred operation and maintenance responsibility for the Corps and set a poor precedent of shifting responsibilities for other projects in the future.

I opposed a similar provision in last year's Defense Authorization bill that changed operation and maintenance responsibility from the local sponsor to the Federal government for another project in Rhode Island.

As chairman of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, I will continue to explore the implications of these changes in operation and maintenance responsibilities in the formulation of the Water Resources Development Act of 2008.

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this conference report.

I applaud Chairman SKELTON for his leadership in guiding this conference report to the floor today. He and Ranking Member HUNTER have done a tremendous Job, and they have been ably supported by the expert staff of our committee.

I'm particularly grateful to Chairman SKELTON for working with me to include things important for Colorado, including: a provision to keep the cleanup of the Pueblo Chemical Depot on track and fully funded; a review of DOD's training requirements for helicopter operations in high-altitude conditions, a provision that will help the High-Altitude Army National Guard Training Site in my district to establish its need for additional training helicopters; language requiring the Army to make its case for expansion at the Pinon Canyon Maneuver Site; an agreement between the Air Force and the city of Pueblo about flight operations at the Pueblo airport; a report on opportunities for leveraging Defense Department funds with States' funds to prevent disruption in the event of electric grid or pipeline failures; and restrictions on the move of key NORAD functions from Cheyenne Mountain to Peterson Air Force Base until security implications and promised cost savings are analyzed.

I am also pleased that the final bill includes two amendments I offered in committee, including one to repeal a provision adopted last year that makes it easier for the president to federalize the National Guard for domestic law enforcement purposes during emergencies. By repealing this, my amendment restores the role of the Governors with regard to this subject. My other amendment extends for 5 years the Office of the Ombudsman that assists people claiming benefits under the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program Act, EEOICPA, which is so important for affected workers from the Rocky Flats site in my district.

Mr. Speaker, this bill rightly focuses on our military's readiness needs.

After 5 years at war, both the active duty and reserve forces are stretched to their limits. The bill will provide what's needed to respond, including a substantial Strategic Readiness Fund, adding funds for National Guard equipment and training, requiring a plan for rebuilding our prepositioned stocks, and establishing a Defense Readiness Production Board to mobilize the industrial base to address equipment shortfalls.

It also provides important funds for the Base Realignment and Closure process, including additional funds to assist communities expected to absorb large numbers of personnel as a result of the BRAC decision. This funding is especially important to Colorado, given that Fort Carson in Colorado Springs will add 10,000 soldiers and will be home to 25,000 troops by 2009.

The bill provides substantial resources to improve protection of our troops, including additional funds for Mine Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicles, body armor, IED jammers, and up-armored Humvees for our troops in the field. Consistent with the Tauscher-Udall Army expansion bill in the last Congress, the bill enlarges the Army and Marine Corps to help ease the strain on our troops and provides for an increase in National Guard personnel. And it will provide for a 3.5 percent across-the-board pay raise for servicemembers, boost funding for the Defense Health Program, and prohibit increasing TRICARE and pharmacy user fee increases.

The bill incorporates provisions from the Wounded Warrior Assistance Act, which passed the House earlier this year and was driven by the revelations of mistreatment and mismanagement at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. These provisions establish new requirements to provide the people, training, and oversight needed to ensure high-quality care and efficient administrative processing at Walter Reed and throughout the active duty military services. The bill also establishes a Military Mental Health Initiative to coordinate all mental health research and development within the Defense Department, and establishes a Traumatic Brain Injury Initiative to allow emerging technologies and treatments to compete for funding.

Given the increased use of the National Guard and Reserves in recent years, the bill gives important new authorities to the National Guard to fulfill its expanded role, including authorizing a fourth star for the Chief of the National Guard Bureau, making the National Guard Bureau a joint activity of the Department of Defense, and requiring that at least

one deputy of Northern Command be a National Guard officer.

The final bill also addresses ongoing problems of contracting fraud by tightening controls on managing contracts and improving whistleblower protections, as well as improving accountability in contracting by requiring public justification of the use of procedures that prevent full and open competition.

I'm pleased that the conference report fully supports the goals of the Department of Energy nonproliferation programs and the Department of Defense Cooperative Threat Reduction program, consistent with the 9–11 Commission recommendations. The bill also slows development of a Reliable Replacement Warhead and establishes a bipartisan commission to evaluate U.S. strategic posture for the future, including the role that nuclear weapons should play in our national security strategy.

Mr. Speaker, the conference report we are considering today does an excellent job of balancing the need to sustain our current warfighting abilities with the need to prepare for the next threat to our national security. It is critical that we are able to meet the operational demands of today even as we continue to prepare our men and women in uniform to be the best trained and equipped force in the world.

This is a good bill, a carefully drafted and bipartisan bill, and I urge its passage.

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of the conference agreement on H.R. 1585 and would like to thank my distinguished colleague, Chairman IKE SKELTON, for his hard work and leadership on this important legislation. I am grateful for his partnership on critical matters of national security.

The struggle against terrorism requires a global campaign centered on engagement with the Muslim world. It also requires us to strengthen our partners' capabilities to fight terror and to maintain our own military capabilities in this area.

I welcome the efforts by the Committee on Armed Services to adjust the Department of Defense's legal authorities to meet this challenge. To its credit, the Department recognizes that ''soft'' power makes the use of military force more effective by fostering stability among vulnerable populations. To that end, the Pentagon has sought a variety of foreign assistance-related authorities traditionally implemented by the State Department.

I particularly welcome the Defense Department's efforts to address shortcomings in our national security bureaucracy. In the arena of stability operations, I, more than anyone, am aware of the budget shortfalls confronting the State Department, and I am fully aware that the men and women in uniform do not at times receive the expanded support that they need during stabilization operations.

I am also pleased that the Defense authorization bill follows the lead of H.R. 885, the Lantos-Hobson ''International Nuclear Fuel for Peace and Nonproliferation Act, passed by the House in June, to designate $50 million to support the establishment of an international nuclear fuel bank, under multilateral control and direction, to remove any rational incentive for countries to build their own uranium enrichment plants—facilities that can make fuel for both civil power reactors and nuclear weapons. It also supports international efforts to build international pressure on Iran by addressing Tehran's claims that it must build a massive enrichment facility because there is no international assurance of supply of reactor fuel.

Notwithstanding these gains, there are a few aspects of this legislation which require continued vigilant oversight by the Foreign Affairs and Defense committees. First, we must ensure that the administration and the Congress work together to develop appropriate nonproliferation safeguards for implementation of the fuel bank. In particular, I look forward to working with the executive branch on criteria for access by foreign countries to any fuel bank established by the IAEA with materials or funds provided by the United States.

Second, to the extent that core functions of the State Department are being duplicated by the Department of Defense, both the Defense and Foreign Relations committees must ensure that the national instruments of soft power remain coherent, coordinated and sufficiently authorized and funded. In the words of Secretary Robert Gates:

> If we are to meet the myriad challenges around the world in the coming decades, this country must strengthen other important elements of national power both institutionally and financially, and create the capability to integrate and apply all of the elements of national power to problems and challenges abroad.

We must ensure that the State Department in particular is adequately resourced to maximize its role in the fight against terror. Our oversight must also ensure that assistance is carried out both by the Defense and State departments in a coordinated, unified fashion. In that spirit, I look forward to reviewing the report required by Section 1209 of this bill, which will require the Department of Defense to provide a global snapshot of the foreign assistance activities it currently undertakes.

I again applaud the work of my colleagues in producing a bill that is a tribute to our men and women in uniform and advances American security.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 1585, the National Defense Authorization Act, NDAA, for Fiscal Year 2008. This legislation is vital to preventing terrorism and suppressing potential rogue states by updating our defense systems, which will in turn protect the future of our Nation and our men and women at home.

The ill-advised war in Iraq has put historic strains on our armed services.

Our readiness is at an all-time low not witnessed since the 1970s. The Army National Guard is operating with only 56 percent of its overall equipment needs.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, the funding and enactment of this bill is crucial. By authorizing $692.3 billion for defense and energy-defense related initiatives in 2008, this bill will strengthen our military. It will also honor our veterans with the efficient and cutting edge health care they more than deserve.

I am proud to say that an amendment that I introduced during the consideration of the NDAA before the House Committee on Armed Services makes certain that the voices of veterans are heard by vesting the Secretary of Veterans' Affairs with the power to appoint two members to the oversight board that will evaluate the current system and care provided to our veterans and active servicemembers.

Working diligently with the House Armed Services Committee, many of my recommendations to the NDAA bill regarding Operation Iraqi Freedom are included in the baseline text of this bill.

Namely, these recommendations address the need for proper oversight of the reconstruction efforts, putting an end to slanted no-bid contracts, along with the sharing and distribution of oil revenue resources to the Iraqi people so as to foster adequate reconstruction and facilitate national reconciliation.

Moreover, I am proud to have worked with my friend and colleague on the House Armed Services Committee, Congressman LOEBSACK, in the adoption of our joint amendment at full committee, which requires Secretary Gates, General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker to provide perpetual reports to Congress on the status and implementation of the Joint Campaign Plan, JCP, and the Iraqi Government's efforts to implement political reform until the end of U.S. combat operations in Iraq.

As such this amendment ensures that Congress is supplied with (1) the information necessary to provide proper and constructive oversight of our progress in Iraq, (2) sheds light on the conditions faced by our troops on the ground, and (3) supplies Congress with the crucial information needed to determine a responsible and timely troop redeployment.

While violence has dropped in Iraq, there is a window of opportunity for the Iraqi Government to make serious strides to achieve political reform and in doing so strategically bring our troops home. Therefore, while we continue to urge this administration to shift policy in Iraq to one that is driven by multilateral and bilateral diplomatic initiatives, we must also ensure that our remaining troops in Iraq are supplied with the support that they need. This bill provides over $17.6 billion for Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles and $8 billion to buy medium and heavy tactical trucks fast enough to replace battle losses and to meet National Guard requirements, which are currently at dangerously low levels.

Mr. Speaker, while we may be divided on the war in Iraq, we, must be united in guaranteeing that our brave men and women in uniform are well rested, well trained and well equipped—and that our veterans receive the services they deserve. We must also be united in ensuring that taxpayer dollars are spent as effectively and efficiently as possible. Therefore, I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of this critical defense bill.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Speaker, I oppose the provisions in this conference report, unilaterally added by the Senate, that provide immigration benefits to certain Iraqi refugees. As Ranking Member of the House ''Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, Refugees, Border Security and International Law,'' these provisions should have been discussed in their proper place, the House Judiciary Committee. However, I along with Ranking Member SMITH, were basically excluded from negotiations. There is no bipartisan support for these provisions in the House Judiciary Committee.

This bill grants special immigrant visas each year for the next 5 years to 5,000 Iraqi nationals and their families. The State Department has estimated that for every Iraqi national granted a visa, they will bring over at least four family members. Therefore, the number of special immigrant visas granted under this bill will reach 25,000 per year, or 125,000 total after 5 years.

Mr. Speaker, 125,000 Iraqis that support the United States would be a tremendous asset to

Iraq and the United States in the Middle East. These Iraqis should remain in their home country to rebuild it and encourage the spread of liberty. If we remove every Iraqi that is supportive of the U.S. from Iraq, terrorists will have the upper hand. Iraq and the United States need these patriotic Iraqis to remain in Iraq and rebuild.

While I sympathize with the Iraqi nationals who have been victims of this War on Terror, conditions within the country are improving. I encourage the Iraqis to stay and fight for their homeland and freedom alongside American troops. That's how we win this War on Terror.

For these reasons I oppose the provisions in the Conference Report to H.R. 1585 that provide U.S. immigration benefits to certain Iraqi refugees, and I urge my colleagues to do the same. Vote ''no'' on the Rule.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, while I cannot support H.R. 1585, this legislation does contain the provisions of H.R. 3481, the ''Support for Injured Servicemembers Act,'' a bill that I introduced in the House and which amends the Family and Medical Leave Act to provide 6 months of leave for spouses, children, parents and other ''next of kin'' to care for injured service members. H.R. 3481 implements one of the recommendations of the President's Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors, chaired by Secretary Shalala and Senator DOLE.

The Family and Medical Leave Act is intended to help individuals balance their family and work obligations. Ninety million working people are now eligible for unpaid job protected leave for up to 12 weeks a year. When the Act was passed in 1993, it was a giant step and is of great importance to working families.

Since a majority of military spouses work, they too must balance work and family. They work to put food on the table and support their families, just like the rest of us. But they face additional challenges because their lives are disrupted by multiple deployments, involving not only active service members but those in the National Guard and reserves as well.

The conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have resulted in over 30,000 casualties with many servicemembers being seriously wounded. These injured warriors need substantial support and care from their families, often for long periods of time, and some permanently.

The Workforce Protections Subcommittee, which I chair, held a hearing in September on H.R. 3481. We heard from several witnesses about the need for extended family and medical leave in these instances.

Unfortunately, this Administration has let down our returning service members and their families. Therefore, I introduced H.R. 3481, so no matter where we come down on the merits of these conflicts, we can help families who support loved ones who put their lives on the line in Iraq and Afghanistan. The provisions of H.R. 3481 will certainly help.

Mr. BERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of language in this conference report that includes several critical provisions to aid the resettlement of Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons.

First, I offer my sincere thanks to Chairman SKELTON and Senator KENNEDY for working to include this language in the conference report before us today.

Since our invasion, well over 4 million Iraqis have fled their homes as a result of political instability, economic catastrophe, and ethnic and sectarian strife.

Unable to legally find employment in their host countries, living in substandard housing with inadequate medical and educational facilities, many refugees simply have no place to turn.

While neighboring countries have struggled to cope with the strain of hosting millions of these refugees, our track record on refugee resettlement has been nothing short of an embarrassment.

As the refugee crisis unfolded in Iraq and its neighboring countries in the aftermath of our invasion, the Departments of State and Homeland Security stood by while a backlog of refugees referred by the United Nations for resettlement languished in the slums of Amman and other cities in the region.

This legislation will help make up for the administration's inexcusably lethargic pace by setting out clear refugee processing priorities, mandating the centralization of Iraq refugee efforts in the State Department, requiring greater cooperation with those allies in the region who are hosting many of these refugees, and increasing congressional oversight of refugee assistance and resettlement programs.

In addition, the language which we have worked together in great bipartisan fashion to include in this conference report also strengthens the Special Immigrant Visa program, for Iraqis who have worked for our Government and military in Iraq.

Many of these Iraqis who served bravely besides our troops and diplomats need our immediate assistance. Singled out as collaborators, they have been targeted by death squads, militias, and al-Qaeda.

Clearly, we owe them more than just a debt of gratitude. We owe them a safe haven and a fresh start.

While this legislation represents an important step forward in our commitment to these refugees, it cannot be the last word on the matter.

I look forward to working with my colleagues in the future to help us live up to our commitments to these refugees.

Ms. BORDALLO. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 1585, the National Defense Authorization Act for the Fiscal Year 2008. I urge my colleagues to pass the conference report because the bill improves the readiness of our men and women in uniform and takes necessary steps toward ensuring that our wounded warriors get the care they deserve. I want to applaud the leadership of Chairman IKE SKELTON for working closely with Members on both sides of the aisle and across the Capitol to ensure that the legislation before the House of Representatives today will truly help our servicemembers in the field.

I am especially pleased with section 374 of the bill, which provides for priority transportation on Department of Defense aircraft for military retirees residing in the United States territories who require specialty care that is not available in that territory. Specifically, a military retiree who requires specialty care and is under the age of 65 will be considered under category 4 priority instead of the current category 6 for space-available seats aboard Department of Defense aircraft. Section 374 also requires the Department of Defense to submit a report to Congress indicating how it will internally address the issue of improved TRICARE coverage in the territories. I worked with the Department of Defense over the past several years to address the specialty care travel dilemma but no satisfactory resolution ever emerged. The provision that I sponsored that is contained in this bill begins to address the concerns that have been raised by military retirees on Guam regarding their access to space-available seats on Department of Defense aircraft. This provision represents an improvement over the current situation but more work remains to strengthen TRICARE benefits for retirees in the territories. I thank the professional staff of the House Armed Services Committee who worked diligently with me and my staff to include this provision in the final version of the legislation.

The bill also includes language that allows the U.S. Army to remain as the program management executive for the joint cargo aircraft program. The provision requires several reports to be submitted to Congress before appropriated funds can be expended by the U.S. Army or the U.S. Air Force for procurement of additional aircraft. The joint cargo aircraft program is critical to replacing aging C–23 Sherpa aircraft that are operated by the Army National Guard. It is also critical so that certain Air National Guard units do not lose their flying missions. The joint cargo aircraft program provides critical intra-theater lift capabilities delivering supplies to servicemembers in the field. I thank my colleagues, Mr. COURTNEY of Connecticut and Mr. HAYES of North Carolina, for their support and leadership on this matter.

As I stated earlier, this piece of legislation helps to improve the readiness of our forces. In particular for Guam, the bill authorizes just over $290 million for military construction on our island. This funding will provide continued economic opportunities for businesses on Guam and begin to fund improvements to critical infrastructure that is needed before the realignment of military personnel begins. In particular, I requested a project be added to the bill to build a technical training facility at Northwest Field on Andersen Air Force Base. This project is a needed training facility for emerging missions at Andersen Air Force Base. As the 607th Training Flight ''Commando Warrior'' Unit moves from Osan Air Base, Korea they will need this facility to ensure optimal readiness for missions at Andersen Air Force Base.

Finally, I am encouraged to see portions of the National Guard Empowerment Act included within H.R. 1585. We will finally give the National Guard the recognition and tools that they need to continue operating as a dual-hatted force responding to crises at home and abroad. As a former lieutenant governor, I know first-hand, how brave, valiant and essential the National Guard is to the safety and security of our Nation. Elevating the Chief of the National Guard Bureau to a four-star general helps to give the Guard the priority in decisionmaking that it deserves. The provision making the National Guard Bureau become a joint activity within the Department of Defense is even more important. Now that the National Guard Bureau is a joint activity I hope that the Department of Defense will give very serious consideration to giving State Adjutants General joint credit for their service to the State or territory. The National Guard is truly a joint force and the work of their general officers should be recognized as such.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly urge my colleagues to adopt H.R. 1585.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, for years I have spoken out and voted against wasteful Defense spending that often serves to make us less safe and takes money from more useful programs. I am concerned that there is still too much money in this legislation for unnecessary weapons systems and other outdated holdovers from the cold war and too little to deal with the challenges of today. However, I am pleased that this bill takes some steps in the direction of reform, and I hope that it provides a platform for further progress.

I support this bill because it includes provisions from the ''Responsibility to Iraqi Refugees Act,'' which I introduced in May and which were added in the Senate as an amendment by Senator KENNEDY. This bill will provide 5,000 special immigrant visas for each of the next 5 years to Iraqis at risk because they helped the United States, require the Secretary of State to establish refugee processing in Iraq and other countries in the region, and direct the Secretary of State to designate a special coordinator at the Embassy in Baghdad.

We need a wholesale change in attitude that puts the needs of Iraqis at the forefront of our Iraq policy, rather than using them as pawns in political games. It is ironic, to be generous, to hear President Bush repeatedly talk about the humanitarian crisis and massive out-flows that would follow what he called a ''precipitous'' withdrawal. This only illustrates the state of denial over the humanitarian crisis currently happening.

This is one area where our moral responsibility to these unfortunate people can be used to bring together those of disparate viewpoints in a cooperative effort that might serve as a template for how we solve greater problems associated with the war. One of the burdens of those who would be world leaders and the responsibility of those who make war is to deal with the consequences of their decisions. Innocent victims of war and civil strife are too often the invisible and forgotten casualties.

Mr. ETHERIDGE. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this important legislation, and I commend my friend, Chairman IKE SKELTON for his leadership in crafting this bipartisan product.

I support this conference report because it focuses on the readiness crisis of the United States military and puts our men and women in uniform first and foremost. It will provide our soldiers in harm's way with the best gear and force protection possible. As a veteran of the U.S. Army and as the Representative for Fort Bragg, I support this bill that will provide our troops better health care, better pay, and the benefits they have earned.

America has the finest military in the world. Unfortunately, the current Administration's policies in Iraq have depleted our great military and put tremendous strain on our troops. Army readiness has dropped to unprecedented levels, and Army National Guard units have, on average, only 40 percent of the required equipment. And many stateside units are not fully equipped and would not be considered ready if called upon to respond during an emergency such as a hurricane.

This conference report helps restore our nation's military readiness by creating a $1 billion Strategic Readiness Fund to address equipment shortfalls, fully funding the Army's and Marine Corps' equipment reset requirements and authorizing $980 million to provide the National Guard and Reserve critically needed equipment.

This bill protects our troops in harm's way by authorizing $17.6 billion, an increase of $865 million, for additional MRAPs vehicle armor, $4.8 billion for anti-IED road-side bomb efforts, $3.3 billion for up-armored Humvees, $1.5 billion for add-on armor for other vehicles and $1.2 billion for body armor.

The measure supports our troops and their families, by giving the military a pay raise larger than requested by the President, prohibiting fee increases in TRICARE and the TRICARE pharmacy program, and strengthening benefits for the troops and their families, as promised in the GI Bill of Rights for the 21st Century.

It includes the Wounded Warrior Act, which responds to the Walter Reed Army Medical Center scandal by improving the care of injured soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan—addressing many of the issues raised by the Dole-Shalala Commission and implementing several of its recommendations.

It improves accountability and cracks down on waste, fraud and abuse in contracting including requiring new steps to manage and oversee contracts in Iraq and Afghanistan and requiring detailed new regulations for private security contractors, such as Blackwater employees, mandating the appropriate use of force.

The bill also includes new bipartisan reporting requirements under which DOD will regularly brief Congress on the planning taking place to responsibly redeploy U.S. forces from Iraq. It incorporates the National Guard Empowerment Act, which gives the National Guard enhanced authorities to fulfill its expanded role in the Nation's defense, including authorizing a fourth star for the Chief of the National Guard Bureau, requiring at least one deputy of the Northern Command to be a National Guard Officer, and making the National Guard Bureau a joint activity of the DOD. And it requires the Pentagon to include in its quarterly readiness reports the state-by-state capability of the National Guard to achieve its homeland and civil support missions, such as disaster response. The bill increases end strength by authorizing 13,000 additional soldiers for the Army and 9,000 additional Marines in FY 2008.

Significantly, this legislation provides all service members a pay raise of 3.5 percent, which is 0.5 percent more than the President's budget request, and increases monthly hardship duty pay to a maximum of $1,500 (up from $150 per month), and provides special pays and bonuses.

The bill will also upgrade military health care for our troops, veterans and military retirees. It preserves health benefits by prohibiting fee increases in TRICARE and the TRICARE pharmacy services for military personnel and retirees. It prohibits cuts in military medical personnel and fully funds the Defense Health program facility maintenance, particularly at Walter Reed. It extends VA health insurance for service members who served in combat in the Persian Gulf War or future hostilities for five years instead of two years. And the conference report enhances benefits specifically for reservists.

I commend my North Carolina colleague Congressman DAVID PRICE for his work on contractor accountability, and I support the inclusion in this conference report of his legislation to crack down on waste, fraud and abuse in contracting.

Mr. Speaker, there are many more provisions of this important legislation worthy of support, and I urge my colleagues to join me in voting to pass it.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. 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. SKELTON. 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.

DIRECTING THE CLERK OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES TO CORRECT THE ENROLLMENT OF THE BILL H.R. 1585

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, I send to the desk a concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 269) and ask unanimous consent for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the title of the concurrent resolution.

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

There was no objection.

The text of the concurrent resolution is as follows:

H. CON. RES. 269

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That, in the enrollment of the bill H.R. 1585, the Clerk of the House of Representatives shall make the following corrections:

(1) In the table in section 2201(a)—

(A) strike ''Alaska'' in the State column and insert ''Alabama''; and

(B) in the item relating to Naval Station, Bremerton, Washington, strike ''$119,760,000'' in the amount column and insert ''$190,960,000''.

(2) In section 2204(b)—

(A) in paragraph (2), strike ''Hawaii'' and insert ''Hawaii)'';

(B) in paragraph (3), strike ''Guam'' and insert ''Guam)''; and

(C) add at the end the following new paragraph:

''(4) $71,200,000 (the balance of the amount authorized under section 2201(a) for a nuclear aircraft carrier maintenance pier at Naval Station Bremerton, Washington).''.

(3) In section 2703—

(A) insert ''(a) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—'' before ''Funds'';

(B) in paragraph (4), strike ''$2,107,148,000'' and insert ''$2,241,062,000''; and

(C) add at the end the following new subsection:

''(b) GENERAL REDUCTION.—The amount otherwise authorized to be appropriated by subsection (a) is reduced by $133,914,000.''.

The concurrent resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.