

The Honorable Rob Wittman

Weekly Update

May 23, 2008

This week I was pleased to support the final passage of the Defense Authorization Bill for fiscal year 2009. I want to share with you some important provisions of the bill.

H.R. 5658, the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act of 2008, authorizes \$531.4 billion in budget authority for the Department of Defense (DoD) and the national security programs of the Department of Energy (DoE). The bill also authorizes \$70 billion to support ongoing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan during fiscal year 2009. H.R. 5658 strikes the right balance between funding the current needs of our men and women in uniform and providing for future capabilities and technologies to meet emerging threats. This bill supports our fighting forces and their families, and I am proud to be a member of the House Armed Services Committee that brought this vital legislation to the floor of the House of Representatives.

H.R. 5658 ensures that the U.S. Navy will be prepared to undertake the challenges of tomorrow by supporting and strengthening the fleet of today. The future of our national security will depend on a strong, viable naval presence to project force around the world in support of national security objectives. Emphasis is placed on lowering the overall costs of new shipbuilding programs in an effort to ensure that future vessels are affordable to the Navy and taxpayer. This portion of the legislation supports my objective to establish a 313-ship Navy as a floor, not a ceiling, and it contributes to the improvement and continued development of our industrial base.

The National Defense Authorization Act also meets the force protection and readiness needs of our troops serving overseas in harm's way. This bill improves the overall state of U.S. military readiness by directing nearly \$2 billion towards unfunded readiness initiatives requested by the Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps, provides \$650 million to improve the quality of our military barracks, directs the Department of Defense to submit a plan to replace all temporary facilities with permanent facilities by FY2015, provides an additional \$590 million to address training shortfalls in the Army, provides an additional \$954 million for depot maintenance on aircraft, ships and ground equipment, and adds \$70 million for unfunded Marine Corps readiness needs. Additionally, H.R. 5658 increases the size of the Army by 7,000 and the Marine Corps by 5,000 above the requested levels, building on the committee's previous work to grow and reset the force.

The legislation also provides a 3.9% across-the-board pay raise for all service members in 2009, which reduces the gap in pay increases between the uniformed services and the private sector to 2.9%. The Democratic majority did not accept the Republican recommendation to set the annual defense budget at 4% of the nation's GDP, but I will continue work on this vital aspect of budgeting that would enable our nation's military to receive stable and sufficient funding in their effort to defend our freedom.

Our committee's actions were instrumental in continuing to develop the industrial teamwork on the Virginia Class Submarine program and in promoting infrastructure and technology development on our nation's military bases, such as road access on and off Marine Corps Base Quantico and the Railgun project on Naval Surface Warfare Center Dahlgren.

I believe that this legislation reflects the Armed Service Committee's priorities in supporting our nation's dedicated and courageous servicemembers. I enjoyed working with my colleagues to pass H.R. 5658 in the House, and I look forward to completing work on the bill in Conference Committee so it can get to the President to be signed into law.