



PRESS RELEASE

House National Security Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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NATIONAL SECURITY COMMITTEE BIPARTISAN LEADERSHIP CALL FOR INCREASED DEFENSE SPENDING

House National Security Committee Chairman Floyd Spence (R-SC), Ranking Democrat Ike Skelton (D-MO) and senior committee republicans and democrats today joined together to call upon the President and the Congressional leadership to renegotiate the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 (BBA) in order to provide increased defense spending to address the military services' growing shortfalls.

In a letter addressed to President Clinton, Speaker of the House Gingrich, and the Majority and Minority Leaders of both the House of Representatives and Senate, senior members of the House National Security Committee expressed bipartisan concern with a widening range of quality of life, readiness and modernization shortfalls. According to the letter, if left unchecked, the risks of returning to a hollow military will grow and will jeopardize the nation's ability to effectively protect and promote its interests around the world.

"In the context of the first federal budget surplus in three decades and today's strong economy," the committee members wrote, "we call on you, the nation's bipartisan political leadership, to reopen negotiations on the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 in order to provide for a sustained period of real growth in defense spending."

The fiscal year 1999 defense budget request represents the 14th consecutive year of decline in defense spending. During the committee's recent oversight hearings on the fiscal year 1999 defense budget, the military services identified over \$58 billion in readiness, quality of life and modernization shortfalls in the fiscal year 1999 - 2003 five-year defense plan.

"When the balanced budget agreement was negotiated, I endorsed it as a significant step forward in terms of our nation's long-term economic security. However, at the same time, I also expressed my deep concern and view that the agreement might be a step backwards in terms of its impact on our national security," said Spence. "It is increasingly evident that we cannot maintain America's superpower status with the five-year defense budget called for in the Balanced Budget Agreement. How are the military services supposed to stabilize their downsized post Cold War force structure, protect quality of life and readiness, and end the decade-long procurement 'holiday' when their budget over the next five years falls more than \$54 billion short of even keeping pace with today's record low inflation?"

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“Chairman Spence and I agree,” said Skelton. “I would add that American service men and women should receive adequate support for their unselfish devotion to securing our nation’s interests around the world. The military is ready, for now. However, if we keep up the current pace of operations and deployments, we may not be ready five years from now.” Skelton continued, “I believe that addressing our needs at home and our requirements for a strong defense abroad are not mutually exclusive goals, but rather complimentary ones.”

Joining Spence and Skelton in signing the letter were Reps. Duncan Hunter (R-CA), Norman Sisisky (D-VA), Herbert Bateman (R-VA), Owen Pickett (D-VA), Curt Weldon (R-PA), Solomon Ortiz (D-TX), Joel Hefley (R-CO), Gene Taylor (D-MS), and Neil Abercrombie (D-HI). A copy of the letter is attached.

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