



PRESS RELEASE

House National Security Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 6, 1998

CONTACT: Maureen Cragin
Ryan Vaart
(202) 225-2539

OPENING REMARKS OF CHAIRMAN FLOYD SPENCE

FULL COMMITTEE MARK-UP OF H.R. 3616

THE FY 99 DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION BILL

May 6, 1998

Today the committee marks-up H.R. 3616, the FY 1999 Defense Authorization Bill. The bill is the product of many months of hard work on the part of all of my colleagues. We received the President's budget in early February and have conducted dozens of hearings over the course of the past several months. The bill is consistent with the President's budget request and the spending caps contained in the Balanced Budget Act.

As I have said before, while the Balanced Budget Act may have been a step forward on behalf of our economic security, I am not so sure the same is true for our national security. The agreement's defense spending numbers fall more than 54 billion dollars short over the next five years of keeping pace even with record low inflation.

After fourteen consecutive years of real decline in defense spending, and in view of the serious quality of life, readiness and modernization shortfalls afflicting all of the services, maintaining our all-volunteer force is increasingly difficult. I think the bipartisan letter calling for increased defense spending many of the senior members on this committee signed a few weeks ago demonstrates the seriousness of the problem. It is not easy for any politician to call for increased spending in this political environment, but most of us realize this is the "politically inconvenient" reality we face if we are going to maintain a military force consistent with our nation's global responsibilities and superpower status. No force — Base force, Bottom Up Review force or now, QDR force — can stabilize its force structure, protect quality of life and readiness and modernize aging equipment with budgets that are projected to fall below the rate of inflation, on average, 11 billion dollars per year each of the next 5 years. It is simply impossible.

With budgets like this, we can no longer claim to be revitalizing our military. We cannot even claim to be maintaining the status quo. We are therefore left to struggle with managing a level of risk that will grow every year. Despite shortfalls and declining budgets, the committee's efforts continue to focus on improving quality of life, ensuring readiness and pushing ahead with long overdue modernization. This focus remains bipartisan and it permeates the work of each subcommittee and panel.

Accordingly, I want to first thank the gentleman from Missouri, the committee's distinguished Ranking Member, for his dedication to this process and for his workman-like approach to all issues.

Let me also thank each of the Subcommittee and Panel Chairmen and Ranking Members for their hard work. You have covered a lot of ground in a short period of time. It is easy for me to establish a schedule and to set parameters. It is much harder to actually follow through, and that is what each subcommittee and panel has done. Finally, let me thank the staff who all too often get the blame yet rarely receive any of the credit.

Before recognizing Mr. Skelton, I would like to make several administrative announcements. First, however long it takes, it is my intention to finish markup today or tonight. Under the best of circumstances, today will be a long day. The committee may address some volatile issues so I want to remind all members to keep the debate substantive and not personal.

While debate is central to the democratic process, I would also remind members that they are on the wrong side of the Hill if they want to filibuster. For the good of all, I plan to keep the day moving along. But to make this work, I will need all member's cooperation.