



PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 28, 2000

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CHAIRMAN FLOYD D. SPENCE

STATEMENT ON H.R. 3906

The committee received H.R. 3906 on sequential referral from the Commerce Committee this past Friday, June 23. On its face, the bill, as reported by the Commerce Committee, appears to do little more than codify a security oversight organization that has existed within the Department of Energy for well over a decade. The Commerce bill appears to endorse this organization as the solution to the current security problems afflicting the nuclear weapons complex. However, this organization – the Office of Independent Oversight and Performance Assurance – is the same group that conducted a security review of Los Alamos last September and gave the lab a glowing assessment of what they found. The head of the audit team praised Los Alamos for “the best review we’ve ever done.... The most impressive inspection that we’ve ever had.” A press release on the inspection goes on to rank “the Laboratory’s efforts to safeguard nuclear materials as the best in the DOE complex.” Clearly, recent events have demonstrated that conclusion to be considerably off the mark.

Of more significance, I believe that the Commerce Committee proposal perpetuates the failed approach of the past that relied on DOE headquarters to manage security and other important functions of the nuclear weapons complex. The President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board and the Congress spoke loudly on that issue in creating what has now become the National Nuclear Security Administration as a semi-autonomous agency entrusted with this critical responsibility.

Therefore, I will shortly offer a substitute amendment to the Commerce bill that establishes a similar security oversight process in law, but places it under the NNSA instead of under the Secretary of Energy in keeping with the spirit and intent of what we legislated last year. This approach does nothing to disturb or preclude the current organization that reports to Secretary Richardson. Instead, it creates a new management tool that would be available for General Gordon as the new NNSA Administrator to better manage and oversee the vast security challenges facing the nuclear weapons complex.

I believe this is a more appropriate response to the problems facing the nuclear weapons labs and one that is consistent with the most recent Congressional action on this issue and urge the committee’s support.

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