

PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee Bob Stump, Chairman

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Statement by Chairman Bob Stump Floor Consideration of FY02 Defense Authorization Conference Report

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to bring before the House the conference report on the Fiscal Year 2002 Defense Authorization Act.

This legislation results from almost two months of intense conference activity resolving hundreds of issues in disagreement with the Senate. It is fair to say that this conference report represents the ultimate compromise as it has something in it to disappoint virtually everyone involved.

But, that is the nature of this process. You win some, you lose on others and the rest you try to find the middle ground. The important point, however, is that we have been able to reach an agreement that in the aggregate is a good bill that deserves the support of this House. This bill stays true to the bipartisan and bicameral goal of all conferees -- protecting the welfare of our fighting men and women during this time of crisis and providing the President and the Secretary of Defense needed tools to accomplish their difficult mission.

Over the strong reservations of many House members, including myself, we have agreed to authorize a round of base closures, but not until 2005. We also have ensured that the next round of BRAC will stay focused on the overriding objective of enhancing the military posture of the United States and not blindly saving pennies or cutting political deals.

This bill also places the decision process on the thorny issue of Navy training on the island Vieques back where it belongs - in the hands of Navy officials and out of the political realm.

The conference report also arrives at a good solution on how to proceed with the critical development of a Ballistic Missile Defense system. The agreement provides the President with the option to spend the full amount requested for this important program. It also strikes a good balance between the desire to extend the program needed management flexibility while retaining necessary oversight controls to ensure sound management.

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Finally, this bill authorizes the most generous military pay raise in 20 years, and provides a number of other enhancements of benefits for our men and women in uniform and their families.

Mr. Speaker, at this moment, halfway around the globe, thousands of sons and daughters are engaged in a noble cause against the forces of evil and intolerance. Our job is to support them, provide them the necessary resources and tools to successfully accomplish this task and ensure that they are safely returned to their families.

This bill provides for all those goals and I commend it to my colleagues for support.

Before concluding, I want to briefly express my thanks to all the conferees who have worked so hard on this legislation and in particular, my friend and partner, Ike Skelton, who has shared my firm commitment to ensuring that this bill and the interest of the troops was not sacrificed due to the political difficulties we faced this year.

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

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