

News from U.S. Rep. John Spratt (D-SC)

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US House of Representatives – Washington, DC

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House Backs Spratt “Mini-Nuke” Compromise

WASHINGTON -- The U.S. House of Representatives today approved by voice vote a motion by U.S. Rep. John Spratt (D-SC) urging adoption of his compromise allowing research but upholding the ban on development of new low-yield nuclear weapons.

Spratt, a senior member of the House Armed Services Committee, worked out the compromise earlier this year after the Bush Administration asked Congress to repeal the 1993 ban that Spratt authored. The Spratt compromise allows the nation’s nuclear weapons laboratories to conduct limited research on low-yield weapons, as many scientists have sought, but preserves the decade-old prohibition on development or production of new low-yield weapons.

“The House and Senate have both answered a specific concern raised by the weapons labs and the Department of Defense and agreed to allow basic research,” said Spratt. “But the House approach is better than the Senate’s because it’s a clear statement of U.S. policy against development of tactical nukes, and contains a stronger guarantee that the Congress will be an equal partner in any decision to move beyond research.”

Spratt co-authored the 1993 law with former Oregon Rep. Elizabeth Furse as a follow-up to the decision of President George H.W. Bush in September 1991 to withdraw land-based tactical nuclear weapons from overseas U.S. military bases, and sea-based tactical nuclear weapons from U.S. surface ships, submarines, and naval aircraft.

“That move by the first President Bush signaled the world that we wanted to minimize the role and possible uses of nuclear weapons, that the U.S. nuclear arsenal would be a strategic deterrent, and that we wouldn’t use nuclear weapons for tactical purposes, such as destroying ships or tanks” said Spratt.

“The U.S. move away from tactical nuclear weapons prompted the Soviet Union to move in the same direction,” continued Spratt. “Gorbachev shortly announced the elimination of warheads for land-based tactical missiles, mines, and artillery

shells; removed warheads from surface-to-air missiles; and withdrew all sea-based tactical nuclear weapons on naval aircraft,” he said.

“Together, these steps marked a major shift away from tactical nuclear weapons. The initiative by the first Bush Administration helped us persuade Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Belarus to forswear nuclear weapons. And these steps made it easier for us to convince much of the rest of the world to extend indefinitely the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, or ‘NPT.’

“I would not like to see us backtrack on these achievements, and I hope that the House’s position will prevail in conference with the Senate,” Spratt said.

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