



PRESS RELEASE

House National Security Committee

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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STATEMENT OF HONORABLE FLOYD SPENCE (R-SC) FY 99 DoD BUDGET - SECDEF/CJCS POSTURE HEARING.

Thursday, 5 February 1998

Mr. Secretary, General Shelton, let me welcome you both.

General Shelton, while you are no stranger to this committee, let me welcome you for the first time in your capacity as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. We look forward to working with you.

Let me also welcome Mr. Bill Lynn who is the department's new comptroller. Bill, congratulations on your "promotion" — we certainly also look forward to working with you.

For the member's information, we are starting 30 minutes later than usual in order to accommodate the schedule of this morning's prayer breakfast. The Secretary needs to leave here not later than 2:15 pm in order to participate in an Administration briefing elsewhere on the Hill. Under the circumstances, it is my intention to work through the lunch hour in order to give as many members as possible the opportunity to engage with the Secretary and General Shelton.

Mr. Secretary, I am sure you are tired of hearing the same old refrain from me and from many of my colleagues on the seriousness of the problems confronting our military. But as the problems get worse and solutions get harder to come by, the frustration level rises.

I am *frustrated* that the President devoted only one sentence in a lengthy State of the Union speech to the need to maintain a ready and modern force. The President warned in a recent speech at the National Defense University that "we must never, never take our nation's security, or those who provide it, for granted." He went on to say that "our obligation to our servicemen and women is to do all we can to help them succeed in their missions; to provide the essential resources they need to get the job done." I am *frustrated* that the gap between rhetorical promises and budget and operational reality is growing.

I am *frustrated* that the President is either unaware of, or has chosen not to acknowledge, the seriousness of readiness, quality of life and modernization problems that you, the services and the congressional defense committees confront on a daily basis. I am *frustrated* that the President's federal budget submission proposes more than \$100 billion in new domestic spending above the spending caps, but fails to propose one dime in increased defense spending.

Mr. Secretary, despite your success in convincing OMB to let DoD keep approximately \$21 billion dollars worth of inflation windfall and to allow the department not to budget what I suspect will be \$10-\$15 billion dollars over the next five years in Bosnia costs, I am *frustrated* that this budget continues to "rob Peter to pay Paul."

For example, this year's procurement request is \$2 billion dollars less than was projected for fiscal year 1999 at this time last year. And it is about \$5 billion dollars less than was projected for fiscal years 1999 and 2000. This year's research and development request is \$600 million dollars below current spending levels and is projected to decline by fourteen percent over the next five years. In the military construction accounts, this budget is \$350 million dollars less than was projected for fiscal year 1999 at this time last year, is \$1.4 billion dollars below current spending levels, and is an astounding \$600 million dollars below even last year's request. The unfortunate and all too familiar bottom line is that the long-term investment accounts are once again paying for short-term underfunded operating and support requirements.

It is in this context, with the President choosing not to educate and mobilize the American public on the need to address defense shortfalls, that we all struggle. The services struggle to make ends meet. Mr. Secretary, you struggle to manage a budget that ultimately cannot address the services' shortfalls. And Congress struggles to carry out its Constitutional responsibility to raise and maintain the military.

Starting this year, Congress certainly takes on a larger share of responsibility for the lack of viable solutions. Along with a majority of my colleagues, I voted for the budget agreement which locked-in the President's low defense spending numbers starting in fiscal year 1999. As I said at the time, I believed the budget agreement was a step in the right direction for the nation's long-term economic security, but a step backwards for our national security.

As I continue to struggle with these frustrations, I found particularly interesting a recent Washington Post op-ed by Robert Samuelson. In it, the author observed that the balanced budget is largely the result of some recent economic luck and, on the spending side of the ledger, of more than a decade of real cuts in defense spending – i.e., the "peace dividend" has played a major role in enhancing our economic security. The author contends that the reason cuts in defense have been largely ignored in discussions of how the balanced budget has been achieved is because they are "politically inconvenient" since, among other things, the cuts may have gone too far.

I think all of us who are struggling to address the services' shortfalls are confronting this political "inconvenience." As the Speaker indicated in a recent National Review article, fixing what is wrong with defense will require more than reform-generated savings – it will require increased spending. But increasing the defense budget will be "inconvenient" as politicians of both parties and in both branches of government seek additional debt reduction, tax cuts, more social spending or some combination of all three in a balanced budget environment.

And if the President refuses to use his “bully pulpit” on the issue of defense shortfalls, increased spending will also prove to be “inconvenient” for many of us. Not knowing that our military is having problems, average Americans (our constituents) are far more likely to see an immediate short-term benefit from a tax cut or increased social spending than they are from increasing the defense budget. In a world where politics and policy-making are increasingly driven by polls, addressing serious defense shortfalls unfortunately does not even rate an “honorable mention.”

Despite the growing frustration and the magnitude of the problem, our responsibility to continue to seek solutions to these problems, even if “inconvenient,” has not lessened.

It *may be*, with neither the President nor the Congress willing to commit additional resources to an underfunded defense program this year, that the real defense debate is about to begin. It *may be* that by trying to fix some of the services’ problems through the unprecedented step of increasing the President’s defense budget these past three years, Congress dared to put problem solving ahead of polling data. It *may be* that long-term solutions to quality of life, readiness and modernization problems will not be found until the force “breaks” somehow and public opinion demands that we fix it – regardless of cost. In this politically-charged and fiscally-constrained environment, there is a lot of concern and frustration, but also an ominous lack of commitment to take the steps necessary to solve the problem. I certainly do not have the answers right now, but neither, I believe, does this budget.

What we are then left to face is not the task of strengthening our military power in order to protect and promote the nation’s global interests and ensure its superpower status. Instead, we are confronted with the challenge of having to manage the growing risk associated with a shrinking force being asked to do more with less. It is reactive, not proactive. And it is not the foundation from which a viable post Cold War world national military strategy will be built.

At this time, and with a deep sense of sadness in light of his retirement tomorrow, I would like to recognize, certainly for the last time in this setting, my distinguished friend and colleague from California, the committee’s Ranking Democrat and former Chairman, Mr. Dellums, for any comments that he might like to make.