

House Armed Services Committee

Ike Skelton, Chairman

For Immediate Release: December 6, 2007

<http://armedservices.house.gov>

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AGREEMENT REACHED ON H.R. 1585, THE FISCAL YEAR 2008 NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION CONFERENCE REPORT

Skelton Says Bill Supports the Troops, Restores Readiness, and Improves Accountability

Washington, DC – House Armed Services Committee Chairman Ike Skelton (D-MO) announced today that an agreement has been reached on the conference report to H.R. 1585, the Fiscal Year 2008 National Defense Authorization Act.

The conference report to H.R. 1585 authorizes \$506.9 billion in budget authority for the Department of Defense (DoD) and the national security programs of the Department of Energy (DoE). The bill also authorizes \$189.4 billion for emergency needs, including resetting equipment to restore readiness, equipment to protect our deployed troops, and support for ongoing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan during Fiscal Year 2008.

In a statement, Skelton discussed some of the defense authorization bill's most significant provisions:

“This is a good bill that supports our troops, restores military readiness, and improves accountability to the American people. Our nation has a responsibility to do our very best for our military personnel. For service members and their families, the bill includes a 3.5 percent pay raise and prohibits increases in TRICARE and pharmacy user fees. The bill also includes the Wounded Warrior Act to address the problems experienced by wounded and injured service members that became apparent earlier this year at Walter Reed.

“Repeated deployments have placed an enormous strain on our forces and on their equipment, resulting in a military readiness crisis. This bill takes action to deal with our readiness concerns by fully funding Army and Marine Corps equipment reset, providing \$980 million for National Guard equipment, and requiring DoD to submit a plan for reconstituting our prepositioned equipment stocks. The bill also establishes the Defense Materiel Readiness Board and allocates \$1 billion to a Strategic Readiness Fund to address equipment shortfalls identified by the Board.

“To meet our urgent need to protect our troops in Iraq and in future conflicts, this bill authorizes \$17.6 billion for Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles. It adds to the President's shipbuilding request by adding advanced procurement funding for a Virginia-class submarine, an LPD class ship, and T-AKE class dry cargo/ammunition ship. The bill also authorizes 8 C-17s to help meet the demands for global power projection in today's world. But just as critical as equipment, the bill authorizes an end strength increase of 13,000 soldiers and 9,000 Marines.

“Recognizing the enormous contribution our National Guard makes to meet our security obligations, the bill also includes the National Guard Empowerment Act, which authorizes a fourth star for the Chief of the National Guard Bureau and requires at least one deputy of Northern Command to be a National Guard Officer.

“Oversight is a committee priority, and this bill brings much needed oversight to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Through new reporting requirements, developed on a bipartisan basis, the Pentagon will regularly brief Congress on the planning taking place to responsibly redeploy U.S. forces from Iraq. The bill also increases reporting on Afghanistan and creates a new Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction.

“The bill combats fraud by contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan by tightening the controls and encouraging the timely reporting of waste, fraud and abuse. This includes requiring the Department of Defense, the Department of State, and the Agency for International Development to clarify the roles and responsibilities in managing and overseeing contracts. The bill also improves protections for whistleblowers, on whom we depend to come forward to report the problems they discover.

“The bill also incorporates the Acquisition Improvement and Accountability Act, which includes provisions to improve the acquisition process and improve accountability in contracting. On a government-wide basis, federal agencies will be required to publicly justify the use of procedures that prevent full and open competition. DoD-specific acquisition reforms include the prohibition of Lead Systems Integrators (LSI) on any new programs after the year 2010.

“Building on the successful passage of H.R. 1, which fully implemented the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission, the bill authorizes funding to continue and expand the Department of Defense’s Cooperative Threat Reduction program and the Department of Energy’s nuclear nonproliferation programs. These programs address perhaps the single biggest threat to the U.S. homeland, the threat of nuclear terrorism and other weapons of mass destruction.

“Finally, this bill takes significant strides to ensure that the Department of Defense is able to posture itself to address new threats by requiring a quadrennial review of its roles and missions. This review will carefully examine whether the Department of Defense is truly developing the core competencies and capabilities to perform the missions assigned to it, and whether these capabilities are being developed in the most joint and efficient way by the military services. This question has not been seriously examined within the Pentagon for decades, with no truly significant changes made since the Key West agreement in 1948. As we confront a new set of security challenges, this review is definitely overdue.

“This defense authorization bill sets priorities that will support our troops in the field, enable our nation to meet immediate military requirements, and preserve our ability to deter and respond to future threats. I urge my colleagues to support this conference report.”

A detailed summary of the conference report to H.R. 1585 is available at <http://armedservices.house.gov/> .

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