

Defense Bill Passes the House

Provides vital equipment for troops and benefits for Active, Guard & Retired Military Service Members South Mississippi to receive \$6B in defense projects.

WASHINGTON, DC (May 17) — Today, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 1585, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008. This legislation authorizes \$503.8 billion for the Department of Defense and \$141.8 billion to support ongoing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan during fiscal year 2008. H.R. 1585 authorizes a total of \$4.6 billion dollars for the procurement of the Mine Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicles (MRAP). These vehicles are designed with a V-shape hull that provides a significant improvement over the U.S. military's other armored vehicles in protecting troops against underbody mines and IEDs. Representative Gene Taylor led the effort to provide an additional \$4.1 billion for the procurement of the MRAP vehicle—which has recently been identified by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates's number one acquisition priority for force protection. The defense bill also authorizes a 3.5 percent pay raise for our nation's military personnel. It also prevents the DOD from increasing healthcare fees charged to military retirees and their families. This controversial proposal called for in the Bush Administration budget request for fiscal year 2008. Additionally, H.R. 1585 contains the full text of the Wounded Warrior Assistance Act which makes needed reforms in the administrative processes whereby wounded services members transition from the DOD to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). These provisions are especially important given the recent reports about the poor treatment of wounded troops at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

"It's a time of war, and with this bill, Congress is finally responding to the needs of our service members and their families," added Taylor. In the Seapower portion of the bill, Congressman sponsored several key initiatives aimed at restoring our nation's Navy and expeditionary force capabilities. Over the past six years of the Bush Administration, the Navy fleet has declined by nearly 50 ships to a total of 275 ships—smaller than our pre-World War I fleet. To reverse that trend, this legislation adds three ships to the President's fiscal year 2008 requested level for Navy shipbuilding. Taylor stated, "With this bill, we are getting our nation back on a strong path toward achieving the Navy's requirement of having a 313 ship fleet." Other initiatives sponsored by Congressman Taylor in H.R. 1585 included a requirement that new classes of major surface combatants are designed and constructed with integrated nuclear power systems, and an initiative to allow the Secretary of the Navy to use procurement funding for capital investment in shipyards or shipyard contractor facilities, if the investment can be shown to result in overall cost savings to the government. The measure also contains a National Guard Equipment Fund which authorizes an additional \$500 million for the procurement of critical, high-priority equipment to address National Guard and reserve component unfunded equipment shortfalls. In addition, H.R. 1585 combines major provisions of H.R. 718, the National Guard Empowerment Act co-authored by Representatives Tom Davis (R-VA) and Gene Taylor (D-MS) as well as recommendations from the National Guard and Reserve Commission into a legislative package that includes an number of provisions including authorizing a fourth star for the Chief of National Guard Bureau, making the National Guard Bureau a joint activity of the DOD, and expanding the National Guard Bureau charter to include official coordination with federal agencies, states, Joint Forces Command and Northern Command on homeland and civil support activities.

Additionally, H.R. 1585 authorizes funding for procurement of defense items or research that supports the U.S. military. A significant amount of this work will be performed in South Mississippi including:

- \$3.4 billion for 2 LPD-17 Amphibious Lift Ships: These vessels are the modern replacement for the Navy's aging fleet of amphibious lift ships. The LPD-17 class ships are being constructed at the Northrop Grumman Ship Systems shipyards in Pascagoula, Gulfport, and New Orleans.
- \$2.8 billion for the 2nd Increment of funding for 2 DDG 1000 Destroyers: The DDG 1000 is the Navy's 21st century land-attack destroyer. Northrop Grumman Ship Systems in Pascagoula is the lead shipyard for this program.
- \$10 million for Advanced Composite Materials for Acoustic Window Applications: This research and development effort will increase performance and durability of sonar domes on the Navy's fleet of surface combatants. This effort will be performed by Seemann Composites of Gulfport.
- \$9 million for Special Operations Craft-Riverine Replacement Program: These craft will replace those used by U.S. Special Operations Forces. The SOC-R vessels are built by U.S. Marine Incorporated of Gulfport.
- \$3.8 million for CVN Propeller Replacement: This work to replace worn propellers from the Nimitz-class aircraft carriers will be performed at the Rolls Royce Naval Marine Foundry at Pascagoula.
- \$6 million for Advanced Lightweight Armor Materials for Ballistic Impact and Blast Protection. This research and development effort will be performed by Seemann Composites of Gulfport.
- \$2.2 million for CLUBS LIDAR for UAVs: This research and development effort will transition the CLUBS LIDAR capability to an unmanned aerial platform. This effort will be led by Optech International of Hancock County.
- \$1 million for Ruggedized/Mobile Secure 1000 Body Scanners: This research and development is focused on developing a quick-deployable mobile check point inspection capabilities for enhanced force protection. This effort will be performed by Rapiscan Systems of Ocean Springs.
- \$4 million for Live-Fire Shoot House/Urban Assault Course: This facility will improve training at Camp Shelby allowing troops to move tactically, engage targets, conduct breaches, and practice target discrimination in an urban environment.

"By passing this legislation, my colleagues and I in the House are making a substantial investment in our long-term national security, and I'm glad that we're taking care of one of our Nation's most important investments: our military service members," said Taylor.