

Our United States Constitution clearly outlines one of the primary roles of Congress – to “to raise and support Armies” and “to provide and maintain a Navy.” I spent most of last week working on legislation to fulfill that Constitutional duty and provide for our brave men and women in uniform. As a member of the House Armed Services Committee, I worked with my colleagues on the annual National Defense Authorization Bill, which sets the course for Department of Defense spending levels and programs. With America engaged in conflicts abroad and vital national interests at stake, it is critical that the committee and Congress get this bill right.

On Wednesday, after working for more than 12 continuous hours with a great deal of debate and dozens of votes, with my support the House Armed Services Committee approved H.R. 5136, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2011. The legislation authorizes \$567 billion in budget authority for the Department of Defense and the national security programs of the Department of Energy, in addition to funding for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. After my trip to Afghanistan and Pakistan last month and visiting the troops in the field, the importance of moving the bill forward quickly was evident, to provide the critical support and resources our service members need to be successful on the battlefield.

First and foremost, I am pleased the legislation addresses many of my priorities for our service members, their spouses and families. Among the important measures contained in the bill is a 1.9 percent basic pay raise. I was also very pleased that the committee adopted my amendment aimed at helping military spouses with employment programs and opportunities. The amendment directs the Government Accountability Office to conduct a study and provide an overview of what the Department of Defense is currently doing to support military spouses with employment programs and opportunities, and then provide recommendations for improvement. We cannot thank our military families enough for their service to our country, and it is my hope this study will benefit military families.

During debate, I co-sponsored amendments that dealt with our long-term national security strategy, policies to find the right balance between contracted and government work and ship-loan financing for our national shipbuilding industrial base. Additionally, I supported an amendment that provided assurance that U.S. troops serving as key life-saving combat enablers—such as those assigned to equip force protection, medical evacuation, and surveillance assets—will not be counted against the President’s authorized troop surge of 30,000 military personnel. Our troops require protection as they protect us, and it’s critical that the troop levels needed are not affected. It’s the responsibility of this Congress to ensure our deployed troops have the force level and resources they need to accomplish their mission with the least possible risk.

Furthermore, it is our constitutional duty to be responsible stewards of U.S. taxpayer dollars. We must do everything within our power to stop runaway federal government spending. As part of that effort, you have my guarantee that I will continue to root out any wasteful defense spending and look for efficiencies to generate savings.

I am extremely proud of the members of our U.S. Military. Each day, they accomplish so much to protect us here at home. And they know that each day, there is much at stake, for them, and for this nation. Our military has been, is, and will continue to be a force for good in the world, and, the simple truth is we should not be apologizing for America and our success. We will support our allies and hold our adversaries accountable for their actions. We must also not forget that we are a nation at war, and supporting those who keep us free is critical. Today, our hearts and prayers go out to all those serving in harm's way now and in the past, and especially to those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice while defending the very freedoms we have in this great nation.

Congressman Rob Wittman represents the First District of Virginia. He serves on the Natural Resources Committee and the Armed Services Committee where he is the Ranking Member of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee.