

May 19, 2008: Weekly Washington Update

Last week I was pleased to offer amendments to the FY2009 Defense Authorization Bill in the House Armed Services Committee, which were successfully adopted.

It was a long day (the Committee meeting lasted from 9am until 2am the next morning!), and I really enjoyed the debate and dealing with all of the different issues at hand. I was especially pleased to successfully amend the bill with the following provisions:

Carrier Amendment

This amendment would require the Secretary of the Navy to provide Congress a report assessing the cost and schedule implications of returning the USS Kennedy to service or keeping the USS Kitty Hawk in service, in order to maintain the statutory requirement of 11 active aircraft carriers, following the proposed decommissioning of the USS Enterprise and until the USS Ford reaches initial operating capability.

Nothing is more vital to our nation's forward presence than the aircraft carrier, and it is unacceptable to allow the total number of aircraft carriers to diminish. To allow the fleet to diminish to only 10 carriers is a threat to our national security.

Submarine Study Amendment

This amendment would require the Secretary of the Navy to assess the feasibility and cost of maximizing the service life and number of Los Angeles class submarines.

Submarines have been a central component of our naval forces for over a century. Our national defense demands that we have a strong and capable Naval Fleet, and we must maximize the use of the very capable Los Angeles class submarine. We must keep our number of submarines high, and this amendment requires the Navy to do exactly that.

Electromagnetic Rail Gun Amendment

This amendment would increase funding for programs associated with the Electromagnetic Rail Gun at Naval Surface Warfare Center Dahlgren.

This weapons system is needed to counter rockets, artillery, mortar, and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) for ship and expeditionary base defense and will ensure the safety of our fighting men and women. Such funding promotes the objectives of the Navy, outlined in Joint Vision 2020, and the development of directed energy weapons will provide unique capability against emerging asymmetric threats.

Submarine Force Structure Amendment

This amendment would require the Secretary of Defense to include an assessment of the attack submarine force structure requirement in the 2009 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) and to base such an assessment on combatant commander requirements.

In the last QDR, the Department of Defense did not mention the attack submarine force structure requirement, and it is time we revisit this issue. We must base our shipbuilding plan and our attack submarine force requirements on what the commanders in the field and on the seas need to accomplish their diverse and joint missions. Our Navy should be able to meet its operational requirements at all priority levels, and we should not be turning away missions and challenges that are vital to the security of our nation because of a lack of warships.

The Defense Authorization Bill will next go to the House Floor for consideration by the full House of Representatives.