

H. RES. 439

Resolved, That the following named Member be and is hereby elected to the following standing committee of the House of Representatives:

(1) COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES.—Mr. Panetta.

The resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. THORNBERRY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and insert extraneous material on H.R. 2810.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Texas?

There was no objection.

PERMISSION TO CONSIDER AMENDMENT NO. 88 PRINTED IN PART B OF HOUSE REPORT 115-212 OUT OF SEQUENCE

Mr. THORNBERRY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that during consideration of H.R. 2810, pursuant to House Resolution 431, amendment No. 88 printed in part B of House Report 115-212 may be considered out of sequence.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Texas?

There was no objection.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2018

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 431 and rule XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for the consideration of the bill, H.R. 2810.

The Chair appoints the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. MITCHELL) to preside over the Committee of the Whole.

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IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly, the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for the consideration of the bill (H.R. 2810) to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2018 for military activities of the Department of Defense and for military construction, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes, with Mr. MITCHELL in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The CHAIR. Pursuant to the rule, the bill is considered read the first time.

The gentleman from Texas (Mr. THORNBERRY) and the gentleman from Washington (Mr. SMITH) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. THORNBERRY. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chairman, I am proud to bring before the House H.R. 2810, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018. It was reported favorably by the House Armed Services Committee at 11:59 p.m. on June 28, 2017, by a vote of 60-1. Now, that vote is an indication of the bipartisan support that exists to support our troops and to fulfill our obligations placed on us by the Constitution.

Mr. Chairman, I think it is always helpful for us to remind ourselves of the authority by which we undertake our responsibilities. Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution says that Congress has the power and the responsibility “to raise and support Armies. . . . To provide and maintain a Navy; To make Rules for the Government and Regulation of land and naval Forces,” and, of course, “To make all Laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into Execution the foregoing Powers.”

The members of our committee and our staff take those responsibilities very seriously. This year, we seek to carry them out in a world which is as dangerous and complex as any of us have ever seen. One example from the news of the day is the alarming progress North Korea is making towards having an intercontinental ballistic missile that can carry nuclear weapons to our homeland.

Now, we have, of course, a number of tools to use, including diplomacy and sanctions, but there is no substitute for military power, and I believe we must develop and deploy more of it to be ready to deal with these growing threats.

So the bill before us today substantially increases money for missile defense so we are more capable of protecting our homeland against those ballistic missiles. It also increases funding for key munitions and for intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance so we can have better visibility on what adversary is doing.

It increases the end strength for the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force, just as they requested. And it funds more joint exercises with key allies in the Pacific. It boosts our shipbuilding budget to get more ships into the water faster, and also cheaper.

So, just as an example, Mr. Chairman, each of those items is important for dealing with this growing threat coming from North Korea, and we could sit here and go through a similar sort of discussion when it comes to Iran, or the provocative actions of Russia and China, or the terrorist organizations of various shades.

Of course, we cannot guarantee that the capabilities that we will vote on in this bill will be available by the time the crisis comes for, unfortunately, Mr. Chairman, we are still dealing with defense budgets that were cut by more than 20 percent at a time when the threats around the world were growing. So we can't guarantee that these capabilities will be available when we need them.

But what we can guarantee is, if we don't fund these things now, they will not be available when we need them, so that is the priority given to this bill.

Mr. Chairman, exactly 1 month ago, on June 12, Secretary Mattis and Chairman Dunford testified before our committee. And I would like to read just one paragraph of the Secretary's testimony where he was comparing what the military was like when he left it and when he came back as Secretary.

Secretary Mattis testified: “Four years later, I returned to the Department and I have been shocked by what I have seen with our readiness to fight. For all the heartache caused by the loss of our troops during these wars, no enemy in the field has done more harm to the readiness of our military than sequestration. We have sustained our ability to meet America's commitments abroad because our troops have stoically shouldered a much greater burden.”

Four years later, shocked, more harm by sequestration than the enemies in the field, and it is only because our folks are so incredible that they have born an increasing burden. That is what the Secretary testified.

Mr. Chairman, we have, indisputably, the finest military in the world, but it is also indisputable that it has been severely damaged by continuing resolutions, by sequestration, and by failure of the executive and legislative branches to adequately support the men and women out there on the front lines. We have an urgent need to begin to repair and rebuild our military.

And I also believe, Mr. Chairman, it is fundamentally wrong to send men and women out on dangerous missions without providing them the best equipment, in the best shape, with the best training that our country can possibly provide. This bill, if followed by matching appropriation, takes a significant step toward meeting that objective, to support those troops.

It also makes major reforms in the way the Pentagon does business. Among other reforms, it enables the military to buy commercial products through online sites such as Amazon, Staples, and Grainger. We require life cycle maintenance costs to be considered at the beginning of a program, as must intellectual property rights, to maximize competition in the maintenance and repairs. Oversight into service contracts has increased, and there is much more, of course, in the bill.

Mr. Chairman, this bill is the vehicle by which we usually, for 55 years, at least, fulfill our responsibilities under the Constitution that I mentioned, to provide for the common defense. I believe that is the first job of the Federal Government.

I want to just express my appreciation to each of the members of our committee. Each of them has contributed to the product before us. Each of them takes their responsibilities under the Constitution very seriously; no one more so than the Ranking Member, Mr.