

WASHINGTON – Today, Rep. Earl Blumenauer, a senior member of the House Ways & Means and Budget Committees, submitted the following statement to the Congressional Record regarding the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012 (NDAA):

Today I voted against the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012 (NDAA). While nothing is more important than providing the resources needed to keep America and our men and women in uniform safe, this authorization spends too much and is a missed opportunity for much needed reform.

First, however, I would like to thank Chairman McKeon and Ranking Member Smith of the House Armed Services Committee for including elements of all three of my amendments in this final conference bill. One amendment lifts the veil on classified immunity for defense contractors, a practice that exposed 36 of our Oregon National Guardsmen to toxic chemicals in Iraq. The other two will help protect our troops on the battlefield and save billions of dollars through energy efficiency initiatives. Their inclusion, however, does not offset the overall authorization which fails to reflect America's priorities or our national security realities.

It is deeply unfortunate that this legislation includes the appalling detention provisions and that the bill continues to tie the President's hands by restricting his ability to transfer detainees to the United States for trial in Federal Court are appalling. Preventing the administration from closing Guantanamo only serves to bolster Al Qaeda and erode America's security. There is no excuse – even in the name of fighting terrorism – for undermining our ideals. Beyond the practical security considerations, terrorism is an assault on those ideals and we should not further erode them in response to that threat.

One thing that most of the Occupy Wall Street and majority of the Tea Party advocates agree upon is that the United States is on an unsustainable path.

The economy is still floundering. We are losing the competition with other countries in the international arena when it comes to rebuilding and renewing America's infrastructure and making advances in education. Even our health care system, improved by the Affordable Care Act, still falls short of the systems in use by most of our major European competitors.

These glaring examples of un-sustainability for our infrastructure, our education system and our health care system are all troubling. None of this, however, compares with the un-sustainability of our massive defense and security spending. U.S. defense spending is bloated and not strategically oriented. We cannot continue to spend almost as much as the rest of the world – friend and foe alike – combined. We spend 6 times as much on defense as China, and 12 times that of Russia. Our Navy is larger than the next 13 navies combined.

People who are at the front deserve our best in terms of equipment, and they and their families need to be well-cared for, not just in the field, but when they come home. Our armed forces are stressed and continue to be hobbled by the reckless actions in Iraq and further challenged by the war in Afghanistan, and need to come home. We continue to spend in Afghanistan with no clear plan for withdrawal.

Today we have a reauthorization of the defense bill that fails to lay the foundation for the dramatic changes that are needed. Scaling back our open-ended spending commitments, nuclear weapons systems that we spend more on today than during the Cold War and are far more out of proportion to what we will ever need or use, patterns of deployment, for example, with our Navy, all cry out for reform. Long overdue elements to deal with cost effectiveness and the environmental footprint, energy costs at \$400 a gallon for fuel at the frontlines in Afghanistan, and tens of billions of dollars lost to inefficient air conditioning are missing.

The greatest threat to our future is losing control of our ability to make tough decisions that will enable us to sustain our military and, more importantly, to sustain the economy. In short, the NDAA ignores the big picture.

We should reject this blueprint and begin the process now of right-sizing the military, trimming our burdensome nuclear stockpiles and unnecessary programs, eliminating costly weapons programs, ending our misguided mission in Afghanistan, and moving away from a Cold War model of deployment with U.S. military bases all over Europe.

We have the most powerful military in the world and will by far even if we invest substantially less. Our problem is that the American public is being ill-served by government. We're not investing in our future, and our economy will not be able to sustain this ever-increasing military commitment, to say nothing of the demands of investing in our communities and our people, especially the young. This is another missed opportunity to set down a marker for real change, and to lead responsibly.

Blumenauer Votes Against Defense Bill, Calls Detention Provisions "Appalling"

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