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CONNECTICUT INDUSTRY TAKES CENTER STAGE IN PRESIDENT'S 2003 DEFENSE BUDGET

WASHINGTON, D.C. ♦ U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) today called President Bush's emphasis on Connecticut defense programs in his fiscal year 2003 budget request positive news for the state and the region. Larson cited the strong support for these programs as an example of the leading role Connecticut plays in national defense and prosecuting the war on terrorism.

Larson stated: "I have worked hard since first being elected to Congress to raise the profile of programs like the F-22 Raptor and Joint Strike Fighter and emphasize the critical contribution they make to our armed forces and national defense. The fact that these programs are receiving such strong support is due to the hard work and persistence of the Connecticut delegation and the Tactical Air Caucus working to educate other members of Congress and the Administration on this issue. It is good news for Connecticut's defense workforce and industry as well as for our armed forces. These programs represent the next generation of military technology that will be necessary to maintain our military superiority in the world."

The president requested \$5.2 billion for 23 F-22 Raptor aircraft and \$3.4 billion for the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF). The president's budget proposal nearly doubles funding for both of these programs over last year's levels. Also included in the defense budget request is \$437.6 million for 27 Blackhawk helicopters, \$910 million for the Comanche helicopter, \$2.4 billion for construction of a new Virginia class Submarine and about \$1 billion for the SSGN conversion initiative.

"Everyone in the state should be proud of the hard work, knowledge and experience Connecticut workers put in to ensuring the success and safety of the men and women in our

armed forces," said Larson.

Larson also praised the president's "First Responder Initiative," which would allot \$3.5 billion for local firefighters, police officers and state and municipal governments for the equipment, training, communications and strategic planning needed to deal with acts of terrorism. The president's proposal is similar to what Larson proposed last year in H.R. 3161, the Municipal Preparation and Strategic Response Act. Larson and several colleagues wrote to President Bush in January when he announced the program, asking to work with the Administration to help move the program through Congress.

Larson and his colleagues also asked that he consider eliminating the local matching fund requirements that exist with most of the programs currently in place with similar grants, work to expand funding for strategic planning for communities, and to have the majority of planning funds proposed in this initiative go directly to local communities.

Larson stated: "In order to meet and combat terrorism here at home, we must organize our homeland defense from the bottom up. This includes funding the training, equipment and strategic planning needs of local governments, firefighters, police officers, medical technicians and hospitals. They are our first line of defense against terrorism. In October last year I introduced the Municipal Preparation and Strategic Response act in the House which would fund these needs, so I am gratified to see the president propose this initiative."

Summary of items in the president's budget request important to Connecticut:

RAH-66 Comanche Helicopter

\$910.2 million

H-60 Blackhawk Helicopter (all services)

\$437.6 million, 27 aircraft

SSN-774 Virginia Attack Submarine

\$2.457 billion, 1 submarine

SSBN/SSGN Submarine Conversion

\$1.018 billion

First Responders Initiative (also in the President's budget)

\$3.5 billion for First Responders initiative that includes: \$105 million to support state and local governments in developing comprehensive plans to prepare for and respond to a terrorist attack \$2.1 billion for first responder agencies to purchase equipment \$1.1 billion for additional terrorism training for first responders \$245 million to support a coordinated, regular exercise program to improve response capabilities, practice mutual aid, and assess operational improvements and deficiencies

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