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LARSON: HOUSE DEFENSE BILL IS GOOD NEWS FOR CONNECTICUT

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WASHINGTON, D.C.- The House Armed Services Committee passed the National Defense Authorization bill for Fiscal Year 2005, H.R. 4200, late Wednesday night, which authorizes funding for national defense programs. Programs important to Connecticut were all funded at or above the President's budget request.

◆This bill fully funds the programs that are critical to the state's defense industry and workers,◆ said Larson. ◆This represents a very strong show of support for the F/A-22 Raptor, the Joint Strike Fighter, and especially the Black Hawk helicopter program, in the wake of the Comanche program being canceled. This the bill is good news for Connecticut and I will continue working to make sure these programs remain fully funded as the bill moves forward.◆

The bill includes:

- \$4.2 billion for the F/A-22 Raptor - 24 aircraft
- \$4.6 billion for the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) for Research and Development
- \$3.2 billion for C-17 - for both R & D and 14 aircraft
- Added \$156 million and 8 aircraft to the Black Hawk program over the President◆s budget request
- \$704 million for Up-Armored Humvees
- \$332 for Ballistic Armor for other Humvees and Trucks

\$421 million for additional ◆Interceptor◆ body armor sets

Also during the markup on Wednesday, Larson successfully added an amendment to the bill which will allow American troops serving overseas to be reimbursed for body armor they purchased - or was purchased on their behalf by their families or loved ones - because they did not yet have the most up-to-date protective equipment.

The program would be administered by the Secretary of Defense and would cover body armor purchases made between September 11, 2001 and December 31, 2003 for troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. Despite the fact that Congress had appropriated funding in an April 2003 supplemental spending bill for ceramic ◆Interceptor◆ body armor that gives greater protection to servicemen and women, many troops did not have the adequate armor until early this year. The measure requires the Secretary of Defense to issue regulations expediting the reimbursements within 60 days of the provision becoming law.

The committee also voted to allow military spouses to retain their full survivors benefits. Under current law, when a military widow reaches the age of 62, their spousal survivor benefits drop by a third, from 55% of their spouse's retired pay to 35%. The committee voted to provide the funding to phase out this penalty. House Democrats had been pushing for action on the issue through a discharge petition.

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