

LARSON: DEFENSE BILL A POWER GRAB BY RUMSFELD AT THE EXPENSE OF CIVIL SERVANTS

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WASHINGTON, D.C.- Calling it an affront to more than 700,000 civil servants who are employed at the Department of Defense and other federal agencies, U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) voted against sending the fiscal year 2004 Defense Authorization Act to the full House last night in the House Armed Services Committee.

"It is unfortunate that I was forced to vote against a favorable report of this bill to my colleagues in the full House, but I could not in good conscience recommend that they support this bill in its current form," said Larson. "I hope that by working with the Rules Committee to amend the bill on the floor or ultimately with our colleagues in the Senate, who have wisely chosen not to include these controversial riders in their version of this legislation, that we can end up with a clean Defense Authorization bill that we can all support.

"This incredibly broad legislation would give the Secretary of Defense sweeping new powers in the most dramatic change in the department since its creation in 1947. To give the Secretary the unlimited ability to restructure the civilian personnel system and eliminate all collective bargaining rights for more than 700,000 civil service employees in the Pentagon and other departments would be a disservice to the successful civil service system. This is the same system that has employed hundreds of thousands of dedicated civil servants who have served through nine wars and 11 presidents. Eliminating collective bargaining is not only a labor issue, it is an issue of civil rights for these men and women, who deserve better.

"This is an unprecedented power grab by Secretary Rumsfeld in an attempt to remake the Department of Defense in his own image under the guise of national security. The rubber stamp of approval given to this request, without thorough consideration of the proposal by the Committee noted by a hearing hastily thrown together only days before markup, represents the total abdication of the Constitutional authority and responsibilities of the House Armed Services Committee and the Congress of the United States.

"While I support many of the priorities included in the overall legislation, including the increases in basic pay to individuals serving in the Armed Forces, the Republican leadership has chosen to take this 'must pass' legislation and attach a number of extremely controversial riders that are not aimed at making sure our military needs are met, but at a much broader overall agenda being pressed under the guise of national security," said Larson.

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Congressman Larson is a Member of the House Armed Services Committee