

LARSON OFFERS HIS SUPPORT FOR PRESERVING VIEQUES AGREEMENT

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LARSON OFFERS HIS SUPPORT FOR PRESERVING VIEQUES AGREEMENT WASHINGTON - Speaking from the floor of the House of Representatives, U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) today urged Congress to preserve the agreement reached between President Clinton and the Governor of Puerto Rico, Pedro Rosellí, to hold a referendum to determine the future of the Vieques Island Naval training range.

Larson voted for an amendment, which the House approved, that eliminated Vieques-related language included in the Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2001 (H.R. 4205). This language would have prohibited the Secretary of the Navy from transferring portions of the training facility until live-fire training resumed on the Vieques range facility, even if the results of the referendum were in favor of the Navy withdrawing from the island. Earlier this year, the President and Governor Rosellí arrived at an agreement stating that a referendum would be held to determine the future status of the Naval training range.

"I supported this amendment because I believe it is the United States military's responsibility to protect the very democratic principles that this bill was prepared to revoke from the people of Puerto Rico," said Larson.

Larson has been a vocal opponent of continued live-fire training on the island since a Navy contract employee was accidentally killed in April 1999. He has written the President twice since the incident urging him to accept a democratic solution to the issue. In December, 1999 Larson met with residents and business owners along Park, Washington and Zion Streets in Hartford. He toured the area to gauge the community's reaction to the plan of action that was presented by the Administration to the Governor of Puerto Rico in December.

Larson toured the island of Vieques in February of this year, and met with local government officials to gain a better understanding of the debate over the island.

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