

LARSON CONDEMNS REPUBLICANS HOLDING DEFENSE BILLS HOSTAGE

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - Early Monday morning, Congress John B. Larson backed the Conference Reports for the FY2006 Defense Appropriations (H.R. 2863) and Defense Authorization (H.R. 1815) bills, which provides essential support for American troops and national defense.

"I am relieved at the passage of the defense appropriations and authorization bills despite the House Republican leadership's dedicated efforts to sabotage the process," Larson said. "I am aghast that the majority would put politics ahead of our national defense and our troops' safety. At any time, national security and the care of our servicemen should be immune to the special interest give away we have witnessed this weekend. But when our country is engaged in war, holding up defense bills to attach measures unrelated to our national security or support for the men and women of our military is reprehensible. They endangered our troops' welfare for the sake of political advantage. This kind of political extortion is cynicism at its worst, and I fervently hope that our nation's priorities never again take a back seat to partisanship self-interest."

The \$453.5 billion appropriations act and related authorization provide a 3.1 percent pay raise for members of our armed forces, increases the death benefit and benefits for permanently disabled troops, and increases active duty levels for the Army and the Marine Corps. The bills improve access to mental health care and takes steps to improve accessibility to the military's TRICARE health-care plan by expanding it to include certain members of the National Guard and Reserve.

For operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the appropriation bill includes \$50 billion in emergency stopgap funding until further spending can be approved early next year. The total includes \$1.2 billion for troop body armor, \$8 billion for equipment replacement and up-arming Humvees, and \$363 million for IED jammers.

The appropriations agreement also includes the so-called "McCain Amendment" barring cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of prisoners and detainees by U.S. military and civilian personnel.

"Continued support for essential defense programs such as the F/A 22 clearly demonstrate the importance of Connecticut's defense industry and skilled workforce to our nation's security," Larson said.

The conference report approves millions for First District fuel cell and aerospace technology projects. The Defense appropriations conference report also provides billions for major systems manufactured in Connecticut, including:

\$3.2 billion for 24 F/A-22 Raptors

\$4.9 billion for research and development of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter

\$3.5 billion for 15 C-17 transports

\$589 million for 26 UH-60S Navy Nighthawk Helicopters

\$558 million for 12 MH-60R Navy Seahawk Helicopters

\$660 million for 45 UH-60 Blackhawks for the Army and National Guard

Also included is non-defense funding of \$29 billion for recovery assistance to the hurricane-devastated Gulf Coast region and \$3.8 billion for Avian Flu preparedness.

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