

PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee Duncan Hunter, Chairman

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 12, 2004

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OPENING REMARKS OF CHAIRMAN DUNCAN HUNTER

Department of the Navy FY 2005 Posture Hearing

This morning the committee will continue its review of the Fiscal Year 2005 defense budget request, with a look at the Department of the Navy. Because votes for today were canceled, our attendance today may not be that high, but I wanted to proceed with this hearing because the issues we're going to discuss are too important to wait.

This year's defense budget requests \$119.2 billion for the Department of the Navy, \$3.9 billion more than the fiscal year 2004 peacetime budget. That's a good step in continuing on the path the President charted to restore the health of our military services after a decade of neglect in the 1990s. In particular, I'm glad this budget addresses some personnel issues that this committee has worked long and hard to get fixed, including the 3.5 percent pay raise and increases to basic housing and subsistence allowances so that our service people don't face any out-of-pocket expenses when moving into private housing.

I am also encouraged by significant increases for next generation systems, such as the DDX, the next generation aircraft carrier, and the Littoral Combat Ship. These all represent solid investments in the people who are protecting us today and the hardware that they'll use tomorrow.

Gentlemen, as you know, this Committee has long had bipartisan concerns about the adequacy of our force structure. The Global War on Terror has only increased the demands on our forces and heightened some of those concerns. While no one should doubt the readiness, lethality, commitment, or ability of the United States military to defeat our enemies in war, we do have to look ahead. The war on terror will be long and I have my doubts that the stresses we're currently experiencing will be temporary.

The good news is that the Administration is looking ahead too. General Schoomaker has already developed a concept for increasing the number of Army brigades without increasing end strength. The Navy has done something similar with this Fleet Response Plan, which would give us six highly deployable aircraft carriers instead of the four we're accustomed to having already deployed.

We should commend the Department for coming up with creative approaches to address the increased demands that the global war on terror is making on our forces, but the jury is still out as to whether it has come up with the ultimate solution. I hope that today's hearing will help us begin to answer these questions as our senior Navy and Marine officials walk us through the Fiscal Year 2005 budget request.

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