

This Week in Washington



WITH CONGRESSMAN
JO BONNER

House Panel Avoids Weighing In On Tanker Award

The House Armed Services Committee met last week to draw up the bill that sets defense spending levels for military programs for the upcoming fiscal year.

Many, including me, were concerned that provisions would be added to this bill, provisions detrimental to Northrop Grumman's contract with the Air Force to build America's new refueling tanker, the KC-45.

As you know, Mobile has been selected to be the site of two new manufacturing facilities that will employ at least 1,500 people and support 5,000 jobs throughout a tri-state area. The groundbreaking for the aircraft assembly plant at Brookley Field is scheduled for June 28.

Throughout this process, I have been in direct contact with the chairman and ranking member,

as well as most other members of the committee, appealing to them not to take the unprecedented action of intervening in a competitive source selection and undermining the integrity of our military procurement process. In so doing, Congress would deny the warfighter the very aircraft they had determined best met their needs.

The General Accountability Office (GAO), which serves as the impartial arbiter of all protests of Department of Defense (DoD) contract awards, is currently reviewing the tanker contract award, and is expected to issue its ruling by June 19, 2008.

I was pleased that after the end of this long markup, following our efforts to help neutralize committee members, members from the Washington and Kansas delegations realized they did not have the votes to support their efforts and chose not to offer amendments that would seek to reverse the contract award.

I would like to thank Congressmen Terry Everett (R-AL), Mike Rogers (R-AL), and Jeff Miller (R-FL) – all members of the House Armed Service Committee – who worked extremely hard to also influence their fellow committee members to refrain from interfering in the tanker competition.

However, this process is far from over as the bill now heads to the floor of the House for consideration by the full body.

House Majority Still Playing Games with Troop Funding

Last week, the House Democratic leaders had a choice to bring to the House floor a clean bill that would provide funding for our troops – ensuring our military men and women engaged in the Global War on Terror have the resources they need to succeed in their missions.

Instead, a bill, which completely bypassed the committee process and had the input of only a handful of legislators, was brought to the House floor as three separate amendments: war funding, troop withdrawal, and domestic spending.

This strategy pandered to anti-war Democratic Members allowing them to vote against the war without voting against funding.

The first amendment provided the funding for the war, including \$96.6 billion to fund the war for the remainder of FY08, which ends September 30, and \$65.9 billion for part of FY09.

The second amendment included provisions to tie the hands of our commanders on the ground and created a timetable for a withdrawal from Iraq.

The third amendment included \$39 billion in unrelated, domestic spending. In order to pay for the tens of billions of dollars in new spending contained in this bill, the Democrats also included a tax increase on small business owners, by imposing a tax hike on individuals making more than \$500,000 and couples making more than \$1 million.

According to the nonpartisan Tax Foundation, nearly 83 percent of filers in this tax bracket report some form of income from a small business, sole proprietorship, or partnership.

In short, this bill was widely recognized as never having a realistic chance of becoming law. It was a strategy designed to send a bill to the president's desk that provided both funding for our troops and language for withdrawal.

It was a white flag of defeat the president would never sign.

I joined 131 of my House Republican colleagues in withholding our votes in favor of this amendment in order to protest the handling of this bill.

The troop funding bill should be designed to do just that – provide funding to our troops – and that is the bill I will support. The sooner a clean funding bill can go to the president's desk, the sooner our troops in the field will receive the funding.

In an interview earlier this month, Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said, "We need (the supplemental appropriations bill) very badly before the Memorial Day recess. We stop paying soldiers on the 15th of June and we have precious little flexibility with respect to that. Clearly that creates incredible constraints on and difficulties for us."

Furlough notices are not the messages we in Congress should be sending our men and women in harm's way.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.

For release the week of Monday, May 19, 2008. For more information please contact Mike Lewis at (202)225-4931.