

DEMOCRATIC VIEWS MILITARY CONSTRUCTION APPROPRIATIONS 2004

**House Report 108-173 - MILITARY CONSTRUCTION
APPROPRIATIONS BILL, 2004**

ADDITIONAL VIEWS OF DAVID R. OBEY AND CHET EDWARDS

Over 1.4 million people serve our country on active duty in the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force. The Military Construction appropriations bill provides funding for the house and workplaces for these service members and their families.

Congress has long recognized that a substantial number of our military live and work in substandard conditions. Over the years this committee has worked in many ways to address this problem, consistently increasing funding in this bill well beyond the requests of the last several administrations. Regardless, our troops are facing an uphill battle: the Pentagon itself rates the readiness of most military facilities as marginal or worse, and over 225,000 service members and their families don't have decent housing.

As the tables in this report show, a total of \$10,698 billion was appropriated for Military Construction for FY 2003, but for FY 2004 the administration requested only \$9.196 billion. The committee, driven by a low allocation that followed from the unrealistic budget resolution, was forced to mark this bill \$41 million below the Presidents request, resulting in funding more than \$1.5 billion below last year's enacted level.

On March 21, 2003 the House voted to thank and support the men and women serving our country in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. We gave our 'unequivocal support and appreciation' to the members of the United States Armed Forces and their families.

Words are one thing, deeds another. Appropriating \$1.5 billion less than last year is no way to show support for service members.

This bill is not up to the job. Ill-advised tax cuts forced by unrealistic spending targets that cause reductions in many areas. The quality of life of our armed forces is clearly among them.

Military construction is not the only casualty of the majority's tax cuts:

It will force cuts in veteran's benefits.

There will be \$200 million in cuts to impact aid to the very same school districts that educate the children of military families.

As many as 230,000 military families have been cut out of the low-income child tax credit provision currently on the books.

It's easy to pass resolutions of support and appreciation. A realistic budget resolution, on the other hand, seems to be beyond the reach of this Congress, and the inadequate military construction funding--and its impact on military families--is one of the results.

The committee considered an amendment by Mr. Obey that would have worked toward correcting this problem by adding \$958 million, a little more than 10%, to the bottom line. The amendment was an opportunity for the committee to keep its promise to the troops by restoring the President's full request, and helping about 8,000 service members and their families get decent housing:

Reinstating the \$160 million in cuts from the President's budget for like hangars, maintenance shops, office space, and physical fitness facilities.

Adding \$480 million for family housing. That should help at least 2500 military families, a positive step toward replacing the 134,000 inadequate units that service members and their families are forced to live in today.

Providing another \$318 million for new barracks. That will help get 5,300 single service members into decent housing. The Pentagon says the total need is over 83,000 units.

The Obey amendment proposed offsetting the increases by making a one-time, one-year modification to the Jobs and Growth Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2003. This act provides huge tax cuts for the very wealthy. People with an Adjusted Gross Income of more than \$1 million are scheduled to enjoy a \$88,326 tax cut in 2004.

These are not just millionaires--these are people with annual incomes of more than \$1 million. There are about 200,000 people in this category. They are one-tenth of one percent of all taxpayers, but their huge tax cut costs the rest of us \$17.7 billion in just 2004 alone.

To provide more funding for military construction, the amendment would trim just 5% of the tax cut for these fortunate individuals for only one year. The average tax cut for persons with more than \$1 million in income would go from \$88,326 to \$83,546.

The amendment was defeated in full committee on a party line vote that is listed in this report. We regret that many of our Republican friends felt compelled to reject the amendment. It provided an opportunity to improve military housing and workplaces and keep our promise of 'unequivocal support' to our service members and their families.

Dave Obey.
Chet Edwards.