

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

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STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

The "Department of Defense Authorization Act, 1985" that I am signing today, H.R. 5167, continues our previous efforts to rebuild America's defenses. Although the funding is substantially below my original request and even below my request submitted as part of our Deficit Reduction Package last May, it is the most we could expect from the 98th Congress. And it allows us to continue our efforts, at a reduced pace, to preserve the peace and guarantee our freedom.

I am pleased that the major elements of our program continue to receive bipartisan Congressional support. Our strategic deterrent posture is being strengthened, and the B-1B and ICBM modernization programs are right on schedule. Congress has provided the funds necessary to enable the Peacekeeper to become operational within 2 years, and we are working hard on a new small missile. This program is important to our national security and to the achievement of real arms control, and I am confident that the Congress will keep the program on track.

Since the dawn of the nuclear age, we have sought to reduce the risk of war by maintaining a strong deterrent and by seeking genuine arms control. Our dialogue with the Soviets on arms control will also continue. We remain ready to reduce nuclear arms, ready to negotiate a fair deal, and ready to meet the Soviet Union half-way. With continued support from the American people and bipartisan support from the Congress, I am confident that we will see progress.

This bill also continues our efforts to improve the basic readiness and staying power of our conventional forces. Our men and women in uniform at last are getting the modern equipment and training they need to do their jobs. The job of rebuilding is not yet finished, but we have made a lot of progress in the past 3 years, and today, our military forces are better equipped, better trained, and better led than ever before.

I am also pleased that this bill provides our service men and women a fair and honorable wage. Once again, young Americans wear their uniforms and serve their flag with pride. We must not return to the days when our military people suffered low morale, and when they had to wonder from day to day if they could make ends meet. And the Administration is committed to the supplemental funding necessary to carry out the education program contained in this bill.

The Act establishes the United States Institute of Peace. I have been advised by the Attorney General that Section 1706(f), relating to the President's power to remove members of the Board of Directors of the Institute, is neither intended to, nor has the effect of, restricting the President's constitutional power to remove those officers.

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Much credit for passage of this bill goes to the Congressional leadership. Howard Baker worked closely with Tip O'Neill on the broad outlines of the compromise, and leaders like Mel Price, Sam Nunn, and Bill Dickinson accomplished the tough bargaining to achieve the final result. But as much as these fine legislators contributed to this bill and our security, there is one Senator whose contribution to our Nation's defense over the years has been unique and enduring.

That Senator is John Tower. The final passage of this Defense Authorization Act marks one of the last milestones in a legislative career spanning nearly 24 years in the Senate. His lasting contributions, and especially those during his outstanding service as Chairman of the Committee on Armed Services, bear the mark of a true statesman, and an extraordinary American. We can only hope that he will not consider his retirement from the Senate to be a retirement from public life. Thank you, John.

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