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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
UPON SIGNING H.R. 14262
THE DEFENSE APPROPRIATIONS ACT

THE ROSE GARDEN

12:47 P.M. EDT

Secretary Rumsfeld, distinguished Members of the House and Senate, members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, leaders in military-oriented and veterans organizations, ladies and gentlemen:

I am about to sign into law the Defense Appropriations bill for fiscal year 1977. This legislation represents substantial progress toward meeting the essential national defense requirements that I recommended to the Congress in January. This bill helps to reverse a steady decline in the real resources devoted to national security, which had become a pattern.

After eight years of decline, we are providing for real growth in defense spending.

I believe this bill reflects a new awareness that this country can no longer shortchange our national defense efforts. I commend the Congress and its leadership for joining with the Administration in reversing this trend. I am convinced that this new pattern must and will be sustained in future years, and I am personally fully committed to it.

I will insure that America's military forces remain unsurpassed, as they are today, but while this bill represents real progress, there is more to be done.

First, I have directed a number of actions to achieve major economies in the operation of the Defense Department. Other economies which would have saved approximately \$16 billion over a five-year period required affirmative legislative action.

Unfortunately, the Congress has thus far failed to act on a majority of these issues.

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Second, Congress has failed to authorize certain programs that are essential to our long-term defense policy. This is particularly true in the shipbuilding area.

Third, Congress has added funds for programs which I did not request in fiscal year 1977, funds which should be used instead for more important programs that Congress rejected. That is why on August 23 I found it necessary to resubmit authorization requests totaling \$2.4 billion to cover what I considered critical programs which were not approved by the Congress.

At the same time, I also asked for the deletion of programs totaling \$584 million in this fiscal year suggesting that these funds be applied against the programs that I had requested.

I am very pleased that the conferees in the House and Senate for the legislative appropriation bill have agreed to some of the steps that I have recommended.

This defense bill, however, represents overall very real progress, but there are other measures that I feel must be taken. The shipbuilding program is of critical importance to our future ability to control the seas in the event of conflict. The Sea Power Subcommittee of the House Committee on Armed Services has unanimously approved a \$1.1 billion program to begin work on the additional ships needed to strengthen our Navy. I urgently call on the Congress to approve this program before adjournment so that we can be assured our continued naval superiority during the next two decades.

I thank in particular those of you here today. I know and I deeply appreciate the efforts of all of you with respect to our national security. I share your dedication and I share with you the valuable contributions that you have made to the nation's freedom.

Thank you very much.

(The Defense Appropriations Act was signed.)

Again, thank you all very, very much. We are very grateful for your contributions and your support, and we will be continuing to sustain this effort, which is so important.

Thank you very much.

END

(AT 12:58 P.M. EDT)