

Calls for Greater Role for Guard in Pentagon

Washington, D.C. - Congressman David Price (NC-04) is spearheading an effort on Capitol Hill to protect the authority of governors to direct the National Guard during natural disasters and other emergencies. Price, a senior member of the House Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee, said he wants to ensure the most effective disaster preparedness and response possible, and he believes the state's traditional role of coordinating readiness and response with the National Guard has served North Carolina well.

In a letter authored by Price and sent yesterday to the chairmen and ranking members of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees, nine of North Carolina's representatives in the U.S. House called on their colleagues to reject a proposal in the 2007 Defense Authorization bill that would give the President the authority to wrest control of the National Guard away from governors during a federally declared disaster. The Tarheel state members are also seeking a greater role for the National Guard in the Pentagon's chain of command to reflect the expanded role of Guard forces since the 9-11 attacks. Joining the Fourth District Democrat in signing the letter were Reps. G.K. Butterfield, Bob Etheridge, Robin Hayes, Walter Jones, Mike McIntyre, Brad Miller, Sue Myrick, and Mel Watt.

"The National Guard has a successful record of working directly with states to prepare for and respond to catastrophic events," the representatives wrote. "The key to this success has been a clear chain of command under each state's governor that allows the Guard to efficiently and effectively deploy its resources," they wrote, adding that the new rule would create uncertainty during a time of crisis, when clear leadership is most needed.

The proposed federalization of Guard command is strongly opposed by the nation's governors, 51 of whom wrote the President about the issue in August.

The nine House members are also supporting provisions in the Defense Authorization Bill that would bolster the voice of the National Guard in military's chain of command. The proposal, contained in the Senate's version of the bill, would promote the Chief of the National Guard Bureau to a four-star general, require that the Deputy Commander of the U.S. Northern Command be a National Guard officer, and enhance the lines of communication between the National Guard Bureau and the military's leadership structure. Price has cosponsored similar

legislation in the House.

Price and his NC colleagues are seeking to influence House and Senate negotiators as they draft the final version the Defense Authorization bill, which is expected to be passed by the end of the month in both chambers.

A copy of the letter follows:

Senator John Warner

Chairman, Senate Armed Services Committee

Representative Duncan Hunter

Chairman, House Armed Services Committee

Senator Carl Levin

Ranking Member, Senate Armed Services Committee

Representative Ike Skelton

Ranking Member, House Armed Services Committee

September 19, 2006

Dear Chairmen Warner and Hunter and Ranking Members Levin and Skelton:

We are writing to ask for your support in addressing two issues critical to our National Guard in the conference report for the Fiscal Year 2007 National Defense Authorization Act.

First, we oppose the inclusion of provisions to give the President greater authority to take control of the National Guard during a federally declared disaster. The National Guard has a successful record of working directly with states to prepare for and respond to catastrophic events, including earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, and fires. The key to this success has been a clear chain of command under each state's governor that allows the Guard to efficiently and effectively deploy its resources. Federal usurpation of control over the Guard would create uncertainty over the command structure precisely when clear leadership is most needed, undermining states' ability to prepare for and respond to disasters.

Federal control would change but not enhance the military's overall role in disaster response. Ample authority already exists in both federal law and Defense Department doctrine to allow both National Guard and active-duty forces to participate in disaster response activities. This legislation would simply wrest control of the operations out of the hands of the officials best situated to lead a response tailored to state and local needs: state governors.

Fifty-one governors, including North Carolina Governor Michael Easley, have registered their opposition to the federal control provisions, and North Carolina National Guard leaders adamantly oppose them as well. We agree that these provisions would hinder the Guard's ability to carry out its dual mission and urge you to remove them from the final bill.

Second, we want to register our strong support for Senate-passed provisions that would enhance the voice of the National Guard in our military's leadership hierarchy.

As you know, Sections 932-33 of the Senate bill would promote the Chief of the National Guard Bureau to a four-star general position, require the Deputy Commander position at U.S. Northern

Command to be filled by a National Guard officer, and instruct the National Guard Bureau to establish more direct lines of communication with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, states and federal agencies. We believe these provisions are critical to adapting the military leadership structure to reflect the expanding role of the National Guard in our nation's defense, and we urge you to retain them in the conference agreement.

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the National Guard has been called upon at an unprecedented rate to defend our nation and respond to challenging domestic emergencies. The Fiscal Year 2007 National Defense Authorization Act offers Congress key opportunities to recognize its new and integral role in our national security. We urge your strong support for the National Guard as you negotiate the final legislation.

Sincerely,

David Price Brad Miller

G.K. Butterfield Mike McIntyre

Bob Etheridge Sue Myrick

Robin Hayes Melvin Watt

Walter Jones

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