FY04 DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION BILL (H.R. 1588)

HON. BETTY McCOLLUM

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 10, 2003

Ms. McCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in opposition to H.R. 1588, the fiscal year 2004 Defense Authorization bill. While I strongly believe we must support our armed servicemen and women around the world, this bill contains several unnecessary provisions intended to weaken employee protections and the environment while authorizing billions of dollars on a national missile defense policy that is unproven and untested. It is unfortunate that these controversial measures were included in such an important piece of legislation.

I agree that the Department of Defense (DOD) should have the flexibility to manage itself in an efficient manner and provide the strongest national defense. This flexibility, however, should not come at the expense of worker's protections. H.R. 1588 gives the DoD broad authority to strip almost 700,000 civilian employees of fundamental rights relating to due process, appeal and collective bargaining rights. This means the DoD will be able to fire employees with no notice and no opportunity to respond, prevent discrimination actions from being heard by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, strip employees of their right to join a union and repeal the laws preventing nepotism. Civil service employees at DoD have defended our Nation bravely and made enormous sacrifices to support the military effort in Iraq. DOD should not be given unlimited authority to trample on their basic rights.

H.R. 1588 also unnecessarily weakens longstanding environmental protections at our military facilities by lowering the accountability standard DoD must follow when recovering imperiled species under the Endangered Species Act. The new standard fails to ensure the DOD's conservation plans are actually effective in assisting the recovery of imperiled species. H.R. 1588 also creates a far less protective definition of 'harassment' of marine life by military activities under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. This new definition allows DoD to avoid ensuring its activities are conducted in a manner to minimize harm to marine life such as whales, dolphins and sea lions.

Although I fully appreciate the importance of military training and readiness, the DOD has not made the case that exemptions to important and long-standing environmental laws are necessary or that training is greatly impaired because of those laws. Furthermore, the President already has the authority to waive environmental laws if he deems it a matter of national security, and not once has a waiver requested by the President been turned down. Until our national security is at stake, no government agency—including the DOD—should be above laws that preserve our air and water and sustain America's wildlife.

This measure also authorizes $9.1 billion for the unproven and untested National Missile Defense system. This costly program fails to address the rising threat of a chemical or biological weapons attack by terrorists and will divert precious resources away from the very real human investments needed to keep our military, intelligence agencies and domestic security agencies strong. At a time when the Federal Government shortchanges our local communities and neighborhoods in their hometown security efforts, it is irresponsible to be adding billions of dollars to a risky National Missile Defense program. We must strengthen our home security and provide our citizens with the appropriate resources necessary to ensure a terrorist attack never happens again on American soil.

Although I oppose H.R. 1588, I am encouraged that the bill provides a significant boost for military salaries, health care, housing allowances and housing construction opportunities. We need to assure our military that as we continue to support their readiness capabilities, we remember the personal well being of the men and women in uniform as well as their families.

When the Conference Report on this bill between the House and Senate is addressed in the House, we will have another opportunity to pass a measure that reflects the critical needs of our military while protecting the civil service protections of our employees and our environment. I look forward to working with my colleagues on these efforts.

CONCENTRATION OF OWNERSHIP IN MEDIA

SPEECH OF

HON. BARBARA LEE

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, June 2, 2003

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) decision to allow for monopolies in media markets represents a grave day for free speech. It also represents the defeat of the belief that the American people will benefit from a variety of viewpoints on issues, not the few that will be ushered in by the huge media conglomerates.

The Bush Administration and FCC Chairman Michael Powell have bowed to the demands of giant media companies. These companies, in effect, claimed that they needed another government handout to remain ''viable,'' even though they have already been absorbing television stations and newspapers.

With this ruling, the Administration has also indicated that it is not interested in preserving multiple media voices and opinions in the electronic and print media industries. The old FCC rules protected the participation of minority-owned media outlets. In fact, with minorities owning only 3.8 percent of United States commercial radio and television stations, including 1.9 percent of the country's commercial television licenses, we need more protection, not less. Yet under the new rules, these minority-owned media outlets will be squeezed out by media conglomerates.

Mr. Powell also argued that new modes of communication, like the Internet and digital TV, reduce the need for these rules. Yet, television and newspapers remain the public's main sources of information. And while the Internet has certainly revolutionized our society, a look at the 20 most visited websites reveals that they are run by the same companies that own the most popular TV networks and newspapers. So Mr. Powell's argument holds no water.

Media ownership rules are actually more important now than they were 50 years ago because the power and resources of large media companies have grown exponentially over the last fifteen to twenty years. As a result, smaller, independent companies do not have the resources to compete with Viacom or Newscorp. These rules are needed to ensure that we don't lose what's left of our locally owned media and that we do have access to diverse sources of information.

By lifting these rules, we will lose our independent media watchdog. Americans don't want a handful of companies controlling their access to information.

We must now redouble our efforts to pass legislation that will ensure a democratic media. We must not only mobilize members of Congress but grassroots organizations to send a message that the exclusion of all other voices except those provided by the media giants is not acceptable for our society.

I am very disappointed that Mr. Powell and his allies on the FCC did not heed the American public's deep concerns and leave our media ownership rules intact.

TRIBUTE TO DON AND KARYL DiPRINCE

HON. SCOTT McINNIS

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 10, 2003

Mr. McINNIS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the fifty-seven years of public service Don and Karyl DiPrince have given to the public schools of La Junta, Colorado. Don and Karyl have made tremendous contributions in the lives of generations of La Junta's school children, serving as teachers, mentors, coaches and role models.

Don comes from a family of teachers and wanted to continue his family's tradition of helping youth, whereas Karyl decided to become a teacher because of her love of children. While Karyl has spent the majority of her career teaching fourth and fifth grades at West School, Don has spent many years teaching physical education and coaching baseball, basketball and football at the high school level. La Junta's children have benefited immensely from Don and Karyl's efforts both in and out of the classroom. Don and Karyl have shaped both the minds and the bodies of our children and we could not have entrusted this important responsibility to a more dedicated and beloved pair of public servants.

Mr. Speaker, it is with deep respect for Don and Karyl that I congratulate them before this body of Congress and this nation upon their retirement from La Junta public school system. They have dedicated over half a century of their lives to the advancement of Colorado's youth and their influence will not be forgotten. Don and Karyl, thank you and good luck to you in all of your future endeavors.