These are big steps backward. So is the provision that would allow geothermal-energy leases to be in effect converted into claims under the Mining Law of 1872.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, we need a well-designed policy to meet the challenges of our time, not a policy that will diminish our energy security. With the Middle East—the world's main oil-producing region—in turmoil, we must question the predictability of future foreign oil supplies. Fully 30 percent of the world's oil supply comes from the volatile and politically unstable Persian Gulf region. Yet with only 3 percent of the world's known oil reserves, we are not in a position to solve our energy vulnerability by drilling at home.

This bill does nothing to tackle this fundamental problem. I only wish my colleagues in the House could understand that a vision of a clean energy future is not radical science fiction but is instead based on science and technology that exists today.

In much the same way that America set about unlocking the secrets of the atom with the ''Manhattan Project'' or placing a man on the moon with the Apollo program, we can surely put more public investment behind new energy sources that will free us from our dependence on oil.

This bill would continue our addiction to finite and politically unstable energy resources, while undermining public health, the environment, and ultimately our national security itself. It should be rejected.

SUPPORT OF THE CONFERENCE AGREEMENT ON THE DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT (H.R. 1588)

SPEECH OF

HON. BETTY McCOLLUM

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, November 7, 2003

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the Conference Agreement on the Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 1588), and in support of our armed forces and the service men and women who defend our great country, and their families.

Unlike the Iraq War Supplemental, which I opposed, the FY04 Defense Authorization bill is not a ''blank check'' for the Administration. Rather, this bill was carefully drafted to address many of our military's most pressing needs. This legislation provides a substantial pay raise for service members, boosts military special pay and extends enlisted and reenlistment bonuses. Additionally, this legislation extends the military's TRICARE health coverage to National Guard and Reservists and their families if such service members have been called to active duty. 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.

The FY04 Defense Authorization bill also addresses the disabled veterans tax, or ''concurrent receipt'', by ensuring a significant number of disabled veterans will no longer be subjected to this unjust tax. As a cosponsor of H.R. 303, the Retired Pay and Restoration Act, I would have preferred the Defense Authorization bill include full concurrent receipt for all disabled veterans. However, this compromise is an important step forward and will allow the House to continue working toward the full elimination of the disabled veterans tax.

While I am supporting passage of this authorization, there are several provisions of this legislation that I oppose. The first regards civil service protections for civilian employees at the Department of Defense (DOD). 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 long-standing 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. I have voted time again to remove funding for the National Missile Defense system, but the Republican Majority defeated each attempt. It is a mistake to fund this unproven program while our citizens at home are without the appropriate resources they need to respond to a terrorist attack on American soil.

I have met with National Guard members, Reservists and regular military personnel who have chosen to put their lives on the line to protect our freedoms. They have sacrificed a tremendous amount, even when their service means putting their family's financial solvency at risk. We owe them our support and our gratitude.

As I stated above, this is not a ''blank check'' for the President. Rather, this legislation will go a long way toward helping our troops in their time of need.

TRIBUTE TO COLONEL MICHAEL VACCA

HON. GARY G. MILLER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, November 19, 2003

Mr. MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute today to one of our Nation's finest young men who demonstrated exceptional courage and concern for our troops. Colonel Michael Vacca of the United States Marine Corps is to be commended for his actions, and I applaud him for his dedication to the American spirit.

On the morning of August 26, 2003, one of the many brave soldiers from my district, Private First Class Daniel Humphreys, was injured while riding in a two-vehicle convoy heading north to Baghdad. When an Improvised Explosive Device hit the rear vehicle of this mission, the vehicle's tires were blown out, the engine and steering systems were destroyed, and Private First Class Humphreys was severely wounded along with other Marines. Private First Class Humphreys and his fellow Marines were taken to hospitals in Germany and Iraq for treatment, and Colonel Michael Vacca showed a tremendous amount of support for his Corpsmen that extended beyond the call of duty.

Not only did Colonel Vacca make regular visits to the hospital, he also notified the wounded soldiers' loved ones and kept them informed of their progress. When a soldier was unable to send word home, Colonel Michael Vacca did so with hope, enthusiasm and pride.

The men and women of our armed forces have been away from their families and friends defending democracy and freedom. Colonel Michael Vacca has not only put his life on the line for his country, he has also brought the spirit of his fellow Marines back home to their families.

Mr. Speaker, Colonel Michael Vacca is a true American hero, and this Congress should celebrate his outstanding service and loyalty to the Marine Corps and the United States of America.

CLEAN WATER ACT ROLLBACKS

HON. HILDA L. SOLIS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, November 19, 2003

Ms. SOLIS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring attention to efforts by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to rollback the Clean Water Act.

Several days ago, in the Los Angeles Times and other newspapers, an internal EPA memo was quoted saying that the EPA is preparing a rule that would eliminate Clean Water Act protections for, ''Streams that flow for less than six months a year . . .'' State and federal officials have estimated that up to 20 million acres of wetlands would be lost.

This preliminary rule would devastate the Southwest where many streams flow only seasonally or after rain or snowmelts. In Los Angeles County, our rivers are often only a trickle, since our community gets an average of 15 inches of rainfall a year. And we are not alone.