



Representative Blumenauer's Legislative Priorities for the FY16 Defense Authorization Act

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- Chairman Thornberry and Ranking Member Smith, thank you both for allowing me to testify before your Committee this morning.
- My remarks will touch on two very different issues, but will be united by a single theme – demonstrating leadership by making difficult choices.
 - The first is finding the resources, despite a tight mandatory spending budget, that will enable Congress step up and do the right thing by authorizing additional Afghan Special Immigrant Visas.
 - The second is preventing the U.S. from committing to the complete rebuild of our nuclear arsenal in a way that goes far beyond what's needed and what this country can afford.

Afghan Special Immigrant Visas:

- I have been involved with the Special Immigrant Visa – or SIV – programs for nearly a decade and it's one that may not even exist, had it not been for the partnership that I've had with this Committee and your staff.
- As a result of your leadership, you have enabled the U.S. to protect thousands of brave Iraqis and Afghans who risked their lives to aid and protect our soldiers.
- These Iraqis and Afghans worked as guides, interpreters, and drivers, and for their service they continue to be persecuted and tortured.
- Too often, these men and women have found themselves trapped in a bureaucratic nightmare while they and their family members are at risk of being assaulted, kidnapped, tortured, raped, or killed simply because they were helping Americans.
- The endless waiting game and uncertainty these individuals and their families face as is an anxiety that does not stop at the borders of Iraq and Afghanistan.
 - It travels across seas and into the homes of our servicemembers when they return, feeling as if they've left a brother in arms behind, to fight on their own.
- Mr. Chairman, I would like to enter into the record – with your permission – two letters.

- The first is from a Mr. Marc Chretien (Kree-Tan), the former political advisor to General John Allen, former Commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).
- The second is from General Stanley McChrystal, former Commander of ISAF and of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan.
- These are two men who understand the strategic importance of the SIV programs better than anyone.
 - Both conclude by calling on us to ensure we fulfill our promises to our friends and allies, as well as our men and women in uniform, and to ensure the U.S. has a functioning, sustainable and transparent SIV program.
 - I have worked with several Chairmen of this Committee to do just that, and I look forward to doing so again this year.
- Thanks to reforms included in the last two Defense Authorizations, State has been able to increase processing rates, going from an embarrassing 32 SIVs issued in all of 2012, to an average of 400 SIVs issued each month since January of 2014.
- The SIV program is now functioning at a level nearly commensurate with the critical duty it aims to fulfill – keeping our promises to our allies.
 - As a consequence of this progress, however, the well of SIVs will soon dry up, and the ball is back in Congress' court to act.
- The Fiscal Year 2015 Defense Authorization included 4,000 additional Afghan SIVs; a two year extension of the Afghan SIV program; and, extended the applicant deadline until December 31, 2015.
 - While the life of the program is not in immediate danger of expiration, the number of authorized Afghan SIVs could be exhausted as soon as this summer, and no later than October of this year.
 - State only has roughly 1,600 SIVs remaining.
- The need for the program remains significant and goes beyond the currently authorized pool.
 - According to State, there are over 10,000 Afghan linguists' with pending applications.
- I understand that for this Committee, providing additional Afghan SIVs is not a matter of policy – you have, time and again, shown leadership and support.

- It is, however, one of resources. The fact that the SIV program must be paid for out of Mandatory Spending – versus discretionary – makes the funding question all the more difficult.
- While your Committee cannot provide all of the roughly 10,000 SIVs still needed, I urge you to provide no fewer SIVs than you included the final Fiscal Year 2015 Defense Authorization – which was 4,000.
 - With that commitment, I will also continue to work with our friends on the Appropriations Committee to help shoulder this duty.
- Congress must find a sustainable way to operate this program so we don't come to the brink of crisis each year. I hope that beyond this Defense Authorization I can work with you to settle that question.

Nuclear Weapons & Related Programs Budget:

- I know that finding a way to adequately support the SIV program is not the only difficult choice you'll have to make this year.
 - Another will be fending off the unnecessary drive by many on your Committee to rebuild our nuclear deterrent beyond what's needed and in a way that threatens combat readiness and operations.
- A recent report from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates that U.S. nuclear weapons planning calls for spending more than \$350 billion over the next decade, and other estimates predict up to \$1 trillion over the next 30 years, to build a nuclear force that will far exceed what the administration and security experts have said will be needed to effectively deter a nuclear threat.
 - Such spending is not only problematic for taxpayers, but those deeply committed to a strong and capable military. We need to inject fiscal responsibility and strategic reality into the administration's nuclear weapons planning.
- Former military officials have acknowledged the administration's plan is unaffordable:
 - In 2013, former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General James Cartwright, said of U.S. nuclear weapons modernization plans, "The challenge here is that we have to recapitalize all three legs [of the nuclear triad] and we don't have the money to do it."
 - The recent National Defense Panel report called these plans "unaffordable" and a threat to "needed improvements in conventional forces."

- Frank Kendall, Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, has echoed similar sentiments, stating in December 2014 that “[w]e’ve got a big affordability problem out there with those [nuclear modernization] programs
- Not only are these plans unaffordable, but the scope is unnecessary:
 - The Pentagon’s 2013 “Report on Nuclear Employment Strategy of the United States” declared “that we can ensure the security of the United States and our Allies [and] partners and maintain a strong and credible strategic deterrent while safely pursuing up to a one-third reduction in deployed nuclear weapons from the level established in the New START Treaty.”
 - Other experts, including a commission chaired by former, General Cartwright, said the U.S. could go even lower without jeopardizing security.
- America must reconcile the facts: our Defense budget is already squeezed, a nuclear deterrent is irrelevant to current international security challenges such as ISIS, the Ebola virus in Africa or even Russian aggression in Ukraine.
 - And yet a nuclear deterrent is still a national security imperative nonetheless. Let’s do this right – it’s time for the U.S. to procure what it needs, and what it can afford.
- I have introduced the Smarter Approach to Nuclear Expenditures (SANE) Act – a bill that would save the United States approximately \$100 billion over the next 10 years by reducing or eliminating unnecessary nuclear weapons programs.
- As your Committee considers the FY 2016 Defense Authorization, I urge you to consider the approach taken by the SANE Act so that we can adopt a more practical and stable nuclear deterrent to reduce costs and risks without compromising U.S. security or that of our allies.
- Thank you.