

In the last two weeks, the USS *Wasp*, the USS *Oak Hill*, and the USS *Kearsarge* have returned home or are in the process of returning home. In both Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, the sailors and Marines aboard these ships cleared roads to ease the flow of people and relief supplies, conducted search and rescue missions, helped deliver much needed supplies, and most of all, were a daily reminder to those they met that our country helps its citizens.

Speaking to the high tempo at which these men and women were working, the Navy reports that during the 68-day period of its hurricane relief deployment, the *Kearsarge* "conducted more amphibious and flight operations than would be completed in a routine six-month deployment."

And I would be remiss if I did not mention the invaluable contribution of National Guard personnel, including those impacted directly by the hurricanes, and those from all over the United States, including my home state of Wisconsin.

I would urge the Defense Department, even as these ships return home, to continue to ensure that its considerable resources and assets remain available to help Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands in the trying weeks and months that still lay ahead. Our citizens in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands will need our help for many months to come and the military must continue to be a key part of that effort.

And I also strongly encourage the Administration to quickly send a new disaster funding request that accurately reflects the proposals that affected communities, including Texas, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands, have put forward outlining the federal aid they need to help communities rebuild better.

Again, I salute the men and women in and out of uniform who have been and continue to help their fellow Americans during this deadly and devastating hurricane season. They are doing their part; now this Administration and Congress need to do ours in the coming weeks.

IN RECOGNITION OF PHOENIX FIRE ENGINE COMPANY NO. 2

HON. MATT CARTWRIGHT

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, November 15, 2017

Mr. CARTWRIGHT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the Phoenix Fire Company No. 2 of Pottsville, Pennsylvania. The fire company will be celebrating its 150th anniversary on November 25.

The Phoenix Fire Company No. 2 originated from the Schuylkill Hydraulic Fire Company, which organized in April 1829 and was officially recognized the following year. This early company purchased a hand engine and was housed in Pottsville's original borough building. In 1861, a few days after the attack on Fort Sumter, the Schuylkill Hydraulic Company reformed into a military company called the Union Guards of Pottsville. They left for Harrisburg on April 24, 1861 and were greeted by Governor Andrew Curtin when they arrived.

Management of Pottsville's fire apparatus was then left to the borough council. The Phoenix Fire Engine Company was estab-

lished during reorganization meeting in September 1867. A hose carriage was purchased, and the company was headquartered at the corner of Centre and Norwegian Streets. In 1885, a cornerstone was set for a new fire house on East Norwegian Street, and this very house continues to serve as the station for the Phoenix Fire Company No. 2 today.

The company operated with horse-drawn equipment until summer 1919. In July that year, an American La France truck with a seventy-five-foot aerial ladder was purchased for \$18,000 and shipped to Pottsville. That truck saw extensive damage in 1925 when Phoenix Company responded to a major fire in Mechanicsville. After a six-month repair process, however, the engine was restored to working condition and served Pottsville well until 1939.

It is an honor to recognize such a historic and distinguished fire company. I am grateful for the Phoenix Fire Company's 150 years of outstanding service to our community, and you can count me as a strong supporter for a successful future.

CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 2810, NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2018

SPEECH OF

HON. PETER A. DeFAZIO

OF OREGON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, November 14, 2017

Mr. DeFAZIO. Mr. Speaker, I will vote against the Conference Report for H.R. 2810, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year (FY) 2018.

The agreement includes several provisions that I strongly support, including giving servicemen and women a well-deserved raise of 2.4 percent. Those who serve in uniform have made extraordinary sacrifices for our country and have earned and deserve a pay raise. The Conference Report also includes funding for Ukraine and Eastern Europe security initiatives to counter Russia's heightened military provocations and annexation of Crimea. Additionally, it includes a provision recognizing climate change as a direct threat to our national security interests.

Despite these important initiatives, I have strong concerns with the Conference Report. The agreement authorizes more than \$692.1 billion, which is \$74.2 billion more than the FY 2017 authorized level and \$26.4 billion more than the president's request. This includes \$65.7 billion to the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) fund, an account which is not counted in the budget and is not paid for. It adds to the deficit and is used as a slush fund by the Pentagon.

Unlike every other federal agency, the Department of Defense (DOD) refuses to complete a financial audit so taxpayers know how the biggest bureaucracy in the federal government spends their money. In fact, a shocking report released last December exposed \$125 billion in administrative waste that the Pentagon tried to bury from being viewed by the public.

The Conference Report also authorizes \$13 billion for the F-35 program, including 90 new planes, 20 more planes than the Trump Administration requested. While I strongly support a modernized military, I have serious con-

cerns about the growing costs of the F-35 program. The Pentagon has projected that the lifetime operating and sustainment costs for the F-35 fleet will total more than \$1 trillion.

I refuse to support increased bureaucratic waste at the expense of American taxpayers and our men and women in uniform. A more accountable and transparent department would ensure taxpayer dollars are directed towards the needs of our troops and the benefits they deserve, rather than buying unnecessary weapon systems, sustaining a Cold War era military force, and giving the president a blank check to fund wars Congress hasn't authorized.

I have always advocated for maintaining Congress's constitutionally-confirmed prerogative to declare war under the War Powers Act and limiting the President's authority to engage in armed conflict without the consent of Congress. I strongly oppose the NDAA's continued authorization of spending for wars that are not congressionally approved. The Pentagon uses the 2001 Authorization of Use of Military Force (AUMF) to continue to justify the more than 16 years our troops have been fighting in the Middle East. In his short time in office, President Trump has already sent troops to Afghanistan, Iraq, Niger, Syria, and elsewhere without seeking a new Authorization of Use of Military Force (AUMF), a violation of the War Powers Act.

Additionally, the Conference Report prohibits the closing of Guantanamo Bay, which costs more than \$100 million each year to house 41 prisoners and has been used as a top recruiting tool by terrorists. Frankly, the prison at Guantanamo Bay has been a black eye for the United States, has eroded relationships with our allies, undermined U.S. missions abroad, and put U.S. citizens and our troops at risk of retaliation.

Congress can make responsible cuts to our defense budget without jeopardizing the safety of our troops or undermining our national security. Fiscal responsibility and accountability at the Pentagon would allow for funds to be better spent supporting the basic needs of our troops, meeting our obligations to veterans of past wars, and ensuring our true defense needs are prioritized.

RECOGNIZING THE LIFE OF FALL- EN MISSISSIPPI SOLDIER ARMY PRIVATE FIRST CLASS (PFC) DAMIAN LAQUASHA HEIDELBERG

HON. TRENT KELLY

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, November 15, 2017

Mr. KELLY of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, today I rise in memory of fallen Mississippi soldier Army Private First Class (PFC) Damian Laquasha Heidelberg who paid the ultimate sacrifice on November 15, 2003, during Operation Iraqi Freedom. PFC Heidelberg was killed when two UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters collided in Mosul, Iraq. He served as an administrative specialist in the Army. PFC Heidelberg was assigned to 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

According to the Associated Press, PFC Heidelberg, a Shubuta, Mississippi native, was a former choir member and church usher. He