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Remarks on Signing the Department of Defense Appropriations Act and the Military Construction Appropriation Act

October 23, 2002

Good morning. Please be seated.

The security of the American people is the first commitment of the American Government. Our Nation faces grave new dangers, and our Nation must fully support the men and women of our military who confront these dangers on our behalf.

The Department of Defense and the Military Construction Appropriations bills I sign today will make our country more secure, make our military forces more prepared, and reward military families for their sacrifice in service.

These bills, passed with bipartisan support, send a message: America is united; America is strong; and America will remain strong.

I appreciate so very much Vice President Cheney joining me today. He is a great Vice President. I appreciate Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld joining me today. He's a great Secretary of Defense. I appreciate Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz coming. I want to thank Tom White, the Secretary of the Army. I want to thank the Members of the Congress who have joined us today, both Democrat and Republican: Senator Byron Dorgan of North Dakota, Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, Bill Young of Florida, Dave Hobson of Ohio, and Jim Moran of Virginia.

I want to thank the service chiefs who are here. They've done such a good job for our country. I want to thank their senior enlisted advisers. I want to thank the friends of the United States military who are here in the Rose Garden today. I want to thank those who wear the uniform who are here. And I welcome my fellow Americans.

Since September the 11th, Americans have been reminded that the safety of many depends on the courage and skill of a few. We've asked our military to bring justice to agents of terror. We've asked our military to liberate a captive people on the other side of the Earth. We've asked our military to prepare for conflict in Iraq, if it proves necessary. We're asking young Americans to serve in many places far from home and at great risk. We owe them every resource, every weapon, and every tool they need to fulfill their missions.

The best military in the world must have every advantage required to defend the peace of the world. And the best military in the world is making good progress on this, the first war of the 21st century.

It's a different kind of war. Our military knows it. After all, we're on an international manhunt. We're chasing coldblooded killers down, one killer at a time. And we're making good progress. We've hauled in or arrested, thanks to our military and our friends and allies, over a couple of thousand killers, and like number weren't as lucky. In either case, they're no longer a threat to the American people.

Sometimes the American people will see the progress we're making, and sometimes they won't. They just need to know that the United States military is after them, one person at a time.

The bill I sign today also sends a clear signal to friend and foe alike that it doesn't matter how long it takes to defend our freedom; the United States of America will stay the course. There is no timetable in the Oval Office here behind me that says at a certain period of time, we no longer care deeply about our freedoms, and therefore, we're going to quit. There's no such timetable. The bill today says America is determined and resolute to not only defend our freedom but defend freedom around the world, that we're determined and resolute to answer the call to history, and that we will defeat terror.

This year's defense bill provides nearly $355 billion to protect our country, more than $37 billion increase from fiscal year 2002—for fiscal year 2002. We're matching increased funding with clear priorities.

First, this legislation takes care of our men and women in uniform and their families. We provide the money for a pay increase of 4.1 percent for service members, provide for additional full-time support personnel for the National Guard and Reserves, continue to reduce the out-of-pocket cost for housing for our service members and their families.

The Military Construction Appropriations bill adds $10.5 billion for building and upgrading military installations and for military

family housing. We're taking care of our people. We want the people who wear the uniform to know America appreciates their service.

Secondly, this year's defense bill will ensure that our military is ready and well-equipped. We increased funds for operations and maintenance by more than $5 billion, provide nearly $72 billion for weapon procurement, an $11 billion increase. Today's American forces are ready and able to deploy to any point in the globe to defeat any foe, and we're going to keep it that way.

Third, this legislation begins developing the next generations of weaponry that will win battles in the future. We invest almost $58 billion in research and development. At the same time, the bill ends some weapons systems that aren't going to meet the needs of the future, and that's an important contribution to our military. To have the willingness to say, "This program works, and this one doesn't," is important. So we ended the Crusader artillery program, a program that was designed for a different era.

Instead, we will fund new systems, systems that will enable our military to do a more effective job at defending America and our freedoms, systems such as the unmanned aerial vehicles like the Predator and the Global Hawk that we've used so effectively in Afghanistan.

We fund efforts to adopt cold war systems like the Trident submarine to meet the new 21st century missions. We fund over $7 billion to protect America and our friends from the threat of ballistic missiles.

I'm grateful that Congress completed its important work on defense and military construction appropriations bills. I want to thank them for working hard on these two important pieces of legislation. I appreciate the bipartisan spirit.

There's still important work to complete. For example, Congress has yet to act on my proposal to nearly double overall funding for homeland defense, including my request for unprecedented funding levels for police and firefighters and emergency medical personnel who are on the frontlines of defending our citizens.

In addition, our new homeland—Department of Homeland Security is stalled in the Senate. The defense bill I will sign today funds our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines, all of which exist in a single Department. That Department was created by President Harry Truman when he reorganized our Nation's defense structure to meet the security threats of a new era.

Today we are once again in a new era. Yet our homeland security activities are spread among more than 100 different Government agencies. America needs a single Department of government dedicated to protecting our people and to protecting our homeland. We can't wait any longer. The threats to America are simply too great. Providing for the security of our country is a broader task than just keeping our military strong. I look forward to working with Congress on all the measures needed to build the strength and security of the greatest nation on the face of the Earth.

It is now my honor to sign the Department of Defense Appropriations Act and the Military Construction Appropriations Act.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:40 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. H.R. 5010, the Department of Defense Appropriations Act, and H.R. 5011, the Military Construction Appropriation Act, approved October 23, were assigned Public Law No. 107–248 and Public Law No. 107–249, respectively. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Statement on Signing the Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2003

October 23, 2002

Today I have signed into law H.R. 5010, the "Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2003," which provides $354.8 billion for national security programs administered by the Department of Defense.

I appreciate the bipartisan effort that has gone into producing this Act. It abides by an aggregate FY 2003 funding level that I support of $759 billion, which is consistent with the House-passed Budget Resolution. My Administration appreciates that the Congress has completed the FY 2003 Defense