



Congressman Neil Abercrombie *Representing Hawaii's 1st District*

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Abercrombie Provisions Prevail In 2010 Defense Legislation

(WASHINGTON, DC) - As House and Senate negotiators reached agreement on the 2010 National Defense Authorization Act following weeks of negotiations, Rep. Neil Abercrombie's priorities are apparent in several sections of the nearly \$700 billion measure that authorizes all operations of the U.S. military and the Department of Defense.

Abercrombie, who chairs the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Air and Land Forces, added language to the bill to provide a competitive engine for the new F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, which is still in development. Congress has argued for several years that having a "back-up" engine, in case of problems with the first, will ultimately save money. In fact, a Defense Department report concludes that a back-up engine will ultimately save the F-35 program \$2.2 billion. The original engine design has already had three ground test failures, including one last month.

"The F-35 will eventually comprise 90% of the country's fighter aircraft fleet, for the Air Force, Marine Corps and Navy," Abercrombie said. "Complete reliance on one type of engine would not be wise, particularly when that engine is already 50% over its cost estimate and continues to have problems in testing."

Such a situation occurred when the Air Force awarded a sole source engine contract for the F-15 fighter in the 1970s. When that engine proved unreliable, a lot of first line fighter aircraft had to be grounded, and an urgent, expensive effort was launched to build an alternate power plant. It was called 'The Great Engine War,' and it cost billions of dollars.

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Abercrombie also included language in the bill to reform the hiring process for the Guam military construction project.

The 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force, with 8,000 Marines and supporting units will relocate from Okinawa, Japan to Guam, requiring the largest military construction project since the end of World War II. An entire military base has to be built from scratch, including headquarters, communication, transportation, supply, training and transportation facilities, barracks for enlisted and officers, a hospital, and family housing for an estimated 9,000 family members who will accompany the force to Guam.

Abercrombie focused on the estimated 15,000 construction jobs that will be created. “The model for large construction projects on Guam has been to outsource the work; to allow labor contractors to bring in thousands of foreign workers, pay a bounty of \$1000 per worker to the Government of Guam, pay the workers bare subsistence wages with no benefits, house them in work camps and charge them for room and meals,” said Abercrombie. “The House Armed Services Committee agreed that since we were building a base for the U.S. military in a U.S. territory paid for with U.S. dollars, it made sense to make as many jobs as possible available to U.S. workers, especially when unemployment for American construction workers is hitting 20%.”

The final language in the Defense Bill requires that Guam contractors advertise and recruit U.S. workers, under oversight from the U.S. Department of Labor, before any foreign workers can be hired.

Abercrombie also wanted to bring construction wages up to the level of many U.S. labor markets. Guam business interests fought that off, but Abercrombie won approval for a requirement that the Guam wage rates cannot be kept artificially low by including low wage foreign workers in calculations. Guam’s current prevailing wages are lower than all 50 states, yet the cost of living nearly equals Alaska and Hawaii’s.

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