

VETO OF H.R. 10929

MESSAGE

FROM

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

VETOING

H.R. 10929, THE "DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE APPROPRIATION
AUTHORIZATION ACT, 1979"



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To the House of Representatives:

I am returning without my approval H.R. 10929, the "Department of Defense Appropriation Authorization Act, 1979." I am doing so because I cannot, consistently with my constitutional responsibilities, sign into law a bill that in my view would weaken our national security in certain critical areas and wastes scarce defense dollars. The Congress inclusion in this bill of a number of lower priority programs would force out of our defense budget certain central elements of our program, items needed now to modernize and bolster our military forces.

I believe that the defense of the United States needs to be strengthened. An adequate defense is the single most important concern I have as President. Accordingly, I submitted to the Congress in January of this year a budget request for the Department of Defense which would if enacted provide the defense we need. It requested \$126 billion for the Department of Defense for fiscal year 1979. That amount was judged by me and by the Secretary of Defense to be adequate to provide for the military security of this country in fiscal year 1979, provided it was wisely spent.

The bill I am returning does not spend wisely. Instead, it actually would lead to less defense capability than I have requested. It does this by eliminating funds for high priority defense requirements and adding funds for purposes which do not meet our defense needs. Most notably, it would take nearly \$2 billion from the total and set it aside for purchase of a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier—a ship which in the end would cost at least \$2.4 billion, plus additional billions for its aircraft and the additional ships needed to defend and escort it.

We need more immediate improvements in our defense forces. A new nuclear-powered aircraft carrier would not be commissioned until 1987.

To spend \$2 billion in defense dollars in that way would ignore much more serious and immediate defense needs. Other programs have been cut, during the appropriation process as well, to stay within Congressional budget limits. The effect would thus be to take away funds urgently needed by the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps for high priority programs—and to use those funds to build the most expensive ship in history. The result would be to weaken our military security in several critical areas, particularly during the next 2 years, at a time when we should be strengthening it. Within the \$126 billion allocated for defense, we cannot have both an adequately balanced defense program and the luxury of an unneeded nuclear-powered aircraft carrier.

In pushing a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier into a \$126 billion defense budget, H.R. 10929 would result in reduction or elimination of these essential programs, and a consequent weakening of our defense posture:

(III)

- Weapons and equipment for the Army.* I requested a \$1 billion increase to strengthen our ground forces, particularly our NATO-oriented forces, by providing more helicopters, combat vehicles, and ammunition for our frontline forces. Adding the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier means eliminating \$800 million of that increase.
- Weapons and equipment for the Air Force.* I requested more funds for airlift, electronic warfare equipment, and electronically guided ordnance. Adding the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier means eliminating \$200 million of this increase.
- Readiness funds.* It makes no sense to have military forces if their equipment is not in condition to fight. I requested an increase of \$1 billion for items which are not glamorous, but which provide the immediate fighting capability of our forces—funds (requiring appropriation but not prior authorization) for repairs of weapons, spare parts for vehicles and aircraft, ship overhauls, training of personnel, communications, and logistical support to move equipment to where it is needed. Adding the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier means eliminating half of that increase in fighting capability—some \$500 million.
- Research and development.* To sustain our position of excellence in a world of weapons increasingly dependent on technology, I requested a 3 percent real growth in defense research and development. Adding the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier leads to an actual reduction in research and development. The bill also shifts some R. & D. funds from high priority programs to less important ones.

Our Navy has for a decade been moving in the direction of larger and larger, more-and-more-costly ships, and fewer of them. As a consequence our fleet today is smaller than at any time since 1940. We need a fleet that includes more vessels that can perform our Navy's mission but that are not, as this one would be, so designed as to be prohibitively expensive to build. The Navy does not need a fifth nuclear-powered aircraft carrier. It can maintain a 12-carrier fleet and maintain the fighting capability it needs from a conventionally powered carrier, which I shall request in my budget for next year, at a saving of \$1 billion for that single ship. Without this kind of discipline and control of the cost of ships, our Navy will not long be able to carry out its missions.

For these reasons, I must withhold my approval from H.R. 10929. I adhere firmly to my request that the Congress provide \$126 billion for defense in fiscal year 1979. But I ask that the Congress delete the authorization for the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, and use that essential \$2 billion of that \$126 billion instead for as many of our programs as possible from the following critical areas:

- \$1 billion for Army and Air Force equipment*—For helicopters, transport aircraft, combat vehicles, electronic equipment, ammunition and ordnance and other weapons and equipment.
- \$500 million for improving readiness in all the armed services*—For a wide variety of items, ranging from repair of weapons to spare parts stockage to improved training and logistical support.
- Up to \$500 million for research and development*—For pro-

grams proposed in my fiscal year 1979 budget but deleted by one or another Congressional action.

—*Naval ships*—It is crucial to maintain an appropriate overall annual level of ship construction. The Congress should return all of the general purpose ships requested in our budget.

These are the ways in which our defense dollars need to be spent. These are the ways in which they will add to our military security, by obtaining the greatest military capability for each dollar and by focusing the effort where more effort is needed.

In light of the continuing Soviet buildup, we must not reduce our own real defense capability, either by cutting the budget amount I have requested, or by substituting for high priority defense requirements programs which are less urgent or less effective.

If we do not spend our defense dollars wisely, we do not provide adequately for the security of our country. I know that the Congress and I share common goals. I ask the Congress to cooperate with me to help our Armed Forces use their funds in ways which produce the greatest fighting power, and to provide the men and women of our Armed Forces with the kinds of weapons, equipment, and other items of support which they need to do their jobs.

JIMMY CARTER.

THE WHITE HOUSE, *August 17, 1978.*