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From: "Strider, Burns" <Burns.Strider@mail.house.gov>
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Congressman Ronnie Shows
Mississippi's 4th Congressional District

Weekly Column, Week of March 26th, 2001
For Immediate Release

Today's Date: March 23, 2001

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Our Military Needs More Support

America's first line of defense from aggression and those who oppose freedom is our military. Our national defense must stand strong. I am concerned that we are not providing the resources needed for new and modern equipment, decent health care and higher pay for military personnel. We are trying to do too much with too little concerning our defense budget.

President Bush's defense budget for 2002 provides 325 billion dollars for national security. This represents an increase, but how much? Remember that we have to keep our promise to our military retirees and fund the health care provisions Gene Taylor and I initiated and passed into law last year. And then we have to adjust for inflation. And when we do that, guess what? The increase is about 100 million dollars.

If any of us won that much in a lottery, we'd be rich. But in the Defense Department, what does 100 million dollars do? Well, 100 million dollars is a pay increase for every soldier - of one dollar and eighty-five cents per pay period. Or it's 1/45th of an aircraft carrier. Or it fixes the gymnasium at West Point. Or it runs the ballistic missile defense program - for six days. Or it's one and a half F-15 fighters. You pick whichever you like, because for that money you only get one choice.

Cuts in our military are on the way because a budget such as this one is outpaced by both inflation and crucial upgrading and resource needs. What will get cut? We could cut procurement, if we can find a way to keep planes designed in the 1960s and built in the 1970s in the air safely, and if we are willing to let the Navy slide below 300 ships. And if we are ready to stop the Army's acquisition of armored vehicles for its current dismounted infantry. I'm not willing to do any of those things, and I hope the Pentagon isn't either.

How about operations and maintenance costs? Well, if we are willing to train our soldiers less, and let our ammunition shortages grow. We could cut flying hours even more, and stop repairing the USS Cole at Ingalls in Pascagoula. We could live with the health care shortfalls. But I don't want to tell the troops we're not going to help get them off food stamps, and I hope none of my colleagues are, either.

Well, then, could we cut military construction? We could if we were ready to give up on repairing dilapidated military housing, and stop adding protection against terrorist strikes. There just aren't any easy choices when you have 100 million dollars to pay for defense needs that add up to around 8.3 billion dollars.

Our military, our national defense is a priority. We must have the best and brightest of our citizens protecting us with the most modern and advanced equipment. The current budget proposal just doesn't do what it takes to recruit the best soldiers and develop and build the most advanced equipment.. It falls short and I will work to see this corrected.

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Ronnie Shows represents the 4th Congressional District of Mississippi in the United States Congress. Shows serves on the Committee on Agriculture, Committee on Veterans Affairs, and the Committee on Financial Services. He may be contacted by writing to: 1408 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515, or by calling his Jackson Office at 601-352-1355 or Washington Office at 202-225-5865. Congressman Shows can also be contacted on the World Wide Web at: <http://www.house.gov/shows> <<http://www.house.gov/shows>> .