

Earlier this week I was given a new committee assignment, to the House Armed Services Committee (HASC). This was an appointment that I had lobbied for since my election in December and one that Republican Leader John Boehner assured me I would be given. In addition, I will serve as a member of the Seapower and Expeditionary Forces Subcommittee and the Readiness Subcommittee.

The First Congressional District has a long tradition of representation on the HASC, and I am honored to continue that legacy as the newest member of the Committee. My predecessors, Herb Bateman and Jo Ann Davis, served on the Committee with great distinction, and I am privileged to have the opportunity to resume their work and serve the fine men and women who protect our freedoms at home and abroad.

The military presence in the First District is large by any measure. With five military installations and more than 20 percent of the District's population active or retired military, the First is more than deserving of a voice and a vote on this important Committee. With so many families affected directly by the actions of the HASC, it is critical that the Member of Congress from Virginia's First District have a seat at the table when important discussions are underway and votes are taken.

There are a number of important issues currently being debated. In the Committee, one issue that is very significant to our region is the size of our naval fleet and specifically, the shipbuilding industry and the role it will play in the future defense of our country. The Hampton Roads region has become synonymous with American naval dominance over the years. Many of the ships that have made the United States Navy the most powerful naval force in the world were constructed at the Newport News Shipyard. Since the end of the Cold War however, we have witnessed the size of our fleet shrink to only 279 ships, its lowest level since 1917. Last year at Admiral Gary Roughead's confirmation hearings to become the Chief of Naval Operations, he stated that he envisions 313 ships as a "floor" for our shipbuilding efforts. Given the evolving nature of modern warfare it is imperative that we take every necessary step to strengthen our military capabilities and provide each branch of our armed forces with the tools

they have determined are required to win the War on Terror and confront developing threats around the globe. As a member of the HASC, I will advocate and vote to authorize and appropriate funds to build 12 ships a year until this goal is met. And I will encourage that these new vessels be built at the Newport News Shipyard, the finest shipyards in America.

Another key issue being debated within the Committee is the readiness of our armed forces. We are currently engaged in two conflicts, in Afghanistan and Iraq, in addition to confronting terror around the world. Other countries like Iran and North Korea pose developing military threats and there are a number of emerging threats in nations such as Venezuela and Pakistan. Our troop levels are thinning, and I believe that we must address this situation and start putting together both short-term and long-term plans of action to combat this problem before it is too late. Military action is always the last option but we must be prepared to defend our sovereignty and maintain our role as the world's leader in the defense of freedom and liberty. Much like the need for a larger naval fleet, the need for robust recruitment and retention programs to ensure that each branch of the military has enough personnel to carry out its charge is fundamental to our safety and security. We must also work hard to ensure our veterans receive the care they deserve and have earned. I will use my appointment to the HASC and the Readiness Subcommittee to work with my colleagues to develop strategic plans to tackle this problem and make certain America is capable of preserving and protecting its freedoms at home and abroad.

America can lay claim to possessing the finest and most advanced military in the history of the world. This claim is made possible by the fine men and women who comprise the five branches of our armed forces, the workers who build and provide the tools our troops employ in the field to get the job done and of course, the unwavering and undeniable support of the American people. I am pleased to have the chance to serve as a member of the House Armed Services Committee, and I look forward to getting to work right away on behalf of our armed forces.