

(Washington, D.C.) - Statement by U.S. Representative Mike Coffman (R-CO) on his vote for the Fiscal Year 2013 National Defense Authorization, which authorizes \$552.2 billion for the base Pentagon budget and \$88.5 billion for overseas operations. The bill includes a 1.7 % pay raise for military personnel, a cap on TRICARE pharmacy fees, and a cost-saving prohibition blocking \$13 billion in Pentagon construction projects for South Korea:

“Military families and retirees who rely on TRICARE to meet their health care needs have endured a growing concern about escalating pharmacy fees. The bill adopted in the House today caps pharmacy fees for the next decade. Any future fee increases may not exceed annual Cost of Living Adjustments given to military retirees. The low co-pays are achieved in part by savings realized through a pilot program for a mail-order prescription refill system established in the bill.

During consideration of the bill, I succeeded in leading an effort in the House to block a Pentagon plan for \$13 billion for military construction projects in South Korea and I’m glad to see that it remained in the final version of the bill. This spending would be at the expense of the U.S. taxpayer, without any cost sharing by the South Korean government. We already spend a much higher percentage of our budget on defense than they do. This plan was not a wise use of our defense dollars and I am glad it has been prohibited.

However, I was deeply disappointed that the Senate did not accept the Coffman/Polis amendment to reduce our military presence in Europe. We still have 79,000 troops left in Europe and the Cold War has been over with since 1991. The Pentagon already plans to withdraw two combat brigades from Europe and our amendment would have increased that drawdown to include the two remaining brigade combat teams. We now have more pressing needs than supporting combat troops in Europe. I intend to continue pushing for the more efficient use of our military.

Finally, as a Marine Corps combat veteran, I strongly believe that uniformed military personnel will best treat our fallen heroes with the dignity and respect they deserve. Unfortunately, there have been a number of documented instances of gross misconduct in the treatment of military remains. In each instance, non-uniformed personnel were intimately involved in the callous behavior.

My Uniformed Chain of Custody amendment would have established that only uniformed military members are responsible for the handling the remains of our fallen heroes until they are laid to rest. My amendment was included in the House version but did not make it into the final bill. I will continue to work on this matter.”