

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks on Signing the Weapons System Acquisition Reforms Act of 2009
May 22, 2009

Good morning, everybody. Please have a seat. Well, long before I took office, I argued that meeting our greatest challenges would require not only changing policies in Washington, but changing the way we do business in Washington. It would require reforming a culture where the influence of lobbyists too often trumps the will of the people, rethinking government so that it works as effectively and efficiently as possible, and renewing our sense of common purpose so that we can bring people together in common effort.

That's exactly what we've done this week. On Tuesday, we brought auto executives, labor unions, environmental groups, Democrats, and Republicans together to set a national fuel-efficiency standard for our cars and trucks for the first time in history. On Wednesday, I signed bipartisan legislation to help homeowners and to crack down on the predatory lenders who seek to take advantage of them. And later this afternoon, I'll sign bipartisan legislation that protects consumers from the unfair rate hikes and abusive fees levied by many credit card companies.

And this morning, I'm proud to join Democratic and Republican Members of Congress for the signing of a bill that will eliminate some of the waste and inefficiency in our defense projects, reforms that will better protect our Nation, better protect our troops, and save taxpayers tens of billions of dollars.

Now, let me be clear: As Commander in Chief, I will do whatever it takes to defend the American people, which is why I've increased funding for the best military in the history of the world. We'll continue to make new investments in 21st century capabilities to meet new challenges. And we will always give our men and women in uniform the equipment and the support that they need to get the job done.

But I reject the notion that we have to waste billions of taxpayer dollars to keep this Nation secure. When it comes to purchasing weapons systems and developing defense projects, the choice we face is between investments that are designed to keep the American people safe and those that are simply designed to make a defense company or a contractor rich.

Last year, the Government Accountability Office, or the GAO, looked into 95 major defense projects and found cost overruns that totaled \$295 billion. Wasteful spending comes from exotic requirements, lack of oversight, and indefensible no-bid contracts that don't make our troops or our country any safer. To put this in perspective, these cost overruns would have paid our troops' salaries and provided benefits for their families for more than a year.

At a time when we're fighting two wars and facing a serious deficit, this is unexcusable and unconscionable. As Secretary Gates has said, "One dollar of waste in our defense budget is a dollar we can't spend to support our troops, or prepare for future threats, or protect the American people." Well, it's finally time to end this waste and inefficiency.

Already, I've announced reform that will greatly reduce no-bid defense contracts and save the Government billions of dollars. And Secretary Gates, working with our military leadership, has also proposed a courageous set of reforms in our defense budget that will target waste and strengthen our military for the future. In taking on this enormously difficult task, he's done a tremendous job, and I want to publicly commend Secretary Gates for that.

The bill I'm signing today, known as the Weapons System Acquisition Reforms Act, represents an important next step in this procurement reform process. It reforms a system where taxpayers are charged too much for weapons systems that too often arrive late, a system that suffers from spending on unproven technologies, outdated weapons, and a general lack of oversight.

And the purpose of this law will be to limit cost overruns before they spiral out of control. It will strengthen oversight and accountability by appointing officials who will be charged with closely monitoring the weapons systems we're purchasing to ensure that costs are controlled. If the costs of certain defense projects continue to grow year after year, those projects will be closely reviewed, and if they don't provide the value we need, they will be terminated. This law will also enhance competition and end conflicts of interest in the weapons acquisitions process so that American taxpayers and the American military can get the best weapons at the lowest cost.

And this legislation is long overdue, and it's been a long time coming. But we're finally signing it into law because of the dedication and commitment of a few key Members of Congress who've been fighting for years for this reform: Senators Carl Levin and John McCain; Representatives Ike Skelton, John McHugh, Rob Andrews, and Mike Conaway. I'm very proud of the extraordinary work that all these gentlemen have done who are standing behind me today. Senator McCain couldn't be here today because he's making sure he has a good seat to watch his son graduate from the Naval Academy in a few hours, and that's where I'm headed as soon as I catch my ride over here.

But I will tell you that defense procurement reform was one of the issues that John McCain and I discussed in our first meeting after the election. And we pledged to work together to get it done, and today I'm extraordinarily proud to stand here and sign a bill that passed with unanimous support from both parties at every step of the way.

What all the gentlemen standing behind me, as well as Senator McCain, knows, what Secretary Gates knows, what all Members of Congress who have worked on this legislation understand, is that we have no greater responsibility than to ensure that our men and women in uniform have everything they need to do their jobs. And every penny we waste on this effort because of no-bid contracts or cost overruns is not only an affront to American taxpayers, it's an affront to our military. And while we have a long way to go to end this waste once and for all, the legislation I'm about to sign is a very important step in creating a Government that is more efficient, more accountable, and more responsible in keeping the public's trust.

So once again, I want to thank all these Members of Congress who did extraordinary work, not only to pass the bill but to get it here on time. I'm proud of them. I'm proud of Congress for sending me this legislation. That's why I'm going to go sign it right now. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:06 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to John Sidney "Jack" McCain IV, son of Sen. John McCain of Arizona. S. 454, approved May 22, was assigned Public Law No. 111-23.

Categories: Bill Signings and Vetoes : Weapons System Acquisition Reforms Act of 2009, remarks.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Andrews, Robert E.; Conaway, K. Michael "Mike" ; Gates, Robert M.; Levin, Carl; McCain, John; McCain, John Sidney "Jack," IV; McHugh, John M.; Skelton, Isaac Newton "Ike", IV.

Subjects: Defense, Department of : Defense contracts :: Contracting policies, reform; Defense, Department of : Defense contracts :: Cost overruns; Defense, Department of : Defense contracts :: Weapon systems development, delays and inefficiencies; Defense, Department of : Funding; Defense, Department of : Secretary ; Defense, Department of : Secretary; Economy, national : Deficit; Energy : Fuel efficiency standards, strengthening efforts; Government Accountability Office, U.S.; Government organization and employees : Accountability and transparency, strengthening efforts; Legislation enacted : Credit Card Accountability Responsibility and Disclosure Act of 2009; Legislation enacted : Fraud Enforcement and Recovery Act of 2009; Legislation enacted : Weapons System Acquisition Reforms Act of 2009.

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