

[Read books about current events](#)



[Home](#) | [Top Stories](#) | [Business](#) | [Tech](#) | [Politics](#) | [World](#) | [Local](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Sports](#) | [Science](#) | [Health](#)

Politics Headlines

Sources: [Reuters](#) | [AP](#) | [ABCNEWS.com](#)

Thursday August 2 12:40 AM ET

Bush Wins House Panel Test on Missile Funds

By John Whitesides

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Republicans on a House of Representatives committee on Wednesday beat back Democratic efforts to cut spending on missile defense programs, giving President Bush his first political victory on his top defense priority.

On a party-line 31-28 vote, the House Armed Services Committee rejected a Democratic plan to cut nearly \$1 billion from a proposed \$8.1 billion in spending on missile defense.

``This is a strategy for failure," Rep. Duncan Hunter, a California Republican, said of the Democratic effort to redirect \$985 million in national missile defense spending to purchases of new helicopters, transport aircraft and other accounts.

The amendment by South Carolina Democratic Rep. John Spratt was offered on a \$343 billion fiscal 2002 defense spending authorization bill.

The panel approved the final spending measure 58-1 after a 13-hour debate on a variety of issues. The committee also rejected the Bush administration's plan to cut the B-1 bomber fleet and imposed tough new conditions on ending bombing exercises at the Navy's Vieques training range in Puerto Rico.

After a lengthy debate, the committee decided to take no position on a base-closings plan, one day before the Pentagon sends Congress its proposal to save costs by closing excess military bases.

``We're kidding ourselves if we don't face this thing," said Rep. James Hansen, a Utah Republican who offered a plan for a single round of base closures in 2003 but withdrew it before a vote.

With the Senate planning to consider its own base-closings plan and the Pentagon pushing another round of cost-saving closings, Hansen told the committee, ``it's gonna come and hit us right between the eyeballs."

PENTAGON RALLIES CONGRESSIONAL SUPPORT

On missile defense, Pentagon officials have tried to rally congressional support for Bush's plans, which it says will eventually require a restructuring or abandonment of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty with the former Soviet Union.

The Spratt proposal would have cut \$584 million of the \$786 million included in the bill for construction of a new missile test bed in Alaska that critics said was simply a first step toward limited deployment by 2004 and could lead to a possible ABM treaty violation.

“It's not a test bed, it's a deployment bed,” said Maine Democratic Rep. Tom Allen. “This is a deployment plan.”

But Republicans said the test bed would enable the Pentagon to conduct tougher, more reliable tests that would bolster the system.

“If we don't have this test bed ... we're not going to have tough testing,” Hunter said.

Democrats said Bush's \$1.35 trillion tax cut had sapped the Treasury of funds that would be better spent on other defense priorities. They argued the missile defense money should be spent on programs that would have more immediate impact on improving conditions for soldiers and sailors.

“This amendment puts our wallets where our hearts are,” said Rep. Ike Skelton of Missouri, the committee's ranking Democrat.

Democrats will try again to remove the funds when the bill goes to House floor in September. But Bush's proposal may face its stiffest test when the Democratic-led Senate takes up its version of the defense authorization bill in September. Senate Democrats already have said they will challenge the missile defense spending.

Earlier in the day, the committee voted 35-20 to place tough new conditions on any end to U.S. bombing exercises on the Puerto Rican island of Vieques. The bill would cancel November's scheduled referendum on Vieques and require the Navy to certify it had found suitable replacement training grounds before it could leave Vieques.

Bush said last month the Navy would end training exercises on the island by May 2003 after widespread protests against the Navy's presence.

On a 33-26 vote, the committee also approved an amendment rejecting the Pentagon's planned reductions in the B-1 bomber fleet. The amendment prohibits any reductions or transfers of the bomber fleet until a series of reports and justifications are provided to Congress.

The Air Force has proposed cutting the B-1 bomber fleet to 60 planes from the current 93 for a savings of \$165 million in 2002. Those funds would go back to the Air Force to upgrade the remaining B-1 bomber fleet.

The committee also retained the 500-person limit on U.S. military personnel in Colombia as part of the effort to fight the country's flourishing drug trade.

It backed a proposal for \$35 million to aid construction of a chemical weapons destruction facility at Shchuchye, Russia, which is designed to destroy 800 metric tons of weaponized chemical agents annually.

[Email this story](#) - [View most popular](#) | [Formatted version](#)

Earlier Stories

[Bush Wins Test in House Panel on Missile Funds](#) (August 2)

[House Panel OKs Missile Defense Funds](#) (July 31)

[Advanced](#)

Search: Stories Photos Full Coverage

[Home](#) | [Top Stories](#) | [Business](#) | [Tech](#) | [Politics](#) | [World](#) | [Local](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Sports](#) | [Science](#) | [Health](#)

[Questions or Comments](#)

Copyright © 2001 [Reuters Limited](#). All rights reserved.

Republication or redistribution of Reuters content is expressly prohibited without the prior written consent of Reuters.
Reuters shall not be liable for any errors or delays in the content, or for any actions taken in reliance thereon.