Mr. Chair, I rise in opposition to this bill.

I thank the majority for allowing the House to work its will in a completely open fashion on this bill. It was a refreshing change. I only wish the outcome had been a bill that reflected better the international security and economic realities we are facing today.

To be sure, there are many things in this bill that I strongly support. The 1.6 percent pay increase for our troops is important and necessary. The additional $1.5 billion for Guard and Reserve equipment modernization is badly needed. The $2.3 billion for family support and advocacy programs will help military families cope while their loved ones are away and help our troops reintegrate when they come home. And the bill also includes a critical suicide prevention amendment I offered.

My amendment would give the Defense Department $20 million to initiate suicide prevention and counseling calls to help prevent these reservists from taking their own lives, as Coleman Bean, my constituent, tragically did in September 2008. For reservists like Coleman Bean of East Brunswick, New Jersey--those in the IRR, Individual Mobilization Aug ment ees, and Inactive National Guard members--there remains no dedicated suicide prevention programs to help them cope with the war-time experiences. These reservists need our help, and I'm pleased my amendment was accepted.

Unfortunately, the good provisions in this bill are vastly outweighed by the absolute failure of the majority to make the Pentagon subject to the same kind of budget reductions they are so eagerly imposing on every other federal agency.

Since the year began, we've heard constantly from the majority that our debt is the greatest threat to our national security. If they really believed that, they would have supported the $70 billion in cuts to the budget that I voted for during the debate on this bill. Instead, the only true cut they supported to this bloated, $650 billion defense budget is a $125 million reduction in funding for military bands.

The majority's message is clear: we will continue down the path of trying to balance the budget

on the backs of the poor, the disabled, school children, and seniors. The Pentagon budget--which now funds a weakly justified war in Libya, a continued occupation of Iraq, and a military quagmire in Afghanistan--remains as the great sacred cow in the federal budget. There is no greater example today of our upside-down priorities than this budget.

This bill will provide nearly $13 billion for an Afghan security force that is riddled with corruption, Taliban sympathizers, and drug traffickers. The bill continues to fund our presence in Iraq--tens of thousands of American troops remain in that country, and as we've seen they remain targets, with still more killed and wounded this year.

So much of this bill continues to be devoted to spending tens of billions of dollars on weapons systems that were designed to meet a Soviet threat that vanished 20 years ago. This week, a colleague from Vermont, Mr. **WELCH**, offered an amendment to this bill that would have eliminated funding for a next-generation nuclear bomber, a bomber to replace the B-2. Why in the world do we need such a platform in the first place? It was not a B-2 bomber that killed Osama bin Laden, but a U.S. Special Operations Forces team working with our intelligence community that eliminated the al Qaeda leader. Buying new nuclear bombers would simply be a form of defense-sector corporate welfare to protect against a threat that does not exist. Yet Mr. **WELCH**
's amendment was defeated, and so we will continue to fund the development of an airplane we don't need.

I offered an amendment with several of my colleagues that would have simply cut the rate of increase in Pentagon spending. Instead of allowing a $17 billion increase over last year's Pentagon budget, it would cap the increase at $8.5 billion without impacting military pay or benefits. That amendment was also defeated--and its defeat only proved what I suspected: the majority is not serious about reigning in government spending.

Most of the attention this week was directed toward spending more for the military than we even have, spending more that the rest of the world--all together--and more than we can afford, even as so many people are calling for austerity measures to cut college aid, bridges and trains, environmental protection, and even Medicare. Yet the majority did not hesitate to deny training to military chaplains for implementing the repeal of ``Don't Ask, Don't Tell'', or to prevent the Defense Department from buying more fuel efficient vehicles, or to prevent taxpayers from finding out about political contributions by defense contractors. For all of these reasons, I am voting against this bill.