
Defense Report

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Congress Puts Our Security in Danger by Wasting Time and Money

By ignoring its first two Gramm-Rudman-Hollings target deadlines, Congress set the stage for further diminishment of support for the Administration's program to rearm America. Additionally, the legislators, if they allow the deficit reduction law's draconian cuts to occur, could jeopardize our military readiness and seriously impair the war-fighting capabilities of our Armed Forces.

According to the provisions of the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings law, Congress was supposed to complete by April 15 its action on a concurrent budget resolution which sets guidelines for next year's appropriations. That resolution, in effect an outline of how Congress would meet the deficit targets in the new law, was to have been followed by consideration of the 1987 appropriations bills by May 15. Both those deadlines were skipped over by the House and Senate. Further, it appears Congress will have an extremely difficult time making its next target date—the completion of all appropriation actions by the end of June.

Missing legislative deadlines is not a new thing with our Congress. In 1974 it passed a law that was supposed to improve the way it legislates appropriations to run the government. The intended improvements to the budget process haven't really worked very well as far as making those time goals is concerned, and the bill for their dalliance is eventually paid by the taxpayers. When Congress doesn't pass a Defense budget on time, it costs the taxpayers dearly.

In the past, Congressional delays had their greatest impact on new programs, which were left unfunded when Congress reverted to its time-honored loophole called a "continuing resolution." The longer the partisan wrangling and legislative inaction continued, the worse the adverse effects on our military strength and preparedness.

This time, however, the missed deadlines appear to be the first steps toward triggering Gramm-Rudman-Hollings' catastrophic, across-the-board, budget-cutting provisions. Should that occur, it would decimate the President's efforts to restore America's military strength. For the sake of our national security, our slow-moving Congress must find a faster way to get its work done.