

By Robin Ashby, Publishing Editor, Great North News Services

Congressman Ike Skelton (D-MO) has been chosen by the House Democratic Caucus to serve a second term as Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee during the 111th Congress, which convenes in January 2009.

I met Rep Skelton during UK Defence Forum visits with UK Members of Parliament when he was Ranking Minority Member, in 2006, and as Chairman in 2007. He is a gentleman of the old school, but was extremely supportive of the UK's case on ITAR and technology exchange between the closest of allies. He arranged for us not just to meet him, but four of his subcommittee chairmen, as well as the acting Ranking Minority Member. We felt a special affinity as his ancestors appear to have come from Skelton, a small coastal village in the north east of England close to my former home. On behalf of the UK Defence Forum I congratulate him on his re-election and look forward to hearing more about the deliberations of his committee in the cause of defence, security and peace for the whole world.

In his acceptance, Chairman Skelton said: "I am honored and humbled by the opportunity to lead the House Armed Services Committee during the 111th Congress. As Chairman, I will continue to work in good faith with Members of Congress, the Administration, and the military to develop defense policies that keep America safe and meet our national security requirements, while also demonstrating gratitude to our men and women in uniform.

"During the past two years, our committee has held 118 hearings and restored critical oversight to the Department of Defense and the defense-related activities of the Department of Energy. Most importantly, both the Fiscal Year 2008 and Fiscal Year 2009 National Defense Authorization Acts received broad bipartisan support, were approved by Congress, and signed into law. I am especially proud of the work of our subcommittee Chairmen and all of our members in getting effective legislation through the Congress and signed by the President.

"I am excited by the prospect of working with the new Obama Administration to continue restoring the health and readiness of our military. There are daunting tasks ahead to ensure that our military is ready to take on all that would harm this nation wherever they would strike us. We must also ensure an orderly and responsible redeployment from Iraq, get the resources needed to truly win the war in Afghanistan, prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and understand the implications of the current economic crisis and of energy and climate change issues for the military and our national security. At the same time, we must be good stewards of every tax dollar directed to our national defense and ensure that our troops and their families receive the crucial benefits they have earned and deserve."