

To the Congress of the United States:

On February 26, I spoke to the American people of my highest duty as President—to preserve peace and defend the United States. I outlined the objectives on which our defense program has rested. We have been firmly committed to rebuilding America's strength, to meeting new challenges to our security, and to reducing the danger of nuclear war. We have also been dedicated to pursuing and implementing defense reforms wherever necessary for greater efficiency or military effectiveness.

With these objectives in mind, I address the Congress on a subject of central importance to all Americans—the future structure and organization of our defense establishment.

Extensive study by the Armed Services Committees of the Senate and the House of Representatives has produced numerous proposals for far-reaching changes in the structure of the Department of Defense, including the organization of our senior military leadership. These proposals, sponsored by members with wide knowledge and experience in defense matters, are now pending before the Congress.

In addition, a few weeks ago I endorsed the recommendations of the bipartisan President's Blue Ribbon Commission on Defense Management, chaired by David Packard, for improving overall defense management including the crucial areas of national security planning, organization, and command.

For more effective direction of our national security establishment and better coordination of our armed forces, I consider some of these proposals to be highly desirable, and I have recently taken the administrative steps necessary to implement these improvements. In this message, I wish to focus on the essential legislative steps that the Congress must take for these improvements to be fully implemented.

Together, the work of the Packard Commission and the Congress represents certainly the most comprehensive review of the Department of Defense in over a generation. Their work has been the focus of an historic effort to help chart the course we should follow now and into a new century. While we will continue to refine and improve our defense establishment in the future, it will be many years before changes of this scope are again considered. Given these unique circumstances, I concluded that my views as President and Commander in Chief should be laid before the Congress prior to the completion of legislative action.

EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

In forwarding this message, I am cognizant of the important role of the Congress in providing for our national defense. We must work together in this endeavor. However, any changes in statute must not infringe on the constitutionally protected responsibilities