



U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

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For immediate release: Tuesday, February 27, 2007

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U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations Opening Statement of Chairman Robert C. Byrd

WASHINGTON, D.C. . The U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee on Tuesday held a hearing on the Bush Administration's request for nearly \$100 billion in additional funding for this year for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. U.S. Senator Robert C. Byrd, the Committee's Chairman, delivered the following statement to open the hearing.

On February 5, the President submitted to Congress a \$103 billion emergency supplemental request related to the Global War on Terror and for additional assistance to the victims of Hurricane Katrina. I look forward to working with Senator Cochran, Senator Landrieu, and other senators on meeting the needs of the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

Our hearing today focuses on the Administration's \$99.6 billion supplemental request for the Global War on Terror, predominately for ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan through the remainder of Fiscal Year 2007.

The Administration's \$99.6 billion request is in addition to the \$70 billion appropriated by Congress in September 2006 for the Global War on Terror. This supplemental request also begins the process of expanding the size of the United States Armed Forces by accelerating two Army Brigade Combat Teams and establishing one new Marine Corps Regimental Combat Team. Funds are included for reconstituting depleted equipment, for existing forces, and for training and equipping Iraqi and Afghani military and police units.

In addition to the \$99.6 billion covered by this request, Congress has already appropriated \$507 billion for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, including \$376 billion for the war in Iraq. In Fiscal Year 2007 alone, the Department of Defense is spending some \$10 billion per month in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Over the last seven fiscal years, including funding combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Congress has provided a total of \$3.2 Trillion -- that's Trillion with a % or 3 followed by 12 zeros -- to the Department of Defense.

The current large increases in defense spending require difficult trade offs in other areas of the national budget, or the even more difficult consequences of an ever-increasing debt. Every dime for the war in Iraq has been borrowed. In this Committee, we have a serious obligation to ensure that the taxpayers's security is ensured and their money is well spent.

The President suggests from time-to-time that we may have to fund and fight this war in Iraq far into the future. Congress cannot, however, continue to fund failing policies and

failing strategies. We need to identify strategies with potential for success and turn the future of Iraq over to the Iraqis.

But under the President's plan, there is no end in sight. No plan for redeployment. No plan for diplomacy. No plan for engaging our international partners for improved security in the region. All the President has requested is more money for military force and more money for ineffective reconstruction efforts.

The Congress has provided billions of dollars above the Administration's requests for additional body and vehicle armor to keep our troops safe, and billions more for the development and deployment to the field of equipment to counter improvised explosive devices. Yet, after all of the billions of dollars and thousands of lives that have been spent in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001, we do not seem to be close to achieving the goal of establishing a stable, effective government in either nation which can provide for its own security, provide for the needs of its populace, or prevent the use of its territory by terrorists and other armed insurgent groups. That has Congress and the entire country concerned.

Even at home, I have concerns about the care being provided to our wounded and their families, and I expect that this Committee will have questions for you about that, Secretary Gates. This nation supports our troops in the field. We in this Congress have pushed for best equipment for our troops in the field and for our troops at home. We have the right to expect that our wounded will receive a higher standard of care and consideration as they navigate the hostile bureaucracies of medical treatment and disability paperwork.

As this Committee considers this supplemental appropriations request and as we review the Fiscal Year 2008 budget requests, we have a number of questions regarding the short- and long-term outlook for the operations in Afghanistan and Iraq and for the United States' position in the region as a whole. A majority of the American people have expressed their dissatisfaction with the way things are going. We need to know that the funds you are requesting will do more than merely continue the status quo. We need to know that you are working hard towards an acceptable resolution to the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The Congress has consistently supported our men and women in uniform, and Congress will continue to support our troops and their families. Nevertheless, with regard to the failed policies of this Administration, this Congress is not blind. The Congress has a vital Constitutional role to play in the development and execution of U.S. defense policy. It is not a rubber stamp or a Presidential lap dog, obedient and unquestioning. Oversight is among our most important responsibilities and it has been lacking for far too long.

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