



U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

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Byrd Applauds Senate Vote on Troop Funding, Vets' Health Care, Katrina Relief

WASHINGTON, D.C.... U.S. Senator Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va., on Thursday applauded the Senate for approving legislation that provides more than \$123 billion primarily for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, for improving the health care for returning soldiers and veterans, for continued Hurricane Katrina recovery for the Gulf Coast, to fill major gaps in homeland security, and to provide emergency drought relief for farmers.

Byrd is chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee and the chief architect of the Senate's version of the funding bill. His closing remarks on the legislation are below.

This bill includes over \$96 billion for the troops. It includes increases above the President's request for the Department of Defense, including for defense health, equipping the National Guard and Reserve, and for military housing.

The bill includes \$6.7 billion for rebuilding the Gulf coast region following Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma. It includes \$4.2 billion for agricultural disaster relief. It includes nearly \$1.8 billion for the VA to make sure that we meet our moral obligation to provide first-class health care to our wounded veterans.

Most importantly, with passage of this bill, the Senate sends a clear message to the President that we must take the war in Iraq in a new direction. Setting a goal for getting most of our troops out of Iraq is not cutting and running. The new direction provides incentives to the Iraqi people to settle their differences, to end their civil war, and to pursue reconciliation.

The American people want our troops out of Iraq. The Congress has said very clearly that we want our military to refocus on Osama bin Laden and his terrorist bases in Afghanistan.

The President has said he will veto this bill. His Administration has asserted that adding funds for caring for our wounded veterans, for rebuilding the Gulf Coast, for securing the homeland, and for agricultural disaster assistance is playing politics. What nonsense. With approval of this bill, Congress will have appropriated \$448 billion for the war in Iraq, including \$38 billion for rebuilding Iraq. Certainly if we can spend \$38 billion on rebuilding Baghdad, we can spend money on rebuilding the Gulf Coast, taking care of our veterans and protecting our agricultural economy.

I hope that the President will drop his rhetoric and instead work with Congress to craft a responsible plan to transition our forces from Iraq and refocus on bin Laden and his base of operations.

Instead of demonizing the Congress and engaging in rhetorical finger-pointing, the President ought to work with Congress on legislation that is in the best interests of the country.

As I close, I want to share some of a letter that I recently received from soldiers serving around Baghdad. They wrote:

Listening to the ongoing debate in the news, and the conflicting views of our lawmakers, we hear again and again accusations by one side of the other side, desire to undercut the troops. We see these accusations as moral blackmail. For it is overwhelmingly clear from all of our experiences that despite the unpopularity of this war, the American people have provided unfaltering moral support to the men and women of the military. We implore lawmakers to abandon these hollow accusations, and to focus on the national interest as a whole.

I say to my colleagues, this wisdom from the war zone is something for all of us to hear -- the Congress, the President, and the nation. This legislation serves the best interests of our troops. It focuses on the national interest as a whole. And it begins the work to return Iraq to the Iraqi people, and return our troops home.

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