



U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

PRESS RELEASE

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Washington, DC – U.S. Senator Robert C. Byrd, D.W.Va., Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, delivered the following remarks today on the status of the Fiscal Year 2008 Appropriations process.

Chairman Byrd's statement is below

Mr. President. With three days to go before the start of the new fiscal year, there is much inside the beltway chatter about continuing resolutions, omnibuses, minibuses, budget showdowns and government shutdowns.

Nowhere is that chatter louder than that which is coming from the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue. The President has threatened almost daily that he will veto any appropriations bill that exceeds his budget request. These veto threats include all of the spending bills that provide funding for our domestic programs . programs that in one way or another benefit each and every American. These bills help to educate our children, secure our homeland, support rural America, and promote a competitive economy. These domestic spending bills provide the essential building blocks for the foundations of our great country.

On the one hand, the President is seeking over \$190 billion in emergency appropriations to fight the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. That is \$190 billion for the costs of the wars for just one year. ONE YEAR. At the same time, the President wants to veto critical domestic spending bills because they total \$22 billion above his budget request . less than one percent of our entire budget and about what we spend in just two months time fighting an unpopular war in Iraq. The chatter from the White House even asserts that the \$22 billion for programs here in America means increasing taxes and putting America's economic growth at risk.

This, of course, begs the question of the economic impact of the almost \$450 billion that we have spent on the war in Iraq.

The President characterizes the \$22 billion above his request as an increase in spending. In fact, \$19 billion of the \$22 billion increase simply represents

restorations of the President's relentless attempts to savage important domestic initiatives.

This week, the FBI announced that violent crime is on the rise for the second straight year. Yet, the President proposes to cut state and local law enforcement funding by \$1.5 billion.

Hurricane Katrina proved that the government is not prepared to handle major disasters, be they natural disasters or terrorist attacks. Yet, the President has proposed to cut first responder grants by \$1.2 billion. Those grants equip and train our police, fire, and emergency medical personnel to respond to a disaster.

The President proposes over \$3 billion in cuts for education programs, including special education, safe and drug-free schools, and improving teacher quality.

Despite an aging population in this country, the President proposes a cut of \$279 million for studying cancer, diabetes, and heart disease at the National Institutes of Health. Under the President's budget, the National Institutes of Health would have to eliminate 700 research grants that could lead to cures or treatments for cancer, diabetes, Alzheimer's, and other diseases.

The President also proposes to cut \$2.7 billion for elderly and disabled housing and community development grants.

When the Interstate 35 bridge collapsed into the Mississippi River, it focused the nation on the need to invest in our crumbling infrastructure. Yet, the President proposes to cut over \$3 billion from infrastructure programs, such as highway and transit funding, bridge repairs, rural wastewater grants, levees and dams, clean water grants, and airport safety and improvements. The President even proposes to reduce funding for the highway and transit levels that are guaranteed in the highway law that he signed in 2005.

The President proposed cuts of \$1 billion from health programs, such as rural health, preventive health, and mental health grants, as well as over \$300 million from the Low Income Home Energy Assistance program.

Between 1998 and 2004, disease outbreaks in food produce have almost doubled. In 2003, there were 870 food inspectors at the FDA. In 2006, there were 640. The FDA lost 230 inspectors in less than four years, so it's no surprise that food inspections dropped by nearly half during that time. Yet, the President does not propose to restore those reductions in the number of inspectors.

All of these foolish cuts have been restored in the bipartisan bills that were approved by the Senate Appropriations Committee by nearly unanimous votes and, regrettably, that the President has said he will veto. In the twelve bills that have been reported from Committee, we have significantly reduced funding used for congressionally directed spending, and we have added unprecedented transparency and accountability.

As one can clearly see, this White House stand-off is not over some irresponsible plan for an expansion of government or pork barrel projects. Rather, it is the President's effort to prevent cancellation of his ill-conceived and poorly justified proposed budget cuts. Congress wants to support vital core missions of

government, such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Food and Drug Administration, and the Customs and Border Patrol agency. Congress wants to make reasonable choices and set important priorities for our nation.

There are consequences for failing to invest in America's safety and America's future. Hurricane Katrina proved that. The collapse of the I-35 bridge proved that. Increases in violent crime prove that. Increases in food borne illnesses prove that. And, every headline about unsafe products being imported into this country proves that.

Americans rightly expect their government to work.

Regrettably, rather than recognizing the consequences of his budget, the President is spoiling for a political fight. He refuses to recognize facts, even as those facts evolve in a changing world.

According to the Administration's latest National Intelligence Estimate, "We judge the U.S. Homeland will face a persistent and evolving terrorist threat over the next three years. The main threat comes from Islamic terrorist groups and cells, especially al-Qaeda, driven by their undiminished intent to attack the United States." Yet, the President threatens to veto the Homeland Security bill that passed the Senate 89-4 because it is \$2.2 billion above his request, with increases for first responder grants, for border security, and for enforcing our immigration laws.

The President is determined to veto eight of our twelve appropriations bills over \$22 billion. Some have argued that \$22 billion is not a lot of money. I do not share that view. \$22 billion is a lot of money. That is why we are fighting for the additional funding above the President's inadequate request. This fight is about priorities.

This Congress passed a budget resolution that balances the budget by 2012 and provides for the increase above the President's request for domestic programs.

Consistent with the budget resolution, the Appropriations Committee has reported all twelve bills. Four have passed the Senate, and with passage of the continuing resolution, we will continue to press for passage of the remaining bills. The President's veto threats inevitably slow this process.

In the twelve bills that have been reported by the Appropriations Committee, we invest the \$22 billion in America's future. By comparison:

In Fiscal Year 2008, the total cost of President Bush's tax cuts is \$252 billion . 11 times the amount of spending in question.

In Fiscal Year 2008, the cost of the tax cuts for the wealthiest one percent of taxpayers is almost \$70 billion . 3 times the amount of spending in question.

In Fiscal Year 2008, special interest tax expenditures will cost \$1 trillion . 45 times the amount of spending in question. Corporate tax expenditures will cost \$91 billion . over four times the amount of spending in question.

\$22 billion is, in fact, a lot of money. Money that, if well spent, can help make America be a safer, healthier, more prosperous country. We are committed to

making those careful choices. We will root out waste. We will cut or eliminate ineffective programs. We will make careful choices.

When President Bush came to town almost seven years ago, he vowed to reach across the aisle for the common good of our nation. Now is his chance to make good on that pledge. He can continue his purely partisan fight over \$22 billion in needed spending, or he can work with the Congress to confront the problems that face Americans here at home. It is my hope that the President will put away his veto pen so that we can get on with the business of adequately funding programs that contribute to a safe and prosperous nation.