

News From _____

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For Immediate Release: December 4, 2007

**“A TIME TO GOVERN”
REMARKS OF SENATOR ROBERT C. BYRD, D-W.Va.
CHAIRMAN, SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE**

ON THE STATE OF THE FY 2008 APPROPRIATIONS PROCESS

Washington, DC ó Senator Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va., the Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, today delivered the following remarks on the Senate floor regarding the status of the FY 2008 Appropriations process:

õMr. President, as Congress reconvenes this week after our observance of the Thanksgiving holiday, we find a brisk wind blowing through the streets of the nation’s capital. As cold temperatures begin to grip the country, Americans are turning up the heat in their homes, but the elected leaders of our country should seize the opportunity to turn down the heat in Washington.

õThree days ago [Dec 1], in his weekly radio address, the President placed the blame at the feet of Congress for the delays in enacting 11 of the 12 annual appropriations bills. But finger-pointing does nothing to solve the impasse, which began with White House threats to veto 10 of those funding bills. With just three short weeks left in this session of Congress, it is time to close down the political posturing and recognize that we have a responsibility to govern.

õAs the Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, it is clear to me that Congress is working with great diligence to find a way around our budget conundrum. Working hand-in-hand with members of the minority, we are crafting an appropriations package that I expect will garner bipartisan support. This package contemplates a reduction of \$10.6 billion from the spending levels approved by Congress in this year’s budget resolution. In addition, various controversial matters, some of which have been the subject of veto threats – are eliminated.

õBoth Democrats and Republicans in Congress are attempting in good faith to find a way around the veto threat demagoguery that has been emanating from 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue for months. Now the White House needs to put aside politics and recognize that it is time to govern in the responsible manner expected by the American people.

õSo, I urge the President to stop the stale veto threats which have been the albatross around the neck of responsible budgeting for months. The fact is that the needs of this nation have changed since the budget was submitted in February. That should come as no great surprise.

õThe Senate, on a bi-partisan basis, has recognized these needs, and events have made them crystal clear.

õThe crumbling state of our infrastructure was punctuated by a deadly bridge collapse in Minnesota. The Senate passed a bill containing funds for the bridge replacement and for repairing bridges across the nation by a vote of 88-7. That was the responsible thing to do.

ōSoaring oil prices mean a cruel squeeze on low income heating assistance. The Senate approved a bill providing increased heating assistance by a vote of 75-19. That was the responsible thing to do.

ōInvestigations into the treatment of soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan have underlined greater demands on the VA health care system. Legislation to increase funding for our veterans passed the Senate by a vote of 92-1. That was the moral thing to do.

ōMore money is needed to improve the security of our borders. An amendment to provide such funding passed the Senate 89-1. That was the smart thing to do.

ōIn July, the Administration released its latest National Intelligence report that concluded that Al Qaeda has regrouped in Pakistan with the intention of attacking the United States again. The Senate passed a homeland security bill to increase funding for first responders by a vote of 89-4.

ōRising crime rates in this country highlight the wisdom of additional funding for law enforcement. The Senate passed legislation providing such funding for cops on the street by a vote of 75-19.

ōThe rising cost of food means that there must be more funding for the Women, Infants, and Children program, or 500,000 people will lose important nutritional support.

ōYet, despite all of these developments since the President submitted an inadequate spending proposal in February, the White House continues to demand an arbitrary and irresponsible ceiling on spending. The White House continues to stubbornly oppose bipartisan initiatives to invest money to solve real problems that face the nation.

ōMr. President, soon the First Session of the 110th Congress will draw to a close, but there is still time to craft an appropriations proposal that makes a sincere attempt to meet the President in the middle of the road. I thank Senator Cochran and his ranking members for their efforts as we move forward in completing the FY 2008 appropriations process. So, the choice is clear: the President and Congress must recognize that the people of this country expect their leaders to actually govern and address the real problems facing the country.

ōDemocrats and Republicans in Congress are willing to work to resolve differences and complete a fiscally responsible package of appropriations bills, but to do the people's business Congress must be joined by a White House willing at last to jettison its political posturing. The tyranny of the veto threat has already dangerously delayed the nation's priorities for far too long.

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