



U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

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Contact: Appropriations Press Office, 202-224-3904

Statement of Senator Robert C. Byrd (D-W.Va.) Chairman, Senate Appropriations Committee On Supplemental Funding for Investments in America

Washington, D.C. ... U.S. Senator Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va., the Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, made the following statement this evening as the Senate moved towards a 92 to 6 approval of funding to meet the needs of the American people by investing in critically important programs here at home.

Chairman Byrd's remarks:

“One year ago, Congress sent the President a war funding supplemental that included clear direction to bring our troops home by December of 2007. The President chose to veto that bill. If he had signed that bill, most of our troops would be home today.”

“Instead of bringing our troops home, the President decided to increase our commitment of U.S. troops and treasure to a war that has now entered its sixth year. Over 4,100 U.S. service members have died. Over 30,000 U.S. service members have been wounded. This year, the President asked Congress to approve another \$178 billion for this endless war. With enactment of this supplemental, Congress will have approved over \$656 billion for the war in Iraq.”

“Once again, the President threw down the gauntlet and said he would veto the supplemental bill if Congress added funding for anything other than the war. He made this demand at a time when the U.S. economy is in trouble.”

“Under the President's failed fiscal leadership, deficits and debt are on the rise. Unemployment is on the rise, with the largest one month increase in twenty years. Economic growth came to a virtual halt at the end of last year. Food and fuel costs are dramatically climbing. 8.8 million homeowners have mortgages that exceed the value of their homes, and foreclosures have increased 57 percent.”

“While saying no to funds for America, the President wanted this Congress to approve more funding to reconstruct Iraq. We have already approved \$45 billion for reconstruction projects in Iraq. Despite the fact that the Iraqi government is running a huge surplus due to excess oil revenues, the President asked this Congress to spend another \$3 billion of American taxpayer dollars on reconstructing Iraq.”

“The President wants money to build schools in Sadr City, but not in Seattle. He wants money for roads in Ramadi, but not Richmond. The President wants money for Mosul, but not Minneapolis. He wants to reconstruct Baghdad, but not Baltimore or Birmingham.”

“Congress listened to the President. We had hearings on his request, and we concluded that, notwithstanding his ill-considered veto threat, we would include funding to help our citizens here at home.”

“The amendment that is before the Senate extends unemployment benefits for thirteen weeks. Over the past year, the number of unemployed workers in this country has grown by 1.6 million to a level of 8.5 million people.”

“I am pleased that the amendment includes critical funding for our veterans. I commend Senator Webb and Senator Warner for their leadership in drafting legislation that provides our veterans with an education benefit that they have earned.”

“We also have a moratorium on six burdensome Medicaid regulations. The President wanted to pass billions of dollars of expenses on to the States for rehabilitation services and school-based services for children with special needs. Congress said no.”

“We have included \$2.65 billion for disaster assistance to help the victims of the Midwest floods, as well as other disasters that have happened over the last year for which the President sought no additional funding. We have added funding for the Food and Drug Administration to help protect our food and drug supplies. We also modified the President’s request for the war by adding \$160 million to his request for funding DoD efforts in Afghanistan. We must never forget that those who attacked us on 9/11 trained in Afghanistan, not Iraq. We also include language mandating that Iraq match, dollar for dollar, further U.S. contributions to reconstructing Iraq.”

“This year, the Appropriations Committee has held, and will continue to hold, oversight hearings looking at waste, fraud and corruption in Iraq. Unchecked corruption in Iraq is providing much of the funding for the very enemy our servicemen and women are fighting – and President Bush has demonstrated either unwillingness or an inability to check the flow of funds and weapons from these sources to the enemy. This amendment requires the Secretary of State to develop a comprehensive anti-corruption strategy and submit to Congress the identities of Iraqi officials believed to have committed corrupt acts. I am also pleased that this legislation continues to provide funding, funding not requested by President Bush, for the Special Inspector General for Iraqi Reconstruction. As a result of our recent hearings on fraud and corruption in Iraq, we learned that there are only five FBI agents assigned to investigate fraud in Iraq and Afghanistan. For this Administration, look no evil, see no evil. Well, it is time to take our blinders off. This amendment includes \$5 million to increase FBI investigations, and the Committee will continue to hold hearings on fraud and waste in Iraq.”

“Mr. President, despite the positive measures for struggling Americans, our veterans, and their families included in this amendment, I deeply regret that this legislation will go to President Bush without the necessary checks to ensure that the war in Iraq is not open-ended. The majority of the American people have come to see this war as a costly mistake that needs to be brought to a close. This legislation brings us no closer to that goal.”

“However, with this legislation, we will once again take care of our troops. We also invest in America here at home.”

“Mr. President. There is more to do. I am disappointed that the White House blocked our efforts to add funding to help the Gulf States recover from Hurricane Katrina, to provide additional Low Income Home Energy Assistance, and to invest in our infrastructure. I have consulted with the Leadership, and next month, the Committee will consider a second

supplemental to deal with the Midwest floods, Hurricane Katrina, and to make critical investments in America.”

Key investments in critically needed programs for America included in the measure are:

Emergency Unemployment Insurance

Extends unemployment benefits for those workers nationwide who have exhausted their unemployment benefits by 13 weeks. With the recent dramatic increase in the unemployment rate from 5% to 5.5% -- equal to the highest one month jump in unemployment in two decades -- this extension is critically needed and mirrors actions taken in recent recessions. More than one-third of unemployment insurance (UI) recipients exhaust their benefits before finding a job.

According to the most recent employment report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, more than 1.5 million people were unemployed for at least 27 weeks, which is 18.3% of all unemployed individuals. By extending UI benefits now, Congress is providing an immediate boost for the economy, and at the same time, helping working families weather the storm. Economists have agreed that extending unemployment benefits is a powerful, cost-effective way to stimulate the economy – every dollar spent on benefits leads to \$1.64 in economic growth.

G.I. Education Assistance

Continuing the Senate Democrats’ commitments to supporting our troops, the measure expands college educational assistance benefits by more than \$62 billion over ten years. Similar to the GI Bill following World War II, the benefit is provided to service members who have served on active duty since September 11, 2001, including activated reservists and National Guard who have so ably served in Afghanistan and Iraq. Once certain conditions are met for length of service, the benefits are also made transferable to family members.

Flood and Disaster Relief

With the mighty Mississippi River not having fully crested, and upriver waters only starting to recede as a result of the dramatic and historic flooding in the Midwest, as well as the designation of 71 other disasters in 33 states since 2007, funding of \$2.65 billion is provided to aid in clean-up, prevention, and protection efforts in these designated disaster areas.

Medicaid

In response to rising health care costs, the measure imposes a moratorium on six Medicaid rules issued by the Bush Administration. The regulations would have shifted millions of dollars in health care costs to state budgets at a time when states are already under financial pressure due to the faltering economy.

The Bush Administration had wanted to reduce federal contributions for school-based services such as transportation for children with special needs; rehabilitation services; targeted case management for people with physical or mental disorders; hospital cost limits; and graduate medical education. Senate Democrats reversed those decisions in this measure.

Food and Drug Safety

With concerns over the blood-thinning drug heparin and the recent salmonella outbreak in tomatoes in states all across the country, Senate Democrats have delivered \$150 million to the Food and Drug Administration for food safety, medical safety, and drug safety activities.

Hurricane Katrina

In response to recovery efforts resulting from Hurricane Katrina, \$73 million is provided for 3,000 permanent housing units for those who were displaced and remain homeless.

The funding measure also includes \$5.8 billion for the continued strengthening and repairs of levees in New Orleans.

Senate Democrats were disappointed that more than \$3 billion in additional funding for relief and recovery efforts from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita were dropped in response to Bush Administration objections.

Science Initiative

To help promote investments in long-term economic development, maintain global competitiveness, environmental clean-up, and advance our medical research capabilities, the measure includes \$400 million for programs under the jurisdiction of the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and the Department of Energy.

Supporting our Troops and their Families at Home

Supporting critical needs for our troops and the quality of life for their families here at home, funding is included in the supplemental package for barrack improvements, child care centers, warrior transition centers, military hospitals and polytrauma rehabilitation centers.

Global Food Aid

The measure includes \$850 million in P.L.- 480 Title II grants for international food assistance in for the remainder of fiscal year 2008 and an additional \$395 million to become available on October 1, 2008 (beginning of FY 2009), a \$500 million increase over the Bush Administration's request.

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