



U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

PRESS RELEASE

Opening Statement of Senator Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va.
Conference Committee Meeting on Labor, Health and Human Services
and Education Appropriations
November 1, 2007

I welcome all Senators and Congressmen, and I thank Chairman Obey, Representative Walsh, Chairman Harkin, Senator Specter, Senator Reed, Senator Johnson, Senator Cochran, and Senator Hutchison for their hard work on the measures that will be considered today.

I am disappointed that we have had to combine bills together. Sadly, it appears the President has given us little choice. The President has irresponsibly chosen to slow the appropriations process by threatening to veto ten of the twelve bills. For the President, it is apparently more important to score political points than govern. Rather than leading the nation toward consensus in an effort to govern, the President continues to divide the nation.

The President's veto threats are a cynical attempt to appear fiscally disciplined at the same time that the President is seeking \$196 billion of emergency funding to support a failed policy in Iraq. That is \$196 billion for the costs of just one year, ONE YEAR of war spending. 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 of time fighting an unpopular war in Iraq.

The President sought a ten percent increase for the Department of Defense, excluding the cost of the wars. He sought a twelve percent increase for foreign aid.

Yet, today, the President threatens to veto a Labor/HHS/Education bill because the Congress had the temerity to approve a five percent increase.

As part of the President's political message, he describes the five percent increase for Labor/HHS/Education as excessive "social spending." I call it responsible investments in researching cancer, heart disease, and diabetes, in educating our children, in providing access to health care to rural America, and to heating the homes of low income elderly Americans. The citizens of the United States deserve a more informed discourse from their President.

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 ó 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, care for our veterans, and promote a competitive economy.

If the President wants to veto this bill, a bill that provides an increase of \$3.7 billion above his request for the 8 million veterans enrolled in the VA health care system, that is his right. If the President wants to veto a bill that provides a \$1.4 billion increase above his request for researching cancer and heart disease, that is his right. If the President wants to veto a bill that provides more funding for community health centers, rural health, and mine safety, that is his right.

But Senators and Congressmen do not work for this President, or any President, they work for the American people. I urge all conferees to support this conference report.

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