



## U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

*PRESS RELEASE*

For Immediate Release: Tuesday, December 18, 2007  
Contact: Appropriations Press Office, 202-224-3904

### **Byrd Opening Statement on the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2008**

Washington, D.C. . U.S. Senator Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va., the Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, today made the following statement on the Senate floor as the Senate began debate on the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2008.

#### **Senator Byrd's remarks:**

Mr. President, the Constitution grants to Congress an extensive array of powers, each of which, in one way or another, touches the lives of every one of the 300 million people who live in America today. But of all of those powers, so carefully inscribed in Article I, none is so powerful ó or so necessary for the welfare of our country ó as the power to appropriate money from our treasury.

But it is not simply within the power of Congress to appropriate funds for the operation of the government. It is a duty that must be exercised each year, without fail, without excuses. The operation of the government ó to enforce our laws, to serve our people, to protect our liberties ó depends upon Congress providing the funds necessary to do so.

The bill that will soon be before the Senate, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2008, is essential legislation for the country. It includes eleven of the twelve annual appropriations bills. In all, it appropriates \$473.5 billion for the operations of nearly every agency in the Federal government, save for those funded by the already-approved Defense Appropriations Act. The bill contains an additional \$42.2 billion in emergency spending, including \$31 billion for the war in Afghanistan, and for force protection for our troops in Iraq.

The President's budget simply did not include sufficient funds for the health of our veterans. This bill provides \$3.7 billion more than requested to make sure that the VA can provide better possible care for our veterans.

The bill also includes \$3 billion of emergency spending for border security, \$622 million for drought relief, \$300 million for firefighting in the West, and \$250 million for low-income home energy assistance. Emergency funds totaling \$2.4 billion are also included for Peacekeeping operations in Darfur, refugee assistance, and other foreign assistance programs. We also approve \$195 million for the replacement of the I-35 bridge, which recently fell into the Mississippi River.

The Consolidated Appropriations bill contains an unprecedented level of transparency and accountability for member-requested projects and earmarks. Each and every earmark contained in the bill or described in the explanatory statement is accounted for in the

tables that are part of the joint explanatory statement. These tables describe the project, they describe the level of funding approved, and a list of the members of either the House or the Senate who requested the item. All information required by Senate Rule XLIV (44) is included in the explanatory statement accompanying the amendment.

In total, the level of funds that are earmarked is reduced 43 percent compared to the appropriations bills signed into law by the President two years ago.

Mr. President, it is imperative that this bill be approved this week. Last May, Congress passed a budget resolution that balanced the budget by 2012 and permitted the Congress to approve appropriations bills at a level \$21.2 billion above the President's request.

The Senate was able to work constructively, on a bipartisan basis, to address the needs of American people. After a deadly bridge collapse in Minnesota, the Senate voted 88 to 7 to provide additional funds to repair crumbling bridges. At a time when crime rates are on the rise, the Senate voted for the bill that puts more cops on the street by a vote of 75 to 19. While oil prices are soaring, the Senate voted 75 to 19 to pass the bill providing more help to low-income families so they can pay their heating bills this winter. After the shocking state of the Walter Reed Army Medical Hospital made the news, the Senate voted 92 to 1 to approve a bill increasing VA funding to better care for our returning warriors. Because our borders are in need of additional enforcement to stem the tide of illegal immigration, the Senate voted 89 to 1 to approve an amendment with billions for border security.

This bipartisan cooperation on moving the appropriations process forward, while addressing our crucial needs of our country, would not have been possible without the diligent work of the Committee's Ranking Member, Senator Thad Cochran.

It is refreshing to know that, in this era in which each political party is urged to view the other as a mortal enemy, there is hope for at least one oasis of comity, in which the duty to govern is still taken seriously. I wish to thank my friend, Senator Thad Cochran and all the members of the Appropriations Committee for their hard work, their diligent work, to produce each of the twelve appropriations bills and for all their cooperation in the assembly of this Consolidated Appropriations Act.

Sadly, the President does not share our view that we must invest in America. The President proposed to increase the Defense budget by ten percent. The President proposed to increase foreign aid by twelve percent. The President proposed \$195 billion of emergency spending for the wars. Yet, the President believes that the seven percent increase we sought for domestic programs was fiscally irresponsible. As a result, he threatened to veto nine of the twelve bills.

Under our Constitution, the President has the power to veto, and the President made clear that he intended to veto our bills. We are already ten weeks into the fiscal year, so we determined that it is time to govern. To govern, there must be compromise from time to time. So, working together across the aisle, we have cut \$17.5 billion from the levels approved by the Appropriations Committee. As a result, domestic programs receive only a three percent increase. I am not pleased with this outcome.

But I urge all Senators to support the Consolidated bill. Within the limits set by the President, we have funded as best we could essential priorities of this nation. For our veterans, this package includes a record \$43.1 billion in funding for the VA, an increase of \$3.7 billion over the President's request. The bill provides \$37.2 billion for veterans health care. An additional \$124 million is included to hire more VA personnel to reduce a six month backlog of benefit claims.

Funding for the National Institutes of Health is \$613 million above the request.

Energy prices are going through the roof. We provide \$788 million more than the President requested for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, which will provide 2 million families with additional help for winter heating bills at a time of record oil prices.

Despite the fact that violent crime is on the rise for the first time in fifteen years, the President wanted to cut State and local law enforcement. We have restored \$1.2 billion of the proposed cut.

Under the President's request, 600,000 women, infants, and children would lose their nutrition assistance. We fully fund the WIC program.

This package also makes education a priority by increasing Head Start by \$114 million, stopping the proposed cut of 30,000 slots for early childhood education. This additional \$118 million for No Child Left Behind means that tens of thousands of disadvantaged students will get the help they need to succeed in school. For college students, the amount for Pell Grants is increased to \$4,731 per year.

The President proposed to eliminate or slash numerous programs for our rural communities, such as rural health, rural housing, and clean water programs. But we restore all those programs.

The President wanted to slash funding for infrastructure programs. We in Congress have increased funding for highways, for repairing bridges, for airport improvements, and for Amtrak.

At my direction, the bill includes a \$20 million increase above the President's request for mine safety. This money will save lives.

Despite the failure of FEMA to respond to Hurricane Katrina, the President wanted to slash funding by over \$1.5 billion for first responders. We restore those cuts and actually increase funding by \$544 million.

I am also pleased that the bill includes \$31 billion for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, including \$16 billion for the war in Afghanistan, over \$10 billion for force protection in Iraq, such as body armor, and systems to defeat IEDs, \$1.1 billion for the wounded warrior program, and \$4 billion for other programs. It is a balanced package, and I support it.

The bill invests in the security of our homeland and supports the men and women who are at the front lines of protecting our communities. The Border Patrol will hire 3,000

more Border Patrol agents to protect our borders. We nearly double funding for port security, chemical security, and transit and rail security. The Justice Department will hire 100 new U.S. Marshals, 200 DEA Agents, and 160 FBI Agents, and we provide funding for hundreds of new cops at the state and local level. Finally, we more than double funding, to a total of \$108 million, for screening and treating illnesses suffered by those who responded to the 9/11 attacks at the World Trade Center.

Because so many Americans are worried about their mortgages and the specter of foreclosure, this bill adds \$180 million to provide credit counseling and foreclosure mitigation to sub-prime borrowers.

The bill takes action on concerns about the safety of the food we eat by providing the funds to hire 91 new meat and poultry inspectors and up to 257 new food safety inspectors for the FDA ó that would fully restore the 25 percent cut in the number of food inspectors since 2003.

The bill makes responsible investments in energy, conservation, and the environment.

Mr. President, those aren't just meaningless numbers on an obscure government ledger. There are consequences for our failure to invest in America. Bridges fall, fires destroy, and hurricanes devastate. People get sick from food that is not inspected and drugs that are not adequately tested. Our schools, our roads, and our transportation system are all in need of serious attention.

This bill is a genuine effort to compromise so that we can move forward. It is a balanced bill. It is the result of over a month of bipartisan negotiations. For the sake of the welfare of our nation, Mr. President, it is time to govern.

The õgotchaö politics that prevails in Washington must end. To continue it damages our country from within and damages our country from without and discredits both political parties.

Mr. President. I ask unanimous consent that additional remarks be included in the Record following these remarks, and I yield the floor.

###