

Iraq – Afghanistan War Spending: Legislative Update
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Congress will likely act before the end of October on at least a portion of the \$192 billion that President Bush is seeking to fund the Iraq – Afghanistan war for Fiscal Year 2008 (which runs from October 1, 2007 through September 30, 2008). Legal and extralegal (civil disobedience / civil resistance) lobbying should take place between now and the end of October.

You can find out who your Representative and Senators are at the website Congress.org, along with phone numbers and contact information.

Following is a likely legislative timeline that Congress may follow.

Defense Authorization and Defense Appropriations Bill Pass House and Senate

On October 1, the Senate passed the Defense Authorization bill. This bill is a policy bill which lays out programs that the Department of Defense is authorized to carry out and also contains a suggested funding amount. However, it does not actually give the Defense Department the legal ability to spend funds in the U.S. treasury. That requires an appropriations bill. So, even though the Senate Defense Authorization bill sets a suggested funding level of about \$150 billion to fund the Iraq – Afghanistan war during FY 2008, that money is not yet actually appropriated.

On October 3, the Senate—on a voice vote—passed the Defense Appropriations bill for FY 2008. This is the bill that gives the Defense Department the legal ability to actually spend money out of the U.S. treasury.

The House previously passed its versions of the Defense Authorization and Defense Appropriations Bill in the summer.

Neither the House nor the Senate version of the Defense Appropriations bill contains funding for the Iraq – Afghanistan war.

Continuing Resolution and MRAP Program

Both the House and the Senate did pass a Continuing Resolution near the end of September. A continuing resolution is passed when regular appropriations bills have not yet passed Congress or been signed into law. The continuing resolution allows government agencies to continue to spend money to operate at the levels at which they operated during the previous year, in order to avoid a shut down of the federal government. Thus, this particular Continuing Resolution did allow for continued spending on the Iraq – Afghanistan war at an average expenditure rate of about \$5.8 billion per month (while also permitting the Department of Defense to draw upon other funds in its regular baseline military budget to fund the war until the full Iraq – Afghanistan war spending request is acted upon by Congress).

Congress appropriated an additional \$5.2 billion for the procurement of Mine Resistant Ambush Protect (MRAP) vehicles in the continuing resolution. In so doing, it fulfilled the spending request which President Bush submitted to Congress at the end of July.

Conference Committee and Possible Bridge Fund for the Iraq – Afghanistan War OR Another Continuing Resolution

Congress may choose one of two routes to continue funding the Iraq – Afghanistan war. It may pass a new continuing resolution to continue funding the war. Or it may attach a bridge fund to the Defense Appropriations bill to fund the war. Either way, there likely will be precious little notice to the public of war funding that is being voted upon by Congress, which makes legal and extra-legal lobbying so important at this time.

A conference committee, made up of Representatives and Senators, must now resolve the differences between the House and Senate versions of the Defense Appropriations bill.

The final vote on the Defense Appropriations bill—which may include some Iraq – Afghanistan war funding—will likely be voted upon in both the House and Senate sometime between October 15 and November 2. The Senate is in recess from October 8 through October 15 and the House plans to adjourn by November 8.

John Murtha, Chair of the House Appropriations Defense Subcommittee, has indicated that he may add a “bridge” fund to the Defense Appropriations bill (as reported by Megan Scully in the October 2, 2007 edition of Congress Daily). This bridge fund would appropriate funds for the military to wage the Iraq – Afghanistan war, probably through the spring of 2008. Such a bridge fund was included a year ago, to the tune of \$70 billion, to wage the Iraq – Afghanistan war.

It is very unlikely that there will be much—if any—public awareness of a bridge fund being attached to the final version of the Defense Appropriations bill that will be voted upon by both the House and Senate. For example, this past May the final version of the Iraq – Afghanistan war supplemental was not publicly available until about 5:30 a.m. on the morning that the vote took place.

Thus, pressure must be exerted now upon Representatives and Senators to oppose any additional funding for the Iraq – Afghanistan war. This includes a commitment to vote against the Defense Appropriations Bill if the final version contains any funding for the war.

Iraq – Afghanistan War Supplemental Vote in Early 2008

Sometime in early 2008, Congress will take up an Iraq – Afghanistan war supplemental to provide funding through the end of the fiscal year (September 30, 2008).

Dave Obey, Chair of the House Appropriations Committee, indicated on October 2 he will not send any Iraq – Afghanistan war supplemental to the floor of the House for a vote prior to the end of the year if it does not:

1. Establish as a goal the end of U.S. involvement in combat operations by January of 2009.
2. Ensure that troops would have adequate time at home between deployments as outlined in the Murtha and Webb amendments.
3. Demonstrate a determination to engage in an intensive, broad scale diplomatic offensive involving other countries in the region.

Obey continued his statement, “As Chairman of the Appropriations Committee I have absolutely no intention of reporting out of Committee anytime in this session of Congress any such request that simply serves to continue the status quo.”

Now for the finer points of Obey’s statement. His commitment is specifically tied to THIS SESSION of Congress, which has a targeted adjournment date of October 26, though it is possible the House could stay in session beyond this date. Obey’s statement very concretely DOES NOT refer to what he may or may not do once the Second Session of the 110th Congress begins in January.

Also, the first two conditions of ending combat operations by January 2009 and of guarantees of rest and readiness for troops deploying to Iraq are not substantively different from the conditions included in the original version of the Iraq – Afghanistan war supplemental passed earlier this year but vetoed by Bush. While ending U.S. combat operations in Iraq by January 2009 would be a significant change in current U.S. policy, we should be pushing for the immediate end to combat operations with the immediate withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Iraq and with full U.S. funding for the reconstruction of Iraq.

Iraq – Afghanistan War Funding for Fiscal Year 2009

On February 4, 2008 President Bush will submit his budget proposal to Congress for FY 2009 (which runs from October 1, 2008 through September 30, 2009). Initial indications, according to the website DefenseInsider, are that the military is preparing a budget request in the range of \$150 to \$200 billion. Initial budget requests from each branch of the military were to be submitted to the DOD comptroller by September 14 of this year. Most probably, this funding request will be debated in the fall of 2008 and be used as an election wedge issue by both the Democrats and Republicans.