

Questions and Answers about the 2007 Supplemental Spending Bill

Q: What is a Fiscal Year?

A: The U.S. government's budget is based upon a fiscal year. A fiscal year begins on October 1 and ends the following September. For example, Fiscal Year 2005 covers the period from October 1, 2004 through September 30, 2005. Fiscal Year 2006 covers the period from October 1, 2005 through September 30, 2006. Fiscal Year is abbreviated FY.

Q: How does the U.S. government set its budget for a fiscal year?

A: In late January or early February of each year, the President submits the proposed budget to Congress for the fiscal year that will begin on October 1. The proposed budget goes first to the House Appropriations Committee. There are several subcommittees which will examine the budget, make changes and then pass it on to the full House Appropriations Committee. This Committee will make changes and then send the budget to the full House of Representatives. Once approved by the full House, the budget bill goes over to the Senate where the process is repeated. The House and the Senate versions are usually a little bit different from each other. A conference committee made up of members of the House and of the Senate combine the bills to create a final bill which is then voted on by the full House and the full Senate.

Q: What is a Supplemental Spending Bill?

A: A Supplemental Spending bill was normally used to fund completely unanticipated circumstances which arose after the budget for the current fiscal year was approved. Supplemental spending bills are introduced mid-way through a fiscal year. A very reasonable use of a supplemental spending bill is to respond to catastrophes caused by nature, such as Hurricane Katrina or the tsunami of 2004. The size and scope of these supplemental spending bills escalated dramatically after the U.S. led invasion of Iraq. Since 2001, the Bush Administration has submitted an "emergency supplemental" spending bill every year requesting more money for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. This is in addition to the funds allocated to the war in the regular budget for that fiscal year. In February, Bush will present 2007's supplemental spending bill to Congress.

Q: What will this supplemental spending bill cover?

A: We're not sure yet, and we won't know until the bill is introduced. Initial requests from branches of the military totaled \$160 billion. This will be reduced by the Pentagon before the bill is submitted to Congress, but estimates are that the final request will be between \$100 and \$128 billion. This year, the Navy and Marine Corps requested \$30 billion combined, while the Army requested \$80 billion and the Air Force,

\$33 billion. Officials state that some funding will go to replacing equipment that is old or has experienced accelerated wear and tear from combat in harsh conditions. In the past, funding has also gone towards combat pay for soldiers, especially for special deployment pay for National Guard units, procurement of supplies, and war-time troop level retention and readiness. All told, this bill is shaping up to be the largest supplemental spending request since September 11, 2001.

See:

- *Controversy over Pentagon's war-spending plan*, Nov 29 2006, Julian E. Barnes and Peter Spiegel, LA Times, <http://tinyurl.com/ymzvwc>
- *The Federal Budget's Long Emergency*, Dec 2006, Veronique de Rugy, Reason (Print Edition), <http://reason.com/news/show/116678.html>

Q: Why is this year's supplemental spending bill so big?

A: This year, Deputy Defense Secretary, Gordon England, sent a memo to the different branches of the military stating the bill would not only allocate money towards the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also anything that could fall under the heading of the so-called "global war on terror." Once this memo was released, the Air Force nearly doubled its requests.

See:

- *Controversy over Pentagon's war-spending plan*, Nov 29 2006, Julian E. Barnes and Peter Spiegel, LA Times, <http://tinyurl.com/ymzvwc>

Q: Why isn't this request factored into a regular appropriations bill?

A: According to the Bush Administration, "Occasionally there is need to modify the President's budget to recognize special circumstances that could not be foreseen when the President's budget was transmitted to Congress." In both 2005 and 2006, President Bush submitted the supplemental request for the current fiscal year (to cover "circumstances that could not be foreseen") as well as the full year budget request for the next fiscal year in February. For example, in February 2006, the White House requested \$67.5 billion in war funding for the fiscal year that ran from Oct 1, 2005 to September 30, 2006. Simultaneously, the White House request \$50 billion in "bridge funds" in its regular budget request for the fiscal year that runs from October 1, 2006 through September 30, 2007. Now the White House will be seeking additional war funding in February 2007 for the current fiscal year while at the same time seeking war funding in the regular appropriations process for the fiscal year that runs from October 1, 2007 through September 30, 2008. Oversight and spending restrictions are far looser on supplemental spending bills. They are designed this way because historically supplemental spending bills were used for emergencies, funds needed immediately. The Bush Administration uses these bills to pass through the real cost of war without much oversight at all, allowing a continuous blank check for the war, while arguing in the regular budget that the war is not costing too much.

See:

- Office of Management and Budget, Supplementals, Amendments, and Releases, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/amendments.htm>

Q: What type of oversight have these bills had in the past?

A: Congress has fast-tracked these bills with little debate over them. The House and Senate each take about a month to deliberate and approve the bills, getting the funding approved by the end of April. This leaves very little time for congress to actually inspect the bills. For these same reasons, the supplemental spending bill is a great cover for pork barrel spending.

Q: Who cares if the process is flawed? We are in the middle of a war, we need more funding, don't we?

A: But the military already has more funding, and we are spending more and more on the military. The U.S. military budget for Fiscal Year 2007 (October 1, 2006 – September 30, 2007) is \$439 billion, which is 48% greater than it was in Fiscal Year 2001. \$70 billion is specifically budgeted for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The budget for FY 2007 is seven percent larger than Fiscal Year 2006. Add on top of that, this supplemental bill's estimated \$100 billion, to total somewhere around \$540 billion. The U.S. public overwhelmingly is against this war and wants to see an end to it sooner than later. How are we to expect our military and political leaders to find a resolution, when we are giving them larger and larger budgets to fight the war?

See:

- *Budget 2007: A Special Tracker*, 2007, Citizen Joe, <http://www.citizenjoe.org/node/301>
- Rep. Dennis Kucinich: *No More Money for War on Iraq*, Dec 4 2006, Interview by Joshua Scheer, Truthdig, <http://tinyurl.com/uke4k>
- *Brother Can You Spare a Dime? Iraq War Spending in Fiscal Year 2007*, Dec 29 2006, Jeff Leys, Voices for Creative Nonviolence, <http://vcnv.org/iraq-war-spending-2007>
- *Never Ending Funding for the Never Ending Iraq War: A Discussion of the Pending Supplemental Spending Bill*, Mar 26 2006, Jeff Leys, Voices for Creative Nonviolence, <http://vcnv.org/never-ending-funding>

Q: But the Democrats have control of Congress now, they'll put a stop to this, right?

A: War funding is not about Democrat or Republican. It is not about Left or Right. It is about Right or Wrong. And on Iraq war funding there is precious little difference between the Democratic and Republican parties. Incoming Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid was recently quoted as saying "We're not going to do anything to limit funding or cut off funds [to the war]." Incoming Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi echoed Reid's sentiment "We will not cut off funding for the troops," but added, "The days of rubber-stamping any request by this administration are over." What the new non-rubber-stamp days will look like is yet to be seen.

Q: Isn't voting against the supplemental spending bill voting against the troops?

A: No, a great deal of items in the spending bill are actually earmarked for up to three years from now. The Congressional Research Services states that it takes anywhere from 1 to 3 years from the time funds are appropriated to the time when equipment and weapons are available in the field. Voting down the spending bill will not keep the troops from having armor or ammo or working machinery today or tomorrow. In fact giving the green light to war funding for up to the year 2010 means we are giving the green light to having troops in harms way in Iraq.