

Never Ending Funding for the Never Ending Iraq War: A Discussion of the 2006 Supplemental Spending Bill

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Once again, Congress is poised to approve “emergency” funding to prosecute the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The House already approved \$67.5 billion on March 16, 2006—rushing the bill through the Appropriations Committee and the House floor in order to get home in time for St. Patrick’s Day. The Senate Appropriations Committee held hearings on the Bush Administration’s supplemental spending request on March 8, though it is yet to vote to send it to the full Senate. The full Senate is expected to vote by the end of April, and quite probably much sooner. Now is the time to call your Senators to tell them in no uncertain terms to vote against the pending supplemental spending bill (call the Congressional switchboard at 1-866-340-9281; they will connect you to your Senators’ offices).

This time around, 71 Representatives voted against the “emergency” spending. Those voting against the supplemental included such long time Iraq war opponents as Ron Paul (R-TX) and James McGovern (D-MA).

But this year, fiscal hawks such as James Sensenbrenner (R-WI) also voted against the supplemental spending package. Sensenbrenner is one of the strongest supporters of the military, voted to authorize the Iraq war, and voted for every prior supplemental spending package for the war. It is simply impossible to assert that his vote is a vote against U.S. troops serving in Iraq. Sensenbrenner’s vote now removes the last rationalization of so-called, erstwhile war opponents who regularly vote for every war spending bill.

This year’s supplemental must be placed within the context of the exponential growth in military spending since Bush assumed office in 2001. The Bush military budget for Fiscal Year 2007 (which runs from October 1, 2006 to September 30, 2007) is 48 percent greater than the military budget for Fiscal Year 2001. The FY 2007 military budget is 7 percent greater than the FY 2006 military budget. [from the President’s budget message] In 2005, U.S. military spending accounted for 43 percent of global military spending—and was nearly 7 times greater than the next biggest military spender, China. [from “U.S. Military Spending vs. the World”, Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, Feb. 6, 2006].

The President’s budget message states that “...the 2007 Budget requests \$50 billion as an emergency allowance or bridge fund to carry the military’s war efforts through part of 2007. Later in 2007, when the year’s total funding needs are better known, the Administration will request the remaining funds for the year in an emergency supplemental appropriation.”

It is clear that the Bush Administration successfully created the funding mechanism for a never ending war in Iraq as well as in Afghanistan. We will be in the same position a year from now, when Bush announces his administration’s request for additional “emergency” funding for the Iraq war. Erstwhile Congressional opponents of the war will vote for additional funding, using

the duck-and-cover approach of saying that they must vote for the supplemental spending in order to “support the troops”. In the meantime more and more U.S. service members will die in Iraq, be horribly maimed, and have their personal and family lives significantly disrupted. Increasing numbers of Iraqis will continue to die.

While Representatives and Senators duck-and-cover rather than taking principled stands on the war, what exactly is being paid for and purchased by the supplemental spending bill approved by the House and pending before the Senate?

The military spending on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is growing at an exponential rate. In FY 2004, the U.S. spent \$66.8 billion on the wars. This increased by 48% in FY 2005, to \$98.8 billion. Assuming passage of the pending supplemental bill, spending in FY 2006 will be \$117.9 billion, a 75 percent increase in spending over FY 2004. [“CRS Report for Congress: FY2006 Supplemental Appropriations: Iraq and Other International Activities; Additional Katrina Hurricane Relief”; by Congressional Research Service; updated March 10, 2006; page CRS-7]. The Congressional Research Service (CRS) is the non-partisan public policy research arm of the U.S. Congress.

On a monthly basis, spending on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq continue to increase. Costs for military operations (including personnel costs as well as operation and maintenance costs) are slated to increase from \$5.4 billion in FY 2005 to \$6.4 billion in FY 2006—a 20 percent increase. If the war costs are calculated to include non-operational expenses, average monthly expenditures will increase from \$8.2 billion in FY 2005 to \$9.8 billion in FY 2006—a 19 percent increase. As noted by the Congressional Research Service, these non-operational costs include defense health, working capital funds, the Iraq Freedom Fund, Afghan and Iraq Training Forces Fund, intelligence, and investment. [see Congressional Research Service, pages CRS-8 to CRS-10]

The supplemental spending bill provides for spending \$6.6 billion on pay to service members. This includes \$5.9 billion for “incremental wartime costs” and \$642.7 million for “active duty overstrength”. “Incremental wartime costs” includes basic military pay, special pay and entitlements for Reserve and National Guard members on active duty. It also includes “incremental pay above the normal military compensation for active component personnel participating in or directly supporting” the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. “Active duty overstrength” is the amount spent to maintain U.S. military forces at a force strength above budgeted enlistment numbers. [See “Department of Defense: FY 2006 Supplemental Request for Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)”, February 2006, pages 4 to 6] [Budget supplemental amounts are from: “Report 109-388; House of Representatives; 109th Congress, 2nd Session”, Report of the House Appropriations Committee committed to the Committee of the Whole of the House of Representatives on March 13, 2006, pages 8 and 9]

Other personnel related expenses amount to \$3.3 billion, including \$1.3 billion for supplemental life insurance and death benefits; \$345 million for recruitment and retention incentives; and \$1.2 billion as a basic housing allowance. [see “Report 109-388; House of Representatives; 109th Congress, 2nd Session, pages 8 and 9]

Expenditures for Operation and Maintenance skyrockets in FY 2006, when total funding will be \$65.6 billion (which includes \$37 billion in the pending supplemental spending bill and \$28.6 billion in the FY 2006 bridge fund). This compares to \$45.8 billion in FY 2005-an increase of 43 percent or \$19.8 billion.

The supplemental spending bill allocates \$17.7 billion for procurement purposes. These monies would be available for use through September 30, 2008. In its initial request for supplemental funding, the Department of Defense requested that "...its procurement funds be available for three years to take into account the one to three years that it takes to contract, order, produce and receive military parts and equipment." [Congressional Research Service, footnote #12, page CRS-8]. Given this lag time, it cannot be plausibly argued that these funds must be allocated at this point in time in order to ensure that U.S. troops in the field have the weapons needed to fight the Iraq war in present real time. The only purpose this additional funding serves is to ensure that weapons are available to fight the war for years into the future.

As the cost of war-fighting escalates dramatically in Iraq-both in dollars and in human lives lost-the U.S. fails to provide any assistance for reconstruction. Indeed the new term of art is "Iraq Stabilization" rather than reconstruction. The supplemental spending bill provides \$1.6 billion for Iraq Stabilization Assistance. Of these funds, \$675 million would fund "provincial reconstruction teams"; \$287 million would provide additional security at nodes in the oil and electrical grids; and \$355 million would fund infrastructure sustainment (i.e., to ensure that the very limited number of completed reconstruction projects might be able to still function into the future-a key concern raised by the Special Inspector General on Iraq Reconstruction in his January 2006 audits).

As the U.S. backs away from any form of commitment to rebuild Iraq following 15 years of economic and military warfare, we are confronted with the stark reality that the currently pending supplemental spending bill continues to permit the U.S. to prosecute a never ending war against Iraq. The costs associated with Operation and Maintenance expenses continue to grow, while little funding (about \$1.9 billion) is provided for such items as body armor-one of the items which our duck-and-cover Representatives and Senators use to justify continue to vote for the war funding (the argument goes that if they don't vote for body armor, they are not supporting U.S. troops).

Our duck-and-cover politicians say that they must vote for the supplemental to ensure U.S. troops have the weapons and ammunition they need to fight the war-and protect themselves, so the argument goes. Yet the procurement process takes from one to three years to be completed, as noted by the Congressional Research Service and the Department of Defense. For how long is the U.S. planning to prosecute this war?

Our duck-and-cover politicians say they must support U.S. troops by voting for continued pay for troops in the field and enhanced benefits. Yet would National Guard members, Reservists and their families not be better off in their home communities, being ready to assist when natural disasters strike, contributing directly to the economy of their local communities? And would all U.S. service members and their families not be better off at home rather than drawing imminent danger pay, greater life insurance and death benefits, and housing allowances?

And if our duck-and-cover politicians truly believe that this war in Iraq is necessary, prudent and in the national security interests of the United States, perhaps they should show the political courage to act as if this war truly matters. Perhaps the duck-and-cover politicians will vote to cancel the tax cuts handed out to the wealthy in this country. Perhaps they will vote for a special income tax surcharge for the wealthiest of our citizens. Perhaps they will impose a special gasoline tax surcharge for the duration of the Iraq war to force us as U.S. citizens to share the pain and sacrifice in waging this war in Iraq. Perhaps they will act to require auto companies to build vehicles which consume less fuel.

Or perhaps our duck-and-cover politicians can begin to act as if the lives of U.S. service members and their families matter to them-even as the politicians refuse to provide funding to reconstruct Iraq following our country's 15 years of economic and military warfare on Iraq. Three years into the prosecution of this war, not a single Senator has dared to vote against funding for the Iraq war. Only two Senators have the temerity to be co-sponsors of legislation to begin talking about a timetable for withdrawal from Iraq. Only 71 House members voted against the pending supplemental spending bill-and not necessarily because they oppose the Iraq war.

Perhaps our duck-and-cover politicians can begin to look into their souls and into their consciences and begin to show the courage to end this war. Perhaps some of them will begin to follow the courage of Ernest Gruening and Wayne Morse who voted against the Gulf of Tonkin resolution which set the stage for the Vietnam war. Perhaps some will shed their duck-and-cover lives and show the resolve of Gaylord Nelson who, as the junior Senator from Wisconsin in 1965, joined two others in voting against funding to escalate the Vietnam war. At the time Nelson said:

“At a time in history when the Senate should be vindicating its historic reputation as the greatest deliberative body in the world, we are stumbling over each other to see who can say ‘yea’ the quickest and the loudest. I regret it, and I think some day we shall all regret it....”

“Reluctantly, I express my opposition ... here by voting ‘nay.’ The support in the Congress for this measure is clearly overwhelming. Obviously, you need my vote less than I need my conscience.”

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