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Evaluating Emergency Supplemental Spending: Advice for Congress

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Next year, the Bush Administration will propose legislation for a supplemental appropriation to fund the war on terrorism and ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Rumored to request around \$160 billion, it could very well end up being one of the largest supplemental bills ever passed. Congress should neither rubber stamp the bill nor use it to debate war strategy. Instead, Congress should carefully scrutinize the request to ensure that it only contains funding for warfighting. At the same time, Congress should not include spending on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in regular defense spending. Doing so would constrain regular defense spending and tighten funds available for modernization, procurement, personnel, and other anticipated expenses.

Blank Checks and Broken Budgets

Ongoing missions that serve our nation's vital national interests, such as the military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, require the use of supplemental appropriations because they cannot be accommodated within the annual federal budget. Using these requests to fund Congressional pet projects, or to make up for chronic budget shortfalls, is inappropriate. Such practices waste scarce tax dollars and may provide cover for some politicians who want to avoid the hard choices required to limit federal spending.

According to press reports, an October 25 Pentagon memo signed by Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon England allowed each military service to include requests for costs associated with the

broader war on terrorism. Predictably, these requests went beyond spending for Iraq and Afghanistan by requesting money not only to cover the direct costs of warfighting, but also to repair and replace equipment and force structure. While whether the military has enough money to remain trained and ready must be addressed, the regular authorization and appropriations process should provide those funds.

A Hamstrung Congress

After several years and numerous requests, the Department of Defense has yet to provide Congress with the individual cost of each operation it intends to fund. Without a budget breakdown for each conflict, Members of Congress vote to approve funds without a complete picture of the costs. Without that background, the ability of Congress to provide the necessary oversight of these large emergency spending bills is limited. Additionally, the warfighting supplemental bills have entirely removed the input of the defense authorizing committees regarding this critical funding, even though these committees are charged with approving the annual Pentagon budget.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
www.heritage.org/research/nationalsecurity/wm1288.cfm

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A Guide for Action

Congress should:

- Approve only emergency funding for operational war-related needs and pass a bill free of earmarks or non-emergency spending. The President should veto a spending bill that contains funds for projects other than those urgently needed by the military.
- Not use the approval of the supplemental to debate war strategy. Delaying the approval of supplemental funding disrupts programs and undercuts readiness because it forces the military to pay for operational missions by diverting funds from regular appropriations. Congress should act fast.
- Ensure that adequate annual defense appropriations in the regular defense budget maintain a

trained and ready force and prepare the military for the future. Annual defense expenditures should total around 4 percent of gross domestic product.

Congress should provide our armed forces in the field with the support they need to do their job while being a good steward of tax dollars and providing appropriate oversight of federal programs. The supplemental will be the first test of the how the 110th Congress intends to address these tasks.

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