

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE APPROVES IRAQ FUNDING BILL

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - A House committee approved Thursday a slightly smaller version of President Bush's \$87 billion funding request for efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, setting up a major congressional debate in both chambers next week.

The powerful House Appropriations Committee rejected proposals to convert some of the money from grants into loans and to further reduce the amount earmarked for reconstruction in Iraq. The committee, by a 47-14 vote, approved a version of the request primarily put together by the chairman, Rep. Bill Young, R-Fla.

The proposal is expected to be on the House floor next week, as is its Senate counterpart, which was approved Sept. 30. The White House has lobbied strongly for the package, with President Bush getting personally involved and top officials repeatedly visiting Capitol Hill. The administration says the money is vital to establishing security and economic viability in Iraq, and even many critics concede that its passage is likely.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said at a press briefing Thursday that she would seek to present a substitute proposal for full House consideration next week.

Rep. Jerry Lewis, R-Calif., praised the work of the appropriations committee: "Today, I believe, in a very bipartisan way, we are going to be stepping out front, leading on behalf of all Americans in fighting this war on terrorism."

In the funding proposal _ a supplemental request to the budget _ President Bush is seeking about \$66 billion for military funding and \$20.3 billion for reconstruction in Iraq. The version approved by the committee cut the money for Iraq reconstruction to \$18.6 billion, shifted some spending in the bill and eliminated a few requests.

For example, the proposal does not include funding for two new prisons in Iraq at \$50,000 per bed, \$200 million to create an American-Iraqi enterprise fund or \$153 million for solid waste

programs. It shifts some of the military funds while boosting funding for relief and reconstruction in Afghanistan from \$800 million to \$1.2 billion. The committee also added money to repair hurricane damage to military and Coast Guard facilities.

Rep. Zach Wamp, R-Tenn., provided a vivid example of Bush's determination to avoid major changes in the bill, particularly the possibility of lending the money to Iraq. Wamp, who had prepared an amendment to convert half of the reconstruction funds to a loan, told the committee that on Wednesday he met with Bush, talked to Secretary of State Colin Powell and received a telephone call from Baghdad from Paul Bremer, the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority.

Wamp said he decided to withdraw his amendment because he knew there were not enough votes to pass it and because of Bush's persuasion. "I met him face-to-face yesterday, and he disagrees with me," Wamp said.

Some GOP senators also are considering a move to require Iraq to repay at least some of the reconstruction money. Senate Democrats lost a bid in their appropriations committee to make such a change.

An amendment by Rep. David Obey, D-Wis., to boost the size of the U.S. Army, increase the amount allocated to the military and kill tax cuts set for the top 1 percent of U.S. taxpayers was rejected Thursday in the House committee.

Eight Democratic House members opposed to the president's request said Thursday that they believed spending as much as the president proposes would be irresponsible.

Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., criticized the proposed supplemental spending at a time when, he said, the president has cut education and transportation and when 40 million Americans are without health insurance. Lewis also criticized the administration for what he characterized as misleading the American public by claiming Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and had ties to al-Qaida.

"I cannot trust the Bush administration to do the right thing," Lewis said. "I cannot trust them to tell the truth. The Bush administration's record on Iraq is one of secrecy, deceit and fear mongering."

Said **Rep. Janice Schakowsky**, D-Ill.: "While we can't predict right now how many of our colleagues will join us in voting no, there is widespread concern in the Democratic Caucus over this supplemental. But we want the American people to know in no uncertain terms that there are Democrats willing to stand up against this reckless and dangerous administration."