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Senate passes war spending package

\$162 billion for conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan; some add-ons unresolved

Associated Press

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WASHINGTON



The Senate passed a \$162 billion war spending plan yesterday, sending to President Bush legislation that will pay for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan until the next president takes office.

The bill, approved 92-6, includes a historic boost in college aid for troops, plus a 13-week extension of unemployment benefits and \$2.7 billion in emergency flood relief for the Midwest.

The Senate, however, narrowly failed to approve a House-passed bill to cancel a scheduled cut in payments to doctors who treat Medicare patients.

It also failed to resolve differences over home mortgage legislation and the administration's electronic surveillance program. Those matters will await lawmakers when they return from a 10-day July break.

The spending bill will bring to more than \$650 billion the amount Congress has provided for the Iraq war since it started more than five years ago. For operations in Afghanistan, the total is nearly \$200 billion, according to congressional officials.

Last week, the House approved the war funding measure, 268-155. The domestic add-ons were approved separately by a 416-12 vote.

The White House has said it supports the combined measure, which technically allowed the measure to advance without senators having to vote specifically for the war funding, a distasteful matter for many Democrats. Highlights of the funding bill include:

- **GI Bill:** \$63 billion over 10 years for increased college aid for military service members who serve after Sept. 11, 2001. The new benefit would provide full in-state tuition and fees for enrollment in a public college, a monthly housing stipend and \$1,000 per year for books and supplies. People who serve three years would receive the full benefit; those with shorter enrollments would receive 40 to 90 percent of the benefit. The benefits could be transferred to a service member's spouse or children.
- **Unemployment insurance:** \$12.5 billion over two years to provide 13 additional weeks of jobless benefits for people whose 26-week benefits have run out. People must have worked 20 weeks to be eligible. Ten-year cost: \$8.2 billion.

- Flood aid: \$2.7 billion to replenish various disaster aid accounts in the aftermath of widespread flooding in the Midwest.
- Medicaid rules: Blocks six of seven new Medicaid regulations sought by the Bush administration to curb program costs and combat waste and abuse. The new regulations would have reduced federal spending on health care for the poor by more than \$10 billion over the next five years and were widely opposed by governors.
- Other spending: \$10.1 billion for various foreign aid programs, including \$1.9 billion for international food aid and \$465 million for Mexico to combat drug trafficking; \$5.8 billion for Louisiana levee repairs and construction; \$4.6 billion for military base construction; \$400 million for "competitiveness" programs, energy research and medical research; and \$210 million to address cost overruns involving the 2010 Census.

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