

# Huge war spending bill to test Democrats

Iraq and Afghanistan request could go as high as \$200 billion

**AP** Associated Press

Updated: 8:37 a.m. CT Dec 1, 2006

WASHINGTON - The Bush administration is working on its largest-ever appeal for more Iraq war funds - a record \$100 billion, at least, and that figure reflects cuts from wish lists originally circulating around the Pentagon.

The measure will give Democrats, who take control of Congress next year, an early chance to try changing the conduct of the war. But they are limited and do not want to be cast as unsympathetic to U.S. troops.

"We're not going to do anything to limit funding or cut off funds," says Senate Democratic leader Harry Reid, D-Nev.

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|   | <a href="#">Harvard University Institute of Politics' Conference of New Members of Congress</a>                    |
|   | George H.W. Bush <a href="#">attends Mexico's presidential inauguration</a>  |
| 2 | John Edwards <a href="#">talks about his book</a> in Seattle, Wash.  |
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**\$200 billion Iraq-Afghanistan war budget**

Senior Pentagon officials have trimmed initial requests from the Army and Air Force. But with \$70 billion already approved for the budget year that began Oct. 1, and more money needed to replace lost or worn-out equipment, spending levels for 2007 easily will be at the highest since the Iraq war began in 2003.

Precise figures have not been set by either the Pentagon or the White House. The requests in February for Iraq and Afghanistan probably will be about \$100 billion, but could climb as high as \$128 billion if the services get their way, said Jim McAleese, a Virginia lawyer who specializes in national security law.

Including the money already approved, the cost of the total military spending for Iraq and Afghanistan could come close to \$200 billion in 2007. About \$120 billion was spent in the 2006 budget year, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

Despite widespread discontent over the Iraq war and President Bush's handling of it, Democrats are expected to grant the vast majority of the request. Yet evidence is accumulating that the figure the White House sends to Capitol Hill will not be limited to dollars critically needed for troops and war-fighting.

**Dems promise greater war budget scrutiny**

There is much sentiment among Democrats to protect troops and fear about being portrayed as unsympathetic to men and women in uniform. These factors probably would overwhelm any efforts by anti-war Democrats to use the debate over the Iraq money to take on Bush's conduct of the war.

"Although the Democrats are very uncomfortable with the way the Iraq policy is being executed, they are at pains not to appear that they are shortchanging troops in the field," said Loren Thompson, chief operating officer of the Lexington Institute, a Washington-area think tank.

"This  
is  
their



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AP

opportunity to show that they, too, are pro-defense," Thompson said.

Democrats are promising to give the upcoming request greater scrutiny than Republicans did when considering Bush's previous requests.

"It won't just be a rubber stamp on what they give us," said Kirstin Brost, spokeswoman for the incoming chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, Rep. David Obey, D-Wis.

### **Deteriorating security, harsh conditions increase costs**

There is increasing concern about the cost of the war and the fact that Iraq spending is kept on a set of ledgers separate from the rest of government operations.

It is possible that the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group could affect the spending request.

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Since the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, Congress has approved about \$500 billion for Iraq, Afghanistan and other terrorism-fighting efforts.

The Vietnam War cost an inflation-adjusted \$121 billion at its height in 1968, according to the Congressional Research Service. The overall tally for Vietnam is \$663 billion, adjusted for inflation, while Iraq so far come to about \$350 billion.

The cost of the war has risen dramatically as the security situation has deteriorated and more equipment is destroyed or worn out in harsh conditions.

### **Broad-ranging 'war' projects**

The Pentagon increasingly is using war spending bills for costs not directly related to Iraq and Afghanistan. Last month, Deputy Defense Secretary Gordon England said the four military services could add projects connected to the broader fight against terrorism, which critics said could be interpreted to cover almost anything.

"He was telling the services to put any damn thing they

wanted into the supplemental," said Winslow Wheeler of the Center for Defense Information, a think tank policy group, in Washington. Such costs include buying cargo planes and restructuring Army outfits into smaller, more nimble fighting units.

England's memo led to inflated requests that are now being "scrubbed" by higher-ups at the Pentagon. While that could lower the price for the February request, Wheeler said, the services are likely to try again in future bills.

Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman had no comment on the upcoming request for money.

Democrats have not been shy about adding money not sought by the president to war bills. Most notably, the Senate in August included \$13 billion for Army and Marine Corps combat readiness in a Pentagon budget measure that had \$70 billion in Iraq.

Farm-state lawmakers such as Sen. Kent Conrad, D-N.D., may try to use the Iraq debate to push billions of dollars in agricultural disaster aid.

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