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## Senate Approves Budget, Breaking Spending Limits



Stephen Crowley/The New York Times

President Bush, far left, with Senators Rick Santorum, George Allen and John Kerry Thursday after a meeting in the White House.

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By [CARL HULSE](#)

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WASHINGTON, March 16 — The Senate narrowly approved a \$2.8 trillion election-year budget Thursday that broke spending limits only hours after it increased federal borrowing power to avert a government default.

The budget decision at the end of a marathon day of voting followed a separate 52-to-48 Senate vote to increase the federal debt limit by \$781 billion, bringing the debt ceiling to nearly \$9 trillion. The move left Democrats attacking President Bush and Congressional Republicans for piling up record debt in their years in power.

Despite calls by Republican deficit hawks to hold the line, Senate Republicans joined with Democrats to approve more than \$16 billion in added spending for social, military, job safety and home-heating programs, exceeding a ceiling established by President Bush.

In separate action, the House advanced \$92 billion in war spending and hurricane recovery money.

Even with the added money, the Senate approved the \$2.8 trillion budget by only 51 to 49 with five Republicans defecting. Senator Mary L. Landrieu of Louisiana was the sole Democrat to back the budget after winning agreement for a new \$10 billion effort for levee rebuilding and coastal protection to be paid for out of oil royalties and other sources. Her vote saved Vice President [Dick Cheney](#) from having to break a tie.

The White House and Senate Republican leaders sought to put the best face on the budget outcome, with Joshua B. Bolten, director of the Office of Management and Budget, crediting Republicans for "navigating difficult waters" in winning approval. Mr. Bolten said the administration would work to eliminate the added spending and restore the benefit cuts sought by the White House.

The successful push for additional spending alarmed and frustrated conservative Republicans who have been trying to steer the party back to a course of more fiscal restraint.

"It is very disturbing, and it gives me a whole lot of heartburn," said Senator Jim DeMint, Republican of South Carolina, who attributed the additional spending to political anxiety. "They want to go and say they are helping people, but we are not helping people when we are selling out their future."

In the House, lawmakers easily approved almost \$92 billion in emergency spending, with about \$68 billion going for military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and \$19 billion for hurricane recovery, slightly less than the White House sought.

The House and the Senate then left for a weeklong break.

The Senate budget bill would clear the way to opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling, but the outlook for that provision is uncertain given strong resistance by Republican moderates in the House and a long legislative route before final approval.

The budget fight and the focus on the rising national debt proved uncomfortable for some Republicans, who instead of tightening the federal belt found themselves caught in a Senate rush to add spending after raising the federal debt ceiling for the fourth time in five years.

"This budget could be the final nail in our coffin, if we don't watch it," said Senator Lindsey Graham, Republican of South Carolina, who said the Republican spending pattern was demoralizing party voters. "I don't think we properly understand the keys to our electoral success."

But Senator [Arlen Specter](#), the Pennsylvania Republican who led the push for \$7 billion in extra money for health and education programs, said those areas had been starved for money in recent years and could not afford to be overlooked again.

"Health and education are the two major capital assets of this country," said Mr. Specter, whose proposal passed easily, 73 to 27.

The provision, like many of the other spending increases, was ostensibly paid for, but Mr. Specter readily acknowledged that the plan to pay the new money out of the succeeding year's allocation was a gimmick.

In another spending increase, the Senate unanimously approved \$184 million for mine safety. The provision by Senators [Robert C. Byrd](#) and John D. Rockefeller IV, both West Virginia Democrats, would be used to hire mine safety inspectors and put in place better mine rescue technologies over five years. It came after a string of mining accidents that left 24 miners dead this year.

The increases in spending took the budget further away from President Bush's original plan. Senate budget writers had stripped some Medicare cuts

sought by the president and added other spending before even bringing it to the floor.

Senator [Tom Harkin](#), the Iowa Democrat who joined with Mr. Specter in seeking the increase for health and education, said the vote showed that his Republican colleagues were "recognizing the American people want something different than the president's budget."

The changes also mean that reaching a final budget deal with the House will be difficult, given conservative resistance there to new spending. In a subtle swipe at the Senate, House Republicans circulated a memorandum on Thursday showing how they had been willing to resist efforts to add money for social and domestic security programs to the emergency spending bill.

The administration told Congress that the increase in the statutory debt limit to nearly \$9 trillion was needed to avoid a default and keep the government operating.

The increase in the debt limit brought the total increase during the Bush administration to \$3 trillion. Democrats said the rising debt was the consequence of what they described as a reckless Republican fiscal policy centered on tax cuts for the affluent.

Senator [Harry Reid](#) of Nevada, the Democratic leader, said Thursday that given Mr. Bush's record, "I really do believe this man will go down as the worst president this country has ever had."

Few Republicans took the floor to defend the debt limit request, and three — Tom Coburn of Oklahoma, Conrad Burns of Montana and John Ensign of Nevada — joined all Democrats in opposing the increase.

But Senator [Charles E. Grassley](#), the Iowa Republican who is chairman of the Finance Committee, attributed most of the growth in the debt to increased domestic security and the costs of natural disasters.

Senator Kent Conrad of North Dakota, the senior Democrat on the Budget Committee, said it was fitting the Senate would agree to raise the debt limit on the same day it adopted a budget that he said would add substantially to the nation's accumulating red ink over the next five years.

"This thing is larded with debt," Mr. Conrad said.

Ian Urbina contributed reporting for this article.

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