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## Congress Raises Ceiling for Borrowing

\$100 Billion Is Spent Without Offsetting Cuts

By Jonathan Weisman and Shailagh Murray  
Washington Post Staff Writers  
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Congress raised the limit on the federal government's borrowing by \$781 billion yesterday, and then lawmakers voted to spend well over \$100 billion on the war in Iraq, hurricane relief, education, health care, transportation and heating assistance for the poor without making offsetting budget cuts.

On vote after vote in the House and Senate, lawmakers demonstrated the growing gap between their political promises to rein in spending and their need to respond to emergencies and protect politically popular programs. The votes followed last weekend's GOP leadership meeting in Memphis, at which virtually every speaker called on the party to renew its commitment to fiscal discipline and to control federal spending and the deficit.

The House voted 348 to 71 to approve a \$92 billion measure to fund the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and ongoing hurricane relief, after members rejected calls from conservatives to pay for at least some of that spending with budget cuts. On the other side of the Capitol, senators considering a budget blueprint for fiscal 2007 voted to effectively breach their own firm limits on spending by at least \$16 billion to boost programs they said have been starved for funding.

"You're talking about the guts of critical domestic programs," Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) said after the Senate voted 73 to 27 to increase spending on health, education and labor programs by \$7 billion over the amount allotted in a 2007 budget blueprint. "All the talk in Memphis doesn't comport with the reality of these important programs."

The \$2.8 trillion budget squeaked through last night, 51 to 49. Senate Budget Committee Chairman Judd Gregg (R-N.H.) expressed regret that he could not hold President Bush's \$873 billion line on discretionary spending, but he said negotiations with the House could bring spending back down.

"It's not everything I wanted, obviously, but it's a step in the right direction," he said.

With no brakes on spending and no moves afoot to raise taxes, the federal debt is now raising (sic) at an unprecedented clip. The government bumped up against its \$8.18 trillion statutory debt ceiling last month, forcing the Treasury to borrow from employee pension funds to keep the government operating. After weeks of pleading from Treasury Secretary John W. Snow, the Senate took the politically unpalatable but economically critical step of raising the ceiling for borrowing to \$8.96 trillion. Under House rules, the debt limit was raised last year without a vote when lawmakers approved a budget.

It was the fourth debt-ceiling increase in the past five years, after boosts of \$450 billion in 2002, a record \$984 billion in 2003 and \$800 billion in 2004. The statutory debt limit has now risen by more than \$3 trillion since Bush took office.

"This should be a wake-up call for every member of the Senate, every member of Congress, and a wake-up call for the president of the United States," said Sen. Kent Conrad (N.D.), the ranking Democrat on the Senate Budget Committee. "The question is: Are we staying on this course to keep running up the debt, debt on top of debt, increasingly financed by foreigners, or are we going to change course?"

Senate Finance Committee Chairman Charles E. Grassley (R-Iowa) acknowledged that the debt has risen at a remarkable pace but said he and his colleagues had no alternative. "Without an increase in the debt limit, our government will face a choice that we shouldn't make and we wouldn't want to make, a choice between breaking the law by exceeding the statutory debt limit or, on the other hand, breaking faith with the public by defaulting on our debt."

There appeared to be little change of course yesterday. After a two-day debate, the House approved \$92 billion in funding for war costs and Hurricane Katrina recovery and added about \$100 million for peacekeeping efforts in Sudan and to repair military sites on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Most of the House spending package, nearly \$68 billion, would pay for military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The legislation would push total war costs since Sept. 11, 2001, to nearly \$400 billion. Before the Iraq invasion in 2003, administration officials predicted that costs related to the war would total less than \$100 billion.

The House added \$850 million to Bush's original request to upgrade Army tracked combat vehicles and to make them available to National Guard units. Lawmakers approved an additional \$480 million over Bush's request for newer, more heavily armored Humvees, for a total of \$890 million. The bill also provides \$2 billion to develop measures to counter the makeshift bombs that kill many U.S. troops.

Service members would receive \$400,000 in life insurance benefits under the House package, and family members of those killed in combat would receive a \$100,000 death gratuity. The House granted a \$4.85 billion White House request to train and equip security forces of Afghanistan and Iraq.

An additional \$4.1 billion was provided in nonmilitary foreign aid, more than half of it for diplomatic and local governance programs in Iraq. The original House package allocated \$253 million for peacekeeping in Sudan, but a Democratic amendment, approved 213 to 208, increased the total by \$50 million, to \$303 million.

The remaining \$19 billion in the House package would assist the storm-ravaged Gulf Coast region, including aid for victims, community redevelopment projects, flood control and levee repair. Republicans turned back numerous Democratic attempts to increase Katrina-related funding. But a GOP amendment to strike the hurricane funding failed 332 to 89.

"Congress must stop hiding wasteful spending under the American flag," said Rep. Jeb Hensarling (Tex.), one of several Republicans who voted against the final bill.

Lawmakers narrowly defeated a Democratic amendment to increase port-related spending by \$1.2 billion. The measure, offered by Rep. Martin O. Sabo (D-Minn), failed 210 to 208; it followed the lopsided 377 to 38 defeat Wednesday of an effort to strike language in the bill barring Dubai Ports World from taking management control of six U.S. ports.

The Senate budget blueprint for the fiscal year that begins in October had dropped Bush's proposed cuts to Medicare before it reached the Senate floor. As they worked to complete the budget, senators from both parties voted overwhelmingly to boost funding for health, education and labor programs by \$7 billion.

Technically the measure did not break the budget resolution's \$873 billion limit on federal programs funded annually at Congress's discretion, because the extra money was taken from prospective spending in 2008. But one of its sponsors, Specter, acknowledged that "it's not sort of a gimmick -- it is a gimmick." Senators also voted to raise the limit on discretionary spending to fund an additional \$3.3 billion for low-income heating assistance, \$1.2 billion for additional aviation security and \$1 billion for military survivors' benefits.

The only Democrat voting for the budget was Mary Landrieu (La.). Republicans voting against the budget were Lincoln D. Chaffee (R.I.), Norm Coleman (Minn.), Susan Collins (Maine), Mike DeWine (Ohio ) and John Ensign (Nev.). Independent James M. Jeffords (Vt.) also voted against the budget.

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