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Ignoring veto threat, Senate OK's \$109b in spending

The Boston Globe

Tacks on billions for special interests

By Rick Klein, Globe Staff | May 5, 2006

WASHINGTON -- The Senate passed a \$109 billion war and hurricane-relief bill yesterday that is loaded with a raft of special-interest provisions for farmers, fishermen, and a major defense contractor among many others, setting up what could be President Bush's first veto.

The bill surpassed Bush's declared spending limit by approximately \$15 billion, including various provisions, pet projects, and add-ons. Lawmakers, some of them self-described fiscal conservatives, apparently seized the opportunity to attach their own priorities to a bill sure to pass because it helps the troops in the field.

Ultimately, the bill designed to pay for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, plus some post-Hurricane Katrina rebuilding in the Gulf Coast, was saddled with billions of dollars in extras, including \$3.9 billion in farm aid, \$1.1 billion to benefit the fishing industry, and \$6 million for sugar interests in Hawaii.

The measure also includes \$700 million to move a rebuilt Gulf Coast freight rail line that Katrina destroyed -- a project opponents have dubbed the "railway to nowhere." But its backers were Mississippi's two powerful Republican senators: Thad Cochran, chairman of the Appropriations Committee, and Trent Lott, chairman of the Rules Committee and a former Senate majority leader.

In addition, lawmakers handed out \$500 million to defense contractor Northrop Grumman, compensation for hurricane damage at a shipyard in Mississippi that Northrop's insurers have refused to cover. And New England senators added \$20 million to help the region's fishing industry rebound from a red tide outbreak that dampened last year's shellfish harvest.

Bush has vowed to veto any spending bill that exceeds \$94.5 billion. Government watchdog groups, meanwhile, said the spree demonstrates that, even as the budget deficit soars toward a record, lawmakers can't break their addiction to overspending.

"It's really mind-blowing," said Steve Ellis, vice president of Taxpayers for Common Sense, a nonpartisan group that tracks government spending.

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"They're the worst kind of addicts; they're recidivist junkies. They've shown time and again that not only are they not able to cut, but they can't stop adding."

The House-passed version of the bill, by contrast, contains little of the extra spending in the Senate version. The House's bill had a bottom line of \$91.9 billion, and Representative John A. Boehner of Ohio, the House majority leader, said the chamber would not agree to spend "one dollar more" than the \$94.5 billion ceiling the president has set.

That sets up contentious negotiations with the Senate, talks that will be shaped in part by whether lawmakers believe Bush -- who hasn't vetoed a bill during his five years in office -- would make good on his threat and reject a bill that ultimately would provide funding for the troops and other national priorities.[Continued...](#)

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