



## U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

*PRESS RELEASE*

### **Chairman Byrd Opening Statement at Senate Appropriations Committee Hearing on FY 2008 Supplemental**

**Washington, DC**...U.S. Senator Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va., delivered the following opening statement at today's full committee hearing of the U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee.

#### **Chairman Byrd's Remarks are Below**

Good afternoon. Before commencing this hearing, I would like for all of us to direct our thoughts and prayers to our colleague, Senator Arlen Specter.

Senator Specter announced yesterday that his health has hit a small bump in the road. While many of us know what it's like to face a health challenge, I know this man. His strong fighting spirit will quickly lead him on the path to recovery.

We meet today to hold our second hearing on the President's FY 2008 supplemental war request. On September 26, 2007, we heard from Secretary of Defense Gates and Deputy Secretary of State Negroponte, and today we will hear testimony from the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, Jim Nussle.

Welcome Mr. Nussle.

Eleven months ago, Congress sent the President a war funding supplemental that included clear direction to bring our troops home by December of 2007. The President chose to veto that bill. If he had signed that bill, most of our troops would already be home. But, instead of bringing our troops home, the President decided to increase our commitment of U.S. troops and treasure to a war that has now entered its sixth year.

Over 4,000 U.S. service members have died. Over 30,000 U.S. service members have been wounded. By the end of 2008, the war in Iraq will have cost a whopping \$600 billion.

In the next few weeks, the Appropriations Committee will consider the President's request for Congress to approve another \$108 billion of emergency funding, mostly for this endless war in Iraq. We will be considering the President's request at a time when the U.S. economy is, by most accounts, in serious trouble.

Under the President's fiscal leadership, the U.S. government will have piled up the five largest deficits in the history of our Republic. It took 212 years and 42 U.S. Presidents to accumulate \$1 trillion of foreign-held debt. But, in only seven years, President George W. Bush has more than doubled the debt our country owes to China, Japan, and other foreign entities.

Economic growth came to a virtual halt at the end of 2007, with the Gross Domestic Product for our economy falling from 4.9 percent in the third quarter to 0.6 percent in the fourth quarter. The unemployment rate rose in March to 5.1 percent, from 4.8 percent in February. The construction trades have lost 394,000 jobs since September of 2006. Manufacturing employment has fallen by 310,000 jobs in the last 12 months. Since March of 2007, the number of unemployed has increased by 1.1 million workers, to 7.8 million. Meanwhile, food and fuel prices are climbing dramatically. 8.8 million home-owners have mortgages that exceed the value of their homes, and foreclosures have increased 57 percent.

A careful review of President Bush's request reveals NO evidence of funding to bolster our country's economy or to help Americans deal with lost jobs, mortgage foreclosures, and the rising cost of living. Food costs have grown by 10 percent, yet there is nothing in the President's supplemental request to strengthen the Women, Infants, and Children nutrition program. Home heating oil costs have climbed 37 percent, yet there is no additional funding for Low Income Home Energy Assistance. And, there is nothing in the President's request to address the alarming crumbling of our infrastructure.

Yet, the President has thrown down the gauntlet and threatens to veto the supplemental bill if the Congress has the temerity to add one dime to his request in order to help our citizens cope with the situation here at home.

What a contrast to the President's request for assistance for Iraq!

We have already poured \$45 billion of our citizens' hard-earned tax dollars into reconstruction projects in Iraq, projects that have done little to promote political reconciliation. That is 45 billion American dollars gifted to Iraq, despite the fact that the Iraqi government is running a huge surplus due to its excess oil revenues!

Now, the President is asking this Congress to shovel yet another \$3 billion of American taxpayer dollars to continue rebuilding Iraq. Well, I say charity begins at home! The President wants money to build schools in Sadr City, but not in Seattle. Why does he demand money for roads in Ramadi, but nothing for Richmond? The President wants money for Mosul, but not one dime for Minneapolis. Why is he determined to reconstruct Baghdad, but not Baltimore, Biloxi, or Birmingham?

Mr. Director, the President repeatedly states that Congress should show support for the troops by rubber stamping a \$108 billion war supplemental that ignores America's

needs. We supported the troops last year when we sent the President a war supplemental that increased funding to provide better health care to our service members, better health care to our veterans, more funding to equip and train the National Guard and Reserve, more funding for mine resistant vehicles, and clear direction to bring our troops home.

This year, we will once again take good care of our troops. But we must also invest in our own economy and take care of our people here at home. To fail to do so will only further dampen our economy, work a hardship on our citizens, and deplete our ability to pay these endless, ever-climbing requests for more money to fund this war in Iraq. The well is running dry, and it is time to prime the pump.

One note to the audience: I will not tolerate disruptions of this hearing. I have instructed the Capitol Police to immediately remove any member of the audience who attempts to disrupt or interfere with this proceeding.

Director Nussle, we look forward to your testimony today.

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