

Senate approves Bush's spending package

The Senate approved the \$87.5 billion spending package Bush proposed for Iraq and Afghanistan

By James Kuhnhen
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

WASHINGTON — The Senate on Monday sent President Bush an \$87.5 billion spending package for Iraq and Afghanistan, capping a month of tumultuous debate in Congress over how much of a burden to place on American taxpayers for Iraq's reconstruction. The Senate approved the amount by voice vote, avoiding a recorded tally on a bill the public dislikes but that Democratic and Republican lawmakers believe is unavoidable given the turmoil in Iraq. "Despite my reservations, I believe that this package will pave the way to

the day when our soldiers finally come home from Iraq," Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, said in a sentiment echoed by many.

With only a handful of senators on the floor, the only audible "no" vote came from Sen. Robert Byrd, D-W.Va., one of the war's most vocal critics. The House of Representatives approved the measure Friday.

Democratic presidential candidates who serve in Congress were split when they first voted on the proposal last month. Sens. John Kerry of Massachusetts and John Edwards of North Carolina voted against the money. Sen. Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut voted in favor. In the House, Rep. Dennis Kucinich of Ohio voted against the money last month and Rep. Richard Gephardt voted for it.

The bill represents the most ambitious reconstruction effort of a van-

quished country since the Marshall Plan in post-World War II Europe. Advocates said that without the money, Iraq would be unable to emerge as a democracy and ensure its own security.

Even Democrats who voted against the use of force in Iraq a year ago said they had no choice but to support the spending bill.

"We must win the war that we started because the consequences of failure would be catastrophic," Sen. Mark Dayton, D-Minn., said.

The Senate action came one day after 16 U.S. soldiers died in the deadliest single attack since Iraq was invaded eight months ago. The measure gives Bush practically everything he asked for, lending his management of Iraq policy the aura of a mandate despite widespread congressional misgivings about where his policy is headed.

The package includes \$64.7 billion for U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan and \$18.7 billion for reconstruction of Iraq.

The troop funds would pay for \$17.8 billion in personnel costs, \$39 billion in operation and maintenance and \$5.5 billion in purchases, including \$239 million for new armored Humvees at \$225,000 per vehicle.

The Iraq reconstruction money, which generated the most debate, would provide nearly \$3.2 billion for Iraqi police and a new army. It sets aside \$5.5 billion to improve electrical transmission, \$2.8 billion for potable water and \$493 million for hospitals and clinics.

The president beat back efforts by lawmakers to make half the reconstruction money a loan rather than a grant; Republican leaders stripped that lan-

guage from the bill before the final votes.

Responding to reports of no-bid contracts and cost overruns by firms involved in reconstruction, the legislation creates the post of a watchdog inspector general to oversee spending by the U.S.-led Coalition Provisional Authority. It requires the inspector general to submit quarterly reports to Congress, but also gives the president the right to waive the reports, or portions of them, for national security reasons.

By avoiding a roll call vote Monday, senators, particularly Democrats, were able to sidestep a vote that many feared would be interpreted as support for Bush's Iraq policy. Indeed, several Democrats denounced the decision to go to war and the administration's course in postwar Iraq.

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Supreme Court to consider permitting HMO lawsuits

The Supreme Court may open the door for patients to file lawsuits against their insurance companies

By Stephen Henderson
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court agreed on Monday to consider whether to permit lawsuits against HMOs for denying patients care in what one lawyer calls the "world series" of ongoing litigation over patients' rights.

If the justices permit two Texas patients to seek big-money awards from HMOs that denied them drugs and

care, it could inspire a wave of lawsuits by patients who feel medically wronged by penny-pinching insurers and probably rekindle the debate over a national patients bill of rights.

"This is the central issue" in the struggle between state and federal regulation of health insurers, said Larry Lorber, a partner at the Proskauer, Rose law firm and an architect of the 1974 Employers Retirement Income Security Act, which governs state regulation of employee benefit plans. "The court has dealt with other insurance-related cases in recent years, but nothing as directly related to coverage issues as these cases. These are as big as any big-ticket cases you'll find."

At issue is the extent to which ERISA protects insurers from state-enforced regulations or lawsuits brought in state courts.

Soon after ERISA was passed in 1974, the Supreme Court made clear in a series of opinions that states were not permitted to get involved with employer-sponsored health plans.

Patients could sue in federal court to have benefits enforced, and Congress has always been free to establish uniform federal health-care standards. But patients were barred from suing in state courts, where large damages could be awarded.

But in recent years, as Congress has failed to act, and the shift to managed

care has fueled rage over the state of health insurance, lower courts have whittled away at insurers' immunity from state suits.

Insurers may not be sued for decisions about the administration of a plan, but they can be held responsible for medical decisions, some courts have ruled. The Supreme Court also has revisited ERISA's restrictions on state regulation and, in an important case last year, said states should be free to force insurers to open their networks to nonmember physicians.

In one of the cases the high court will hear, a woman was told by her insurance company that she was covered for only one day of hospitalization after

surgery. She sued after she was discharged and developed complications.

Patients' rights groups have long pointed to such examples as proof of the need for a change in the system.

"People should have a recourse when they feel they are improperly denied care," said Ron Pollack, executive director of Families USA, a national patient lobby group. "They don't have the authority and power to contest those decisions. Now that there might be a right to litigate and secure significant damages, the consumer will be in a better position to challenge arbitrary denials of care."

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Casualties, not peace, prevalent in Iraq, experts say

31 U.S. military casualties in 10 days have prompted expert opinion stating that war activities persist in Iraq

By Philip Dine
St. Louis Post-Dispatch (KRT)

WASHINGTON — After the deadly events of the past 10 days in Iraq, which have cost the lives of 31 U.S. soldiers — highlighted by Sunday's downing of a U.S. helicopter — military experts say it is clear that the United States is engaged in a war as well as the rebuilding of a country.

That means that Americans should expect mounting casualties — and that the administration must make it clear that in the foreseeable future U.S. forces will be engaged in battle. This is especially true in the "Sunni triangle," the center of the country where Saddam Hussein's loyalists are strongest.

"There will be a constant stream of casualties. It's inevitable that it's going to get worse in the short run," said Jim Phillips, an expert on terrorism and the Middle East at the Heritage Foundation which has strongly supported

U.S. policy in Iraq.

The Iraqi insurgents, a combination of Baathist remnants and foreign terrorists, had been surprisingly ineffective, and it was just a matter of time before they found ways to kill more Americans and international aid workers, Phillips said.

President Bush needs to take a lesson from World War II leaders Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt in talking about the coming sacrifices of blood and treasure, said Clifford May, president of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies which is also a strong supporter of the current administration.

"What we're seeing in Iraq today is what the war against terrorism looks like and is likely to look like for a long time to come, and it's the job of political leadership to prepare the public for that reality, for the sacrifices and difficulties that lie ahead," May said.

"If you say that what's going on in Iraq is a peacekeeping effort, a reconstruction effort, then it's just a terrible failure if people are killed every day. But if you say what's going on is a war, and by the way we're going to build schools

while the war's going on, that's a different story. People expect to take casualties in a war; they don't expect to take casualties in a peacekeeping effort."

The creation of realistic expectations among the American — and Iraqi — people is central to the outcome of the war in Iraq, said James Lindsay, past director of global security at the National Security Council and current vice president of the Council on Foreign Relations.

Adversaries in Iraq "are bent on seeing America fail, and their strategy is to make the occupation so costly that the American public will recoil in horror," Lindsay said.

"The real question is who's going to win that battle between the Bush administration and the rejectionists in Iraq for the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people and the American people."

If Americans understand the stakes and accept the related costs, they're more likely to stand by the effort, Lindsay said. And if Iraqis realize that Americans will stick it out, they're more likely to help the United States — improving U.S. prospects.

"This is tough stuff. You're really try-

ing to manage people's expectations of what's likely to happen," Lindsay said. In that sense, the recent series of killings could persuade more Iraqis that Americans will be driven out — which could become a self-fulfilling prophecy if people stop cooperating with U.S. forces.

National Security Council spokesman Sean McCormack said that Bush "has done an excellent job in communicating to the American people both the progress that we have made and the challenges we face in Iraq."

Prevailing in Iraq will require not just preparing the American public for a dangerous guerrilla war but also getting much tougher with insurgents and surrounding countries that support them, said Danielle Pletka, vice president for defense and foreign policy at the American Enterprise Institute.

"The crux of the problem is we're fighting a counter-insurgency, and we should be fighting it much more ruthlessly," said Pletka, a former top Republican staff member on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

"We need to take the velvet gloves off, send soldiers out on proactive sweeps against Baathists who are liv-

ing freely throughout Iraq, strike fear in the heart of the rejectionists in a way we have not done so far."

But cracking down on the insurgents in a more forceful way risks antagonizing other Iraqis, said Dan Benjamin, an expert on the Middle East and terrorism at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"It's true that within the Sunni triangle, the primary issues remain security and not reconstruction, and this is sporadically true elsewhere in the country, with flare-ups from time to time. But this is an extraordinarily difficult kind of phenomenon to deal with — primarily because we're trying to pacify the region without arousing even more antipathy. That is the classic dilemma of any type of counter-insurgency."

Benjamin, former director of counter-terrorism policy at the National Security Council, said that while the effort may require more American force, "the more pressure we insert, the more difficult it becomes to keep others from becoming disaffected."

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NEWS BRIEF

EPD says heightened patrol helped reduce incidents

The Eugene Police Department deployed an extra 34 patrol officers and five sergeants Friday evening in preparation for Halloween.

Mischief during the night was kept to a minimum, which was partially due to the increased patrol, EPD spokeswoman Kerry Delf said.

Fifty-two people were cited with having an open container and 34 were cited with minor in possession of alcohol in the campus area, according to an EPD press release.

"We were hoping things would go well, and it appears that they did," Delf said.

Delf said that even though there were no riots, there was enough underage drinking to keep officers busy throughout the night.

Other citations in the campus area included six traffic infractions,

four citations for littering and three citations for urinating in public. One citation was given for interfering with a police officer, one for driving under the influence and one for criminal mischief in the second degree.

In the West University neighborhood, officers cited one person with

urinating in public.

Extra officers were deployed partially because Halloween was on a Friday. The last time Halloween fell on a weekend was in 1998, when people took to the streets and about a dozen arrests were made.

— Ali Shaughnessy

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