



BUDGET COMMITTEE



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Opening Statement from Senator Judd Gregg (unofficial transcript)

Senate Budget Committee Hearing on Budgeting for the Cost of War

Thank you Senator Conrad, and I do think this is a very appropriate hearing. I wish we had someone from the Defense Department testifying, but I know its difficult to get them to come to the Budget Committee – having been Chairman and requested that a number of times.

I appreciate the Senator's comment that the troops in the field will get the support they need. Obviously I believe that's the correct policy. I know the Senator is very sincere in his belief in that. I just wish the Majority Leader were equally sincere and would allow us a vote on that specific language this week, which appears to be something the Majority Leader is not going to allow us to do. It's a fairly reasoned position – troops in the field should be supported. But as of right now the Majority Leader takes the position that that proposal shouldn't be allowed to the floor as one of the three things, or four things, we vote on this week. Very strange in my opinion, inconsistent to say the least.

On this issue, however, of budgeting for troops, and our costs, I do agree with the Chairman – we have very serious concerns about the way the Administration has brought forward their budget. I will begin by congratulating them for at least including this year what they project is the full cost in '08. I thank Director Portman for insisting on that. I don't think the Pentagon would have done it without the Director's insistence.

However, once again they've designated it as an emergency. This is unacceptable. It is very clear, after five years of war, that it is not an emergency, that it is something that we have to do. We have to fight this war, and we have to make sure the troops that go in to this battle are fully supported with the resources they need and it should go through the regular order because we've seen in a couple of the other supplementals that have been sent up that things which were not war fighting have been including. And it has been represented, at least in press reports, that it may occur again, such as the repositioning of the Army and aircraft which would be purchased for the out-years and even boats that don't deal with the immediate issue of fighting the war. So I do think this language should have the emergency designation stripped from it, and it should go forward as a

“sidecar,” that’s the way I would describe it. I don’t want it folded into the core budget because I don’t want to -- two or three years from now when the war does wind down, and we are out of Iraq, which we all hope will happen -- I don’t want the defense base to have grown by the amount of the war costs, and we have to go back and pick that money out in order to get the defense re-postured at its proper level. I believe we should have a base budget for the defense department, and we should have what I call a sidecar for fighting the war. But it shouldn’t be an emergency event – it should go through the authorizing process.

I will be interested in the proposal that comes forward from our Democrat colleagues, now responsible for the reins of government and specifically the budget -- as we all know the budget isn’t signed by the President, it is purely a work of the Congress -- on how you’re going to handle these war costs. My own view is you need to put more in for ’09. I think the White House and the Administration has grossly underrepresented that number with a \$50 plug, its not anywhere near what the ’09 cost is going to be. More correct number is probably going to be on what the historical average is somewhere around \$90 billion, \$100 billion. But it will be interesting, and you’ve got a difficult task, and I’ll be happy to work with you on that. But I do think we should get this number right, and we should give the military the dollars they need to make sure the men and women who are in the field are properly supported. And we should do it in the regular order, not outside the regular order, and I thank you for having this hearing.

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