

*This Week in Washington*



WITH CONGRESSMAN  
JO BONNER

### Stopgap Measure Passes Congress

At the writing of this week's column, negotiations concerning the rescue plan of our nation's financial markets are still ongoing and have reached a tenuous point.

The principles charged with crafting the legislation have yet to come out with a plan for us to absorb, and it is too premature to speculate on what the final package will ultimately include.

While this economic plan has rightly consumed the headlines of the last several days, the complete abdication of the appropriations process by the Democratic leadership in Congress meant that Congress was forced to act last week to pass a continuing resolution, or CR, in order to prevent a shutdown of the federal government.

This year, Democrats have voted to make the world safe for monkeys. They have given

passports a whole month – and trains even got a day – of honor.

Yet, only one FY09 Appropriations bill has passed the House and none has passed the Senate.

Because these bills will not be enacted by October 1, 2008, which is the start of the new fiscal year, a CR is the only option to keep the government running.

This huge end-of-session omnibus spending bill, which passed the House last week and is currently pending in the Senate, will keep federal programs running into the next fiscal year.

The CR provides funding, through March 6, 2009, for nine spending bills at the levels provided by the 2008 appropriations bills, with some exceptions.

Three separate Appropriations bills, Defense, Homeland Security, and Military Construction-Veterans Affairs are also included in the CR.

The Military Construction-Veterans Affairs portion of the bill contains \$72.9 billion in total discretionary spending for our veterans, \$9 billion more than last year.

The Homeland Security Appropriations bill contains \$39.98 billion in funding to protect our borders, hire an additional 2,200 border patrol agents, create detention space for an additional 1,400 illegal aliens, and hire an additional 1,273 Customs and Border Protection Officers as well as the continued construction and improvements to our nation's border security infrastructure.

The Defense Appropriations bill provides \$487.7 billion in funding for our troops, national security, and military readiness, \$733 million for troop facility and barracks repairs, \$3.6 billion for Future Combat Systems, and \$750 million for National Guard and Reserve equipment.

Unfortunately, in what has become standard procedure with this majority, the CR, which calls for more than \$1 trillion in new spending, was filed after 11 p.m. the day before the floor vote was scheduled.

As a result, Members had less than 24 hours to review the 357 page bill before voting on it, and Members were provided no opportunity to offer amendments to the legislation.

Obviously, funding our troops, our veterans, and homeland security is vital, and we cannot shut down the federal government, particularly in a time of war; therefore, I cast my vote in favor the bill.

"In God We Trust"

While some wish to remove the founding principles of God and faith from the U.S. Capitol – I want to take this opportunity to share a victory with those that find meaning in the words "In God We Trust."

In the U.S. House Chamber, the motto "In God We Trust" is inscribed above the Speaker's chair; however, the replica of the House chamber that will be on display in the new Capitol Visitor Center (CVC), which is scheduled to open in early December, did not include this motto.

When I questioned the decision to omit these important words from the replica, I was told by the majority party that I was not a museum curator and to let the professionals decide what should or should not be on display.

Needless to say, this answer did not sit well with me. I pushed forward and continued to question the CVC staff during the oversight hearings of the Legislative Branch Subcommittee on

Appropriations, of which I am a member.

This week, I am proud to report that the CVC listened to my concerns and addressed this blatant omission by including the words "In God We Trust" in the CVC replica of the House Chamber.

While some would consider this matter to be trivial – I believe it to be a triumph. In a time of so much unrest throughout the world – the simple, yet meaningful phrase, "In God We Trust," will remind all who visit our nation's Capitol of what binds us together as citizens and as a country.

I hope the next time you are in Washington you will be able to visit the CVC and take pride in this victory of keeping the words and motto "In God We Trust" displayed prominently.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.

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