

Washington, DC — Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.) issued the following statement today in response to the Bush administration's request for an additional \$87 billion for Iraq.

“Congress will provide the necessary support for our troops and we will make a significant investment in stabilizing and rebuilding Iraq. The question before Congress is how best to provide that troop support and how to make the appropriate investment in both Iraq and Afghanistan – two troubled nations that the United States now ‘owns’ as a result of the Bush administration's policies. This \$87 billion supplemental appropriation is not the best answer.

“We have already provided huge sums that have not been well spent. The costs of policies in Iraq are approaching \$200 billion dollars of borrowed money with no end in sight. Our troops continue to have unmet needs that were entirely foreseen, like the flat jacket liners and armoring of vehicles. Tales abound of questionable expenditures and contracts, yet proposals were included in this request that simply don't meet the laugh test: millions of dollars for garbage trucks, zip codes, and a witness protection program (at \$1,000,000 a person). It was wrong to give this administration a blank check to wage unilateral war and it is wrong to give them a blank check for reconstruction.

“During debate, I offered an amendment that would save American taxpayers a quarter of a billion dollars and would have transferred money from Iraq reconstruction efforts to provide \$247 million in additional funding for Afghanistan - a country with the same population as Iraq, an even larger land area, that is still harboring terrorists.

“Decades of conflict in Afghanistan, including the war against the Soviet Union, have left about 2 million dead and created 700,000 widows and orphans. Afghanistan remains a hot bed and safe haven for Al Qaida – responsible for the launching of murderous attacks against the U.S. The UN estimates that 5-7 million unexploded landmines are scattered throughout the country. An estimated 400,000 Afghans have been killed or wounded by mines, leading to the highest per capita number of amputees in the world.

“Estimates for reconstruction in Afghanistan range as high as \$30 billion over the next decade. There is no shortage of need and the bottom line is we can do much more. Even after the \$500 million this amendment called to remove from reconstruction in Iraq, it is still receiving the most generous aid package in history. Afghanistan was a real threat and we need to do more to make sure Afghanistan does not again spin out of control.

“While my amendment did not pass, I was encouraged by the reaction of colleagues from both sides of the aisle who recognize the importance of additional funding in Afghanistan. I will continue to fight to ensure that the administration’s discredited program for Iraq does not leave other Middle East priorities under-funded and ineffective.

“Even though the administration was wrong to claim that this Iraq reconstruction could be financed by Iraq’s own oil revenues, and even though it would be ill-advised to hopelessly burden the future Iraqi government, the American public should not bear the burden of vast sums of borrowed money because the administration had neither the foresight nor the patience to develop realistic plans and partnerships. We should be working with creditors like the Russians and the French as well as international organizations like The World Bank to soften the impact on American tax payers.

“While this proposal has been improved by the Appropriations Committee, it still falls short. There is still too much spent on the wrong things and administered by the wrong people. Congress does no favors to our troops, our citizens, or the Iraqi people, to continue to fund the administration’s ill-advised plans.”