

For Immediate Release: Thursday, November 1, 2007
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HIGHLIGHTS: Priorities Package

WASHINGTON – Today, House and Senate conferees met to consider a package of bills to fund top priorities of the nation.

The bills:

- Maintain our commitments to our veterans
- Invest in domestic priorities that will increase the strength of this nation.

This package keeps our commitment to our veterans with the largest single increase in the 77-year history of the Department of Veterans Affairs. It also invests in critical domestic priorities in the Labor, Health and Education bill with major investments into K-12 education, college affordability, increasing access to quality healthcare, medical research, worker protection and job training programs.

Both components of this package passed the House and Senate with strong bi-partisan support.

Military Construction and Veterans Affairs

\$64.7 billion, \$15 billion above 2007 and \$4 billion above the President's budget request.

Department of Veteran's Affairs: \$43.1 billion, \$3.7 billion over the President's budget request for veterans' medical care, claims processing personnel, and facility improvements.

- **Veterans' Health Care:** \$37.2 billion, \$2.6 billion over the President's budget request for VA hospitals and clinics, and research into conditions such as Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which are among the most common problems facing Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. In 2008 the VA will treat 5.8 million patients, including about 263,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans.
- **Claims Processors:** \$124.2 million to provide 1800 new claims processors to address the 400,000 benefit claims backlog.

Military Construction: \$21.5 billion, \$306 million above the President's budget request including \$129 million to construct 16 new child development centers.

- **Guard and Reserve:** \$ 1.1 billion, \$367 million above the President's budget request.

Labor, Health and Education

\$150.7 billion, \$6.2 billion above 2007 and \$9.8 billion above the President's budget request.

Education: \$60.7 billion, \$4.5 billion above the President's budget request, to improve education with targeted investments to:

- **Support No Child Left Behind** programs that improve K-12 education such as Title I grants to help low-income kids, teacher quality efforts, and after school programs;
- **Educate kids with disabilities** with IDEA Grants; and
- **Help families pay for college** with Pell Grants and other higher education initiatives.

Labor: \$12 billion, \$1 billion over the President's budget request, rejecting the President's cuts and making important investments in:

- **Job training** programs including adult, youth, and dislocated worker training and Job Corps; and
- **Worker protection** efforts at the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) and the National Institutes for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

Health and Human Services: \$68.5 billion, \$5.3 billion over the President's budget request for targeted efforts including:

- **Improving Healthcare** through programs like Community Health Care centers to improve healthcare access, and programs to train nurses and other healthcare professionals;
- **Medical Research** at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to study diseases like diabetes, cancer, Parkinson's, and Alzheimer's;
- **Fighting Poverty** with Community Service Block Grants and Social Services Block Grants;
- **Helping kids** with Head Start;
- **Improving public health** with work done at the Centers for Disease Control; and
- **Helping families facing rising energy prices** with the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

Social Security Administration (SSA): \$9.9 billion, \$576 million above the President's request, helping to reduce the disability claims backlog.

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