
U.S. Congressman Jim Cooper

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For Immediate Release:
May 13, 2004

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CONGRESS MUST STEP UP TO SUPPORT THE TROOPS, COOPER URGES IN ARMED SERVICES DEBATE

—says \$67 billion needed to pay for on-going costs, not the
\$25 billion the Administration requested

WASHINGTON—With the threat of escalating violence in Iraq and the likelihood of increasing numbers of American troops in the Middle East, U.S. Rep. Jim Cooper urged his colleagues in Congress to fully fund the costs of the war.

During debate yesterday by the House Armed Services Committee over next year's defense authorization bill, Cooper introduced an amendment to the bill that would approve an additional \$67 billion to cover expected costs in Iraq and Afghanistan for fiscal year 2005.

"Let's not kid ourselves anymore," Cooper added. "After months of saying no additional funds will be needed, the Administration is now admitting that an additional \$25 million will be required for 2005. But our troops have needs right now that are going unmet: protective vests, ballistics armor, armored Humvees. If we don't deal with the real numbers regarding appropriations soon, our troops in the field are the ones who pay the price. I don't think we can afford that."

Pointing out that too much information about military efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan has been kept from the American people, U.S. Rep. Jim Cooper added that Congress must now openly talk about, and finance, the war's real costs.

"We all know that sometimes hearing the truth hurts but *not* knowing the truth always makes a problem worse," U.S. Rep. Jim Cooper said during House Armed Services Committee debate on supplemental funding for Iraq and Afghanistan. "We've seen this in the past week as we discover the details regarding Iraqi prisoner abuse. We need the same kind of honesty about the real cost of our war efforts."

The amendment introduced by Cooper would fully fund military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan through September 30, 2005. The amendment specifically provides funding for troop increases of 10,000 soldiers for the Army and 3,000 marines for the Marine Corps, provides force protection funding for armored humvees, wheeled vehicle armor kits and body armor as well as funding for replacement of equipment lost in combat. In addition, the amendment provides additional funding to develop counter terrorism technology, increases Imminent Danger Pay and the Family Separation Allowance, and pays for replenishing Army and Navy ammunition stocks.

Cooper said another important provision would help address continuing National Guard and Reserve equipment shortages. The amendment provides \$200 million to help with National Guard and Reserve equipment. A recent GAO report revealed that the National Guard alone is short over 20,000 pieces of critical equipment due to the services' repeated failures to fund these accounts. The Administration-backed bill provided only \$50 million for National Guard and Reserve equipment funding.

Earlier this week, the National Guard's 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment, which includes 4000 members from Tennessee and about 100 members from Cheatham County, received notice of its pending deployment in Iraq. "With so many of our troops from home fighting in Iraq, it's more important than ever that they get the equipment they need," Cooper said. "My amendment would have helped to better ensure these soldiers' safety."

The amendment failed on a party line vote of 34-26. Although disappointed by the vote, Cooper said, "I am confident that when this bill comes before the full House, Congress will choose to do the right thing by our troops. We cannot leave our brave soldiers in the field without the equipment to do the job they're there to do. By fully funding the war, we can help our troops fulfill their mission more quickly and return home to their families as soon as possible."

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