

Bush Signs \$80 Billion Wartime Spending Bill

President Plans to Ask U.N. to Lift Sanctions on Iraq

By Jennifer Loven
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ST. LOUIS -- President Bush signed a nearly \$80 billion spending bill Wednesday for the war in Iraq and planned to call on the United Nations to lift economic sanctions against Baghdad now that Saddam Hussein's regime has collapsed.

Bush signed the wartime spending bill in the Oval Office shortly before heading to St. Louis, where he was speaking on national security, Iraq and the U.S. economy. He was speaking to employees of a Boeing Co. factory that makes one of the fighter jets that flew missions during the conflict.

Before Bush's speech, presidential spokesman Scott McClellan said the president would call on the U.N. to lift sanctions that were imposed on Iraq after its 1990 invasion of Kuwait. The sanctions have stunted Iraq's oil revenues, although the U.N. has permitted some oil sales to finance purchases of food and medicine.

"We need transition from the oil for food program as soon as possible and help restore a normal trading relationship with the global economy," McClellan said.

Bush had wanted unfettered control of \$60 billion of the nearly \$63 billion earmarked for the Pentagon, but a House-Senate compromise sliced the money the president could control to \$15 billion. Lawmakers also voted to require Bush to tell them how he plans to spend the money five days before he disburses it.

The president won the power to give the Pentagon a role in spending some of nearly \$2.5 billion for rebuilding Iraq and providing humanitarian aid there. Some lawmakers wanted to steer the money to the State Department, but final language included the Defense Department among agencies allowed to tap into the fund.

The spending bill also includes money to fight terrorism and bolster homeland security, and it provides about \$3 billion for the slumping airline industry.

Bush's speech at Boeing was to focus on national security and the progress in the war and touch on the nation's economic problems, said White House press secretary Ari Fleischer.

The president planned to walk along the factory floor where workers make the F/A-18 Super Hornet. Just deployed in July 2002, three squadrons of the jets are aboard the aircraft carriers USS Abraham Lincoln and USS Nimitz, said Patricia Frost, a spokeswoman for Boeing in St. Louis.

Boeing makes the front half of the Super Hornet; the rear is made by Northrop Grumman. General Electric builds the engines and Raytheon the radar systems. On his tour, Bush is to stop at the splicing area where the two halves of the plane are joined.

Democrats criticized Bush for appearing with Boeing employees just days after he opposed extending unemployment insurance for workers in aviation industries. The unemployment rate for the airline industry is three times the national average. Boeing slashed 30,000 jobs by the end of 2002 and said it would eliminate another 5,000 positions, mostly in the commercial airplane group, in 2003.

"It is amazing that after fighting against aid for Boeing workers, the president is showing up at their doorstep to praise them," said Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., who sponsored a provision in the war spending bill to extend unemployment benefits another 26 weeks for aviation workers. "While they certainly deserve recognition for their work, they also deserve our support."

On April 8, White House budget director Mitch Daniels wrote to the chairmen of the House and Senate appropriations committees, saying the administration strongly opposed the provision. "To provide benefits for a specific industry would be unusual, unfair and potentially harmful to our national unemployment system," Daniels wrote.

Tom Buffenbarger, president of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, said 238 machinists at the plant will be laid off within 72 hours of Bush's visit.

"It is a travesty to ask these soon-to-be laid off men and women to be props in a photo-op," he said.

It's the president's 10th visit to Missouri, a state with 11 electoral votes he is eyeing for his re-election bid. He barely won the state in 2000, receiving 50 percent to Al Gore's 47 percent, a margin of 78,786 votes. Missouri has voted for the White House winner all but once since before World War I.

From St. Louis, Bush travels to his Texas ranch, which he has not visited since February. It is his third straight Easter weekend in Crawford, Texas. He will host Australian Prime Minister John Howard and his wife at the ranch May 2-3. Howard was a staunch supporter of military action in Iraq and sent Australian troops to support the U.S.-led coalition.

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