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By Josh Rogin, CQ Staff

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The top House Defense appropriator promised to add billions of dollars to the current estimate for fiscal 2009 war funding when Congress takes up the bill this spring.

John P. Murtha, D-Pa., chairman of the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, said Tuesday that his panel is crafting a supplemental spending bill that would total between \$86 billion and \$88 billion for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and global anti-terrorism programs.

Added to the \$65.9 billion Congress provided in fiscal 2009 war funding in the last supplemental bill (PL 110-252), total war spending this year would come to more than \$150 billion if Murtha's recommendations are enacted.

War funding will not be included in the pending economic stimulus bill, although that legislation will contain about \$10 billion in military-related domestic infrastructure spending, he said.

Murtha's total is also \$16 billion to \$18 billion more than the latest estimate of outstanding war costs issued last week by Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates. In a Dec. 31 letter to congressional leaders, Gates predicted that \$69.7 billion in additional fiscal 2009 supplemental war funding would be needed, but he warned that the number could change.

"This estimate is my personal assessment and does not reflect the position of the Bush administration or the incoming Obama administration," Gates wrote. "As such, I fully expect that the new administration will conduct a fresh review of these matters and provide an updated and more authoritative proposal early next year."

A House Appropriations aide said Congress would bring up the bill this spring, noting that current war funding should last until June. A Senate Appropriations staffer said that the Senate would wait for House action before considering more funding.

Although Murtha's panel is still writing the bill, it plans to add politically popular items that have appeared in previous war-spending bills, including pay and benefits provisions, money for domestic military facilities and some procurement funds.

For example, lawmakers plan to add money to give a \$500 per month salary bonus to all 185,000 soldiers who have been held past their deployment commitments since 2001 in the Army's stop-loss program. This benefit would cost \$600 million.

In past supplemental bills, Congress has added unrequested money for training, National Guard equipment, and procurement of such items as aircraft and mine-resistant ground vehicles.

#### Familiar Footing

War supplementals have been customary since operations began in Iraq and Afghanistan, but Murtha has long criticized their use, saying they corrupt the budgeting process.

He also has criticized conflicting messages from the Pentagon on the need for some big-ticket items such as destroyers and fighter planes.

"We've got to get this together and coordinate this so I know what the hell I'm doing," Murtha said. "We can't operate this way anymore."

Supplementals have provided most of the \$864 billion in war funding since Sept. 11, 2001, according to the Congressional Research Service.

Total spending on the wars could reach \$1.7 trillion by 2018, according to a new report by the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, with an additional \$70 billion to \$700 billion in interest costs, depending on how the spending is financed.

The process of supplemental funding "has reduced the ability of Congress to exercise effective oversight. It has also tended to obscure the long-term costs and budgetary consequences of ongoing military operations," the report stated.

#### The Gates View

Under Gates's latest estimate for the next supplemental, \$53.5 billion would go to current operations, including military pay, training and transportation costs. Within that total, \$3.6 billion would be for military intelligence activities, \$1.5 billion to counter roadside bombs and \$1.3 billion for military construction projects at home and abroad.

The estimate also would provide for international assistance, calling for \$2.3 billion to train the Afghan Security Forces and \$1.3 billion to equip them. About \$1.4 billion would go to reimburse coalition countries such as Pakistan and Jordan for their military expenditures, and \$400 million would be designated to build up Pakistani capabilities.

Gates's estimate also calls for \$7.5 billion to replace and repair military equipment such as aircraft and ground vehicles, as well as \$600 million to procure four F-22 Raptor fighters.

Another \$2 billion would be used to speed up Army and Marines Corps plans to expand ground forces. Veterans's health and family support programs would receive \$1.7 billion more.