

Senate passes defense authorization bill

By Amy Klamper, [CongressDailyAM](#)

The Senate passed the fiscal 2005 defense authorization bill late Wednesday night, wrapping up debate on more than \$447 billion in defense spending that includes \$25 billion in emergency contingency funds for Iraq and Afghanistan.

Passage of the authorizing legislation clears the way for debate to begin on the fiscal 2005 Defense appropriations bill, which Senate Appropriations Chairman Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, hopes to finish this week.

In a fit of frustration during floor debate late Wednesday, Stevens scolded the Senate for failing to meet a Tuesday evening deadline for completing the authorization bill.

"I for one am really, really getting a little bit impatient about getting this bill done," he said. "But if I have to embarrass every member of the Senate to get it done, I'm going to do it. We're at war. We're at war!"

Stevens cautioned that, given the fast-approaching deadline for handing over sovereignty in Iraq and the threat of escalating violence there, the Pentagon will need immediate access to the \$25 billion in contingency funds.

"We know that if there is a development in Iraq in particular which will give rise to a need for money, this bill must become law before we leave for the conventions in August," he said, referring to the Democratic and Republican presidential nominating conventions

. Stevens asserted that concern over raising the government's allowed debt limit would not threaten work on his bill. House Republicans Tuesday included language in that chamber's version of the fiscal 2005 Defense appropriations bill that could later be replaced with a provision raising the debt ceiling.

"I have been asked, as manager of this bill, to commit that I will not bring this bill back from conference with the debt ceiling in it," he said. "I can make no such commitment."

Senate Budget ranking member Kent Conrad, D-N.D., said he hoped to be able to speak on the debt limit issue when the Defense spending bill reached the floor, although he noted that in such a large bill there were plenty of other matters that could slow things down.

"It does concern me that there would be an attempt to increase the debt limit by hundreds of billions of dollars without any debate, without any vote," Conrad said. "That would be a serious breach of congressional standards in my book."

-- Reporters John Stanton and Peter Cohn contributed to this story.

