

he came home, he went to college on the GI bill, which made it possible for him and so many veterans like him to live out their own version of the American Dream. And now it's our turn to help guarantee this generation the same opportunity that the greatest generation enjoyed by providing every returning servicemember with a real chance to afford a college education. And by providing the resources to effectively implement the post-9/11 GI bill, that is what this budget does.

And even as we care for veterans who've served this country, Bob Gates has helped us design a budget that does more for our soldiers, more for their families, and more for our military. It fully protects and properly funds the increase to our Army and Marine force strength and halts reductions in the Air Force and Navy, allowing fewer deployments and more time between each. It builds on care for our wounded warriors and our investments in medical research and development. It deepens our commitment to improve the quality of life for military families—military childcare, spousal support, and education—because they're deployed when their loved one gets deployed.

On my visit to Baghdad this week, I was inspired all over again by the men and women in

our armed services. They're proud of the work they're doing. And we are all deeply proud of them. And through their service, they are living out the ideals that stir something deep within the American character: honor, sacrifice, and commitment to a higher purpose and to one another.

That, after all, is what led them to wear the uniform in the first place, their unwavering belief in America. And now we must serve them as well as they've served us. And as long as we are fortunate to have leaders like Secretary Gates and Secretary Shinseki, and as long as I am Commander in Chief, I promise that we will work tirelessly to meet that mission and make sure that all those who wear this Nation's uniform know this: When you come home to America, America will be there for you.

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:54 a.m. in Room 450 of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Sgt. Maj. John L. Estrada, USMC (Ret.), former Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, who introduced the President; and Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki.

Letter to the Speaker of the House of Representatives Transmitting a Supplemental Appropriations Request for Ongoing Military, Diplomatic, and Intelligence Operations

April 9, 2009

Dear Madam Speaker:

We face a security situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan that demands urgent attention. The Taliban is resurgent and al Qaeda threatens America from its safe haven along the Afghan-Pakistan border.

With that reality as my focus, today I send to the Congress a supplemental appropriations request totaling \$83.4 billion that will fund our ongoing military, diplomatic, and intelligence operations. Nearly 95 percent of these funds will be used to support our men and women in uniform as they help the people of Iraq to take responsibility for their own future—and work to

disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The rest of the money will fund a variety of defense and international efforts that will help to use all the elements of our power to confront the threats to our security—from securing loose nuclear weapons to combating fear and want under repressive regimes.

In the past, the Congress has moved expeditiously to approve funding for our Armed Forces. I urge the Congress to do so once more. I also urge the Congress to focus on the needs of our troops and our national security, and not to use the supplemental to pursue unnecessary spending. I want the Congress to send me a

focused bill, and to do so quickly. When this request returns to me as legislation ready to be signed, it should remain focused on our security. It is important that we follow the same approach we applied to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and keep extraneous and unnecessary projects out of this legislation.

As I noted when first I introduced my budget in February, this is the last planned war supplemental. Since September 2001, the Congress has passed 17 separate emergency funding bills totaling \$822.1 billion for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. After 7 years of war, the American people deserve an honest accounting of the cost of our involvement in our ongoing military operations.

We must break that recent tradition and include future military costs in the regular budget so that we have an honest, more accurate, and fiscally responsible estimate of Federal spending. And we should not label military costs as emergency funds so as to avoid our responsibility to abide by the spending limitations set forth by the Congress. After years of budget gimmicks and wasteful spending, it is time to end the era of irresponsibility in Washington. In this request, we are honest about the costs we will bear as a nation, and we will use our resources wisely and responsibly to meet the threats of our time and keep our Nation safe and secure.

There is no question of the resolve of our military women and men. Yet, in Afghanistan, that resolve has not been matched by a comprehensive strategy and sufficient resources. This funding request will ensure that the full force of the United States—our military, intelligence, diplomatic, and economic power—are engaged in an overall effort to defeat al Qaeda and uproot the safe haven from which it plans and trains for attacks on the homeland and on our allies. At the same time that we are increasing our troop commitment, we will employ the necessary civilian resources to build Afghan governance capacity and self-sufficiency.

As the United States moves forward with our mission, we are asking our friends and allies to join us with a renewed commitment. As

I made clear on my recent trip to Europe, the threat posed by al Qaeda is international in scope; the response to the threat also should be international. Going forward with this strategy, we will establish and regularly assess military and civilian capacity, checking progress through clear measurements to ensure an ongoing informed assessment and accountability. I have asked my National Security Advisor, General Jim Jones, to oversee this effort and to work with the Congress on the development of these standards for progress.

In Iraq, violence has been reduced substantially because of the skilled efforts of our troops and the Iraqi people's commitment to peace. The threat of terrorism in Iraq has been dealt a serious blow. Iraqis are prepared to take responsibility for their own future through a peaceful political process. Because of this, we are positioned to move forward with a responsible drawdown of our combat forces, transferring security to Iraq's forces. Under the Strategic Framework Agreement and Security Agreement, Iraqi personnel have taken the lead in security operations and will continue to handle greater responsibility.

Stability and security depend on responsive, capable, and accountable governments. This request includes funds to help create political and economic stability in post-conflict areas, assist Afghans and Iraqis to protect and sustain their infrastructure, and build their capacity for more responsive and transparent governance. This request also will enable military commanders to respond to urgent humanitarian relief and reconstruction needs in their areas of responsibility. We provide funds for the extraordinary security and costs associated with supporting U.S. diplomatic activity in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

The request also increases funding to provide wounded servicemembers with the highest quality support and care, and provides additional compensation to our troops for their service in hazardous, life-threatening areas.

This request reflects the reality of our day and age: We need to use all the elements of our power—economic and diplomatic as well as military—to confront threats to our security.

Thank you for your consideration of this funding request and for your steadfast support for our servicemembers and their families.

Sincerely,

BARACK OBAMA

Remarks Following a Meeting With Senior Economic Advisers and an Exchange With Reporters

April 10, 2009

The President. Well, first of all, happy Easter and happy Passover. I'm sorry that you guys, like us, are working today.

We just had a terrific conversation with Ben Bernanke, Sheila Bair, and our entire regulatory group to talk about progress that we're making on the economy. And I wanted to just give you a little bit of a sense of the efforts that we've been making in stabilizing the financial markets.

And I want to thank SEC Chair Mary Schapiro, as well as Comptroller of the Currency John Dugan, for joining us. They weren't with us the last time we met.

We discussed ongoing stabilization of the financial system and the steps that have already been taken. I spoke yesterday about the progress that's been made in the housing market. As a consequence of some excellent work by Ben and some coordinated activities between the various agencies, what we've seen is mortgage interest rates go down to historic lows, and we've seen a very significant pick-up in refinancings. That has the effect of not only putting money in the pockets of people, but also contributing to stabilization of the housing market.

We discussed the public-private investment mechanisms that we have set up, so that we can start getting some of these toxic assets off the books. And all the agencies here have been involved in further refining the ideas and making them work effectively. And we feel confident that even as we're dealing with the problems within the banking system, that we're also addressing some of the problems in the nonbank financial system that was such a huge proportion of our credit flow when it came to things like auto loans and credit cards and so forth.

We feel very good about the progress that we're making in unlocking lending in some particular markets, for example, the small business

area. Some of you will recall that a couple of weeks ago, we made a presentation about how we were going to help thaw lending to small businesses, and I'm pleased to discover that because of our actions, we've seen a 20 percent increase in the largest SBA loans program in the last month alone.

And what that means is that small businesses are starting to get money that allows them to keep their doors open, make payroll, and that is going to contribute to overall economic growth, as well as help make sure that people are able to keep their jobs.

And we have also seen this month people starting to get their first checks in terms of the tax cuts that were initiated through the recovery package. And when you combine it with the other efforts that are being made across the country for infrastructure projects, for the kinds of innovative energy programs that were part of the recovery package, what you're starting to see is glimmers of hope across the economy.

Now, we have always been very cautious about prognosticating, and that's not going to change just because it's Easter. The economy is still under severe stress, and obviously, during these holidays we have to keep in mind that whatever we do ultimately has to translate into economic growth and jobs and rising incomes for the American people. And right now, we're still seeing a lot of job losses, a lot of hardship, people finding themselves in very difficult situations either because they've lost their home, they've seen their savings deteriorate, and they're still at risk of losing their jobs.

So we've still got a lot of work to do. And over the next several weeks, you will be seeing additional actions by the administration. What I just wanted to emphasize today, and I think that Ben Bernanke and Sheila Bair and our economic team as a whole would agree, we're starting