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Senate set to vote on upping debt limit

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WASHINGTON (AP) - The Senate on Thursday slated votes on must-pass bills to prevent a government shutdown and extend the Treasury Department's ability to [finance](#) the budget deficit.

A stopgap spending bill is needed because Congress has not sent President Bush a single spending bill, while the [debt](#) limit increase measure comes as the government continues to

leak red ink.

The Senate agreed to votes on the bills Thursday night. Once they pass, they'll be shipped to the White House for Bush to sign by an Oct. 1 deadline. That's when the new fiscal year starts and, coincidentally, when the government will hit its borrowing ceiling of \$8.965 trillion.

Congress has never failed to raise the debt ceiling and prevent default on U.S. obligations, but the vote nonetheless illustrates the fiscal failings of Bush and Congress since the U.S. recorded four straight years of surpluses ending in 2001, Bush's first year.

The budget deficit for the current fiscal year is expected to reach \$158 billion, about \$15 billion less than appropriated for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The stopgap spending bill would keep all 15 Cabinet departments running at current levels through mid-November, extend financing for a popular health [insurance](#) program covering children from low-income families and provide funding to continue Pentagon operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Such stopgap funding bills are routine and have been needed every year since 1994. But for the first time in five years, none of the 12 annual appropriations bills have become law by the Oct. 1 deadline. Republican-led Congresses typically had made sure at least the defense and homeland security measures had passed by then.

Bush is plainly eager for a veto showdown with Democrats over their efforts to add \$23 billion for domestic programs to Bush's \$933 billion request for the approximately one-third of the federal budget funded by the yearly spending bills.

Beyond Bush's objections to the additional money -- which he says would compound into \$205 billion over five years -- Bush is looking to reclaim for Republicans the reputation with the public as the party of fiscal discipline.

'One of the reasons we lost control of the Congress ... is that people

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ROYAL DUTCH SHELL (11:35am)	2232.00	+19.50 (0.88 %)
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CATERPILLAR INC (12:27pm)	108.60	+1.02 (0.94 %)
IBM (12:27pm)	175.14	+0.91 (0.52 %)
EXXON MOBIL CORP (12:27pm)	82.73	+0.49 (0.59 %)
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BAIDUCOM INC (12:53pm)	145.26	+4.44 (3.06 %)
LIBERTY MED CP B (10:51am)	80.93	+3.76 (4.65 %)
CLAYTON WILLIAMS E (12:55pm)		

quit seeing differences between the two parties,' said GOP lobbyist Charlie Black.

Democrats say their spending add-ons are relatively modest given the overall size of the budget and in comparison to Bush's pending \$189 billion request for Pentagon operations in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2008. And most of the additional money, Democrats say, simply restores cuts proposed by Bush to popular programs such as community development grants, health research and anti-crime initiatives.

'On the one hand, the president is seeking over \$190 billion in emergency appropriations to fight the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan ... for just one year,' said Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Robert Byrd, D-W.Va. 'At the same time, the president wants to veto critical domestic spending bills because they total \$22 billion above his budget request -- less than 1 percent of our entire budget and about what we spend in just two months' time fighting an unpopular war in Iraq.'

Democrats were also critical about the debt limit increase, the fifth such increase since Bush took office.

'The fact is that under his fiscal policy, the debt limit of the United States has been raised \$3.865 trillion dollars,' said Senate Budget Committee Chairman Kent Conrad, D-N.D. 'This most recent increase of \$850 billion is one of the biggest increases we have ever had.'

The House passed the stopgap funding bill on Wednesday and passed the debt limit increase when adopting its budget plan in May.

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