

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON | Congress on Thursday cleared for President Bush must-pass bills to prevent a government shutdown and extend the Treasury Department's ability to finance the budget deficit.

The stopgap spending bill, which the Senate approved 94-1, was needed because Congress has not sent Bush a single spending bill. Sen. Russ Feingold, D-Wis., cast the only no vote, saying the bill gave Bush a "blank check" to continue the war in Iraq.

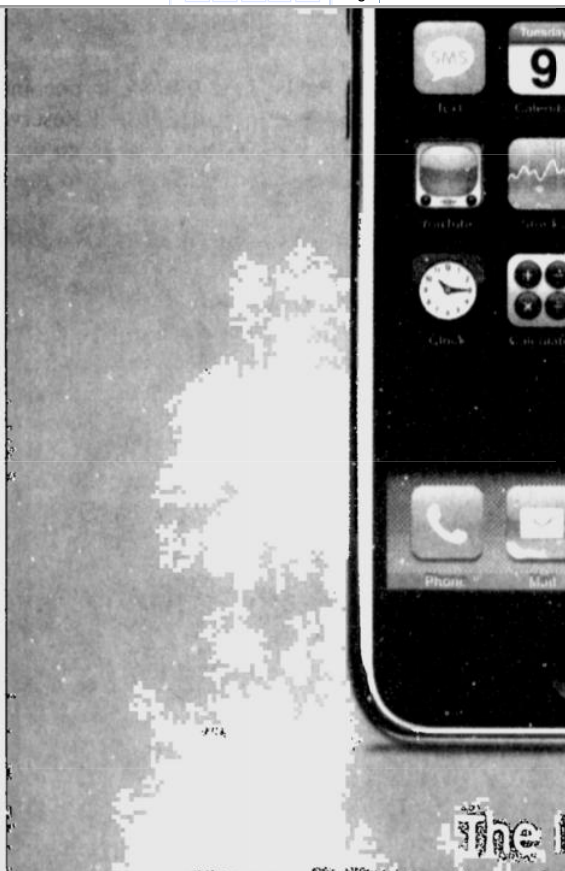
The debt limit increase measure passed by a 53-42 vote and comes as the government continues to leak red ink.

The bills will now 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. The new debt limit would be \$9.815 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 lingering deficit is well below the \$413 billion set in 2004 and is now largely a product of increasing war costs. It is expected to reach \$158 billion for the fiscal year about to end, about \$15 billion less than appropriated for the war.



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