



Members of Congress Oppose Using Budget Gimmicks to Fund the Pentagon

Mar 19, 2012

By BEN FREEMAN

Overseas contingency operations (OCO) funds, which have been used to pay for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, should only be used to fund emergency military operations, according to a recent letter from six Republican Representatives to the House Appropriations Committee.

“Any gimmicks that would shift regular, base budget functions into OCO accounts would distort any potential spending cuts and do nothing to address the debt crisis we are still facing,” write the letter’s signatories, which [according to Inside Defense](#) are Representatives Jeff Flake (R-AZ), Jim Jordan (R-OH), Tom McClintock (R-CA), Mick Mulvaney (R-SC), John Campbell (R-CA) and Scott Garrett (R-NJ).

This shifting of funds from base budgets to OCO is a way for lawmakers to avoid the caps on discretionary spending resulting from last August’s debt ceiling bill because the OCO budget, unlike base budgets, is not capped.

The legislators behind the letter argue that this strategy is deceptive. “Much like passage of emergency spending bills that contained billions in extraneous spending unrelated to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan was not an honest way to budget, neither is transferring funds that belong in the base budgets of bills to accounts that are meant to be temporary accounts to fund war-related spending,” the letter states.

Both Congress and the White House have already used this trick. Ben Friedman of the Cato Institute and Charles Knight of the Project on Defense Alternatives [wrote in *The National Interest*](#) that “The current administration acquiesced last year as the Congress [shifted](#) about \$7 billion of what was non-war Pentagon funding into the OCO account to get under the spending cap. This year, they propose [moving](#) at least \$4 billion in ‘temporary end strength’ costs into the war account.”

This chicanery allows lawmakers to keep funneling taxpayer money into the Pentagon despite legislation they enacted to reduce the federal deficit. It also undermines the intent

of OCO funding. As Friedman and Knight [said](#), “OCO budgets should be reserved for extraordinary emergencies. Otherwise, they become a Pentagon slush fund.”

POGO opposes using OCO budgets as a “slush fund” and supports the effort of these House Republicans to make sure that war funding is used to actually pay for wars, not the Pentagon bureaucracy.

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