

The following text may be printed, copy/pasted, or downloaded and emailed.

House Approves Sweeping Defense Bill

LIZ SIDOTI

Associated Press

December 19, 2005

The military would get a pay raise and an Iraq war veteran would get to adopt a bomb-sniffing dog named Rex under a defense bill the House approved early Monday.

The measure also includes a ban on the cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of terrorism suspects in U.S. custody and other restrictions on detainee interrogation that President Bush reluctantly endorsed last week.

On a 374-41 vote, the House sent the bill setting Pentagon policies and funding levels to the Senate, where quick approval was expected. The measure then would be forwarded to the president for his signature.

The House voted on the bill after Republicans abandoned a last-minute attempt Sunday to attach to it legislation that would have limited individual political donations to independent groups like MoveOn.org. That plan had stalled the defense bill just before passage.

Sweeping in scope, the bill authorizes a 3.1 percent pay raise for military personnel and allows exceptions to the law that prohibits the adoption of military working dogs before the end of their useful life.

The latter provision was added after lawmakers were made aware of the case of Air Force Tech Sgt. Jamie Dana. She was severely injured when her Humvee was bombed in Iraq but was rebuffed when she sought to adopt Rex the dog.

The Air Force initially said it spent thousands of dollars training Rex, and by law he needed to work the remaining five years of his useful life before he could be adopted. But lawmakers say Dana would get to adopt Rex under the provision in the bill.

Like a separate military spending bill, the defense policy measure also includes the ban on mistreating terrorism suspects in U.S. custody, regardless of where they are held, as well as a requirement that U.S. service members follow interrogation techniques outlined in the Army Field Manual.

Under an agreement with the president, Sen. John McCain (news, bio, voting record), R-Ariz., the chief sponsor of the ban, added language allowing civilian interrogators accused of violating the standards the same legal protections as those afforded to accused military interrogators.

Also included in the measure are provisions:

_Permitting terror-war detainees at the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to appeal their detention status and punishments to a federal appeals court in Washington while prohibiting them from filing habeas corpus lawsuits in any federal court.

_Increasing the number of active duty Army personnel by 10,000 and the number of active duty Marines by 1,000.

_Boosting enlistment and re-enlistment bonuses.

_Requiring the Navy to maintain 12 aircraft carriers.

_Authorizing an increase in the maximum enlistment age for active duty troops from 35 to 42 years.