

War in Kosovo hits home

US to boost military spending, activate reservists

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The war against Serbia is having its first impact on workers in the United States with the Clinton administration activating reservists while moving to plunder the federal budget surplus, which is supposedly being set aside to shore up the Social Security system, in order to boost Pentagon spending.

On April 27 President Clinton authorized the activation of 33,102 military reservists. Of this total 2,116 members of the Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard from eight states are being called to active duty. They are being mobilized to help in the refueling of NATO planes as part of the expanded bombing campaign in the Balkans.

The activation of the reservists is the largest since the Desert Storm assault against Iraq in 1991. In addition to disrupting the lives of the servicemen and their families, the call-up could have potentially serious consequences for civilian aviation, since most of those being activated are pilots, mechanics and other airline workers.

Clinton has also authorized the Air Force to prevent pilots and other service members deemed essential from retiring or leaving the service before the air war against Serbia ends. According to a Pentagon spokesman, once the current bombing escalation is complete, the US will have more aircraft involved than it did in the war against Iraq.

Congress is meanwhile debating the authorization of additional billions for the already gargantuan Pentagon budget. The Clinton administration is proposing an extra \$5 billion to cover additional costs related to the bombing of Serbia through the end of September and \$1 billion for what it calls humanitarian aid. The request does not include money for the deployment of

ground troops.

In a game of political one-upmanship House and Senate Republicans are proposing to double the \$6.05 billion funding request from the White House for Balkan operations. The House Appropriations Committee is planning a vote on a \$12.9 billion package that authorizes increases in military spending unrelated to the war against Serbia. These include \$3 billion for spare parts, \$460 million for munitions purchases, \$400 million for electronic warfare equipment and other items and \$1.8 billion for a 4.8 percent military pay raise to take effect January 1, 2000.

House Republicans are also calling for an additional \$1.1 billion for additional military construction around the world, including \$47 million for a bachelor officers' complex in Bahrain.

Both Clinton and the Republicans propose that money for the military come from this year's projected \$111 billion budget surplus. The call for additional funding for the US war machine comes just months after Congress approved the biggest increase in Pentagon spending since 1984 at the height of the Reagan military buildup, \$110 billion over the next six years.

The explosion of military spending linked to the attack on Serbia further undercuts any chances that the federal budget surplus will be used to even marginally expand funding for education and other social programs. House and Senate Republicans in fact have made little effort to conceal that they are using the war "emergency" as a cover for evading budget rules in order to pour billions more into the Pentagon.

Congressman Jerry Lewis, chairman of the

Appropriations subcommittee dealing with defense, said that they planned to take advantage of the war against Serbia in order to do "backfilling" to increase military spending. Asked if it would difficult for the Democrats to vote no on the additional funding Lewis said, "I'd hope it would be a tough no vote for any American."

Revealing in terms of the social interests pushing for the military buildup is a report that House Majority Whip Tom DeLay of Texas has enlisted the aid of defense industry lobbyists to obtain passage of the Republican package. "We've added a lot in defense money to this," said one Congressman, "That helps these lobbyists."

A few figures expose the claim that the Pentagon faces some kind of funding "emergency" in its grotesquely one-sided war against Serbia. Even before the latest increases the US military budget exceeded by a factor of five the military budget of any other country. The US government allots more than half its discretionary spending to the military, an amount that exceeds the military budgets of Russia, China, Japan and all the NATO countries combined. Even without additional funding the US military budget will rise to \$276 billion next year. By comparison the total Gross Domestic Product of Serbia is around \$20 billion, of which only a small fraction is spent on defense.



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