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U.S. Senate OKs \$10.1M Micro Money

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WASHINGTON—The U.S. Senate voted, 90-0, Wednesday to approve a supplement appropriation bill that contained \$10.1 million for Micronesia, including \$1.7 million for the controversial Koror-Babelthup bridge in Palau.

The bill now goes to a conference committee, since it provides more than the \$8.4 million approved by the House.

The Palau bridge would span about 1,000 yards over choppy waters, now served by an unreliable ferry, to ease travel problems between the airport at Babelthup and the more populous Koror. Rising costs have pushed bids on the bridge up to \$5 million.

Congress has already appropriated about half of that and several members have declared their dismay over the expense. However, the majority of the committee felt it was too late now to turn back after committing the government to build the bridge.

The money voted by both Houses was more than the \$8.2 million endorsed by the Interior Department and the Office of Management and Budget. The House added \$160,000 for a new fleet of school buses on Saipan. The Senate approved that too. A big chunk of the money is \$4.5 million for a new hospital in Ponape.

Micronesia, accustomed to getting \$60 million a year from Congress, got only \$47 million in its normal appropriation and came back seeking the full difference. Federal officials here supported only the \$8.2 million of the request.