Lawmakers in both chambers will have their hands full with policy this week -- from an emergency supplemental spending package and lobbying overhaul to a rewrite of the nation's 10-year-old telecommunications law -- but Senate Democrats still plan to try to sneak some politics onto the agenda as well.

The Senate this week will try to wrap up work on a $107 billion FY06 emergency supplemental appropriations bill, which is mostly for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and hurricane relief. Conservatives will try to strike more individual earmarked projects in that bill. A cloture vote Tuesday, if successful, would cut the discussion short.

The House will resume wrangling over legislation designed to overhaul lobbying and ethics provisions that would pertain to both influence-peddlers and lawmakers and will look to take up a telecommunications package that cleared the Energy and Commerce Committee last week.

At the same time, Senate Majority Leader Reid said Democrats in that chamber would try to keep focused on some potentially potent political issues, including rising gas prices and the war in Iraq. The war is an especially strong magnet for criticism this week -- three years ago today, speaking from the deck of an aircraft carrier with a banner proclaiming "Mission Accomplished," the president declared an end to major combat operations in Iraq.

Both sides are likely to find other opportunities for political rhetoric today when trustees release their annual reports on the status of the Medicare and Social Security programs.

Last year, it was estimated that Medicare's hospital insurance trust fund would be exhausted in 2020, a year later than the previous estimate and the Social Security fund would run dry in 2041, a year earlier than estimated the previous year.

The House has already passed a $91.9 billion FY06 supplemental, coming in $300 million shy of President Bush's initial request. But even after adjusting his price tag to accommodate avian flu countermeasures, the Senate version is $12 billion more than Bush's revised request. That earned an unusually strong veto threat from the White House.

Numerous amendments to the supplemental are still lined up, including about 16 from Rep. Tom Coburn, R-Okla., aimed at individual provisions the White House did not request, such as $230 million to buy three new V-22 Osprey tilt rotor aircraft. He successfully struck from the bill $15 million for a Gulf Coast seafood promotion campaign last week, and thus might feel emboldened this week.
Senate Majority Leader Frist and 34 senators said they will back trimming the overall price tag back to the president's $94.5 billion request when the measure reaches a House-Senate conference. Meanwhile, Senate Appropriations Chairman Cochran, from hurricane-battered Mississippi, wants a more generous Gulf Coast aid package than the president's $19.8 billion would allow.

But with numerous other amendments lined up, dealing with items ranging from Iranian democracy to forest health projects in Western states, Frist and Cochran agreed a cloture vote was necessary to try to finish work on the bill this week. Lawmakers want to reach agreement on the measure by the end of May, to ensure there are no funding disruptions for military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

On the other side of the Capitol, House GOP leaders will continue talks on the FY07 budget resolution in hopes of making a last-ditch attempt to pass it. But the House Appropriations Committee is not waiting, and will begin marking up FY07 spending bills at the subcommittee level this week. Appropriations Chairman Lewis has every intention of sticking to the budget's $872.8 billion spending cap, even if no budget resolution is adopted.

The House debate on lobbying reform began last week, when Republican leaders rescued the package from what appeared to be nearly certain defeat.

Republicans passed the rule for their lobbying bill Thursday only after House Speaker Hastert and Majority Leader Boehner promised appropriators they would not agree to any lobbying bill conference report that did not extend proposed curbs on appropriations earmarks to authorization and tax bills.

In addition to earmark provisions, the bill would add new disclosure requirements for lobbyists, impose a moratorium for the rest of the year on privately funded travel and strip the pensions of members convicted of certain felonies.

Bill sponsors will have one hour of general debate Wednesday, along with 10 minutes of debate on each of nine amendments, including measures to modify the bill's language on ethics training, penalties and member pensions.

Republican leaders are likely to have an easier time passing the lobbying package than they did in approving the rule, but they still face opposition from moderate Republicans who contend the reforms do not go far enough, and from Democrats.

Democratic leaders, who pressed for an open rule, say they expect few of their members to support the bill, which grew more unpalatable when GOP leaders decided to reattach a House-passed bill that regulates so-called 527 groups.
The Senate meets at 2 p.m. today to resume consideration of the supplemental appropriations bill, with a vote scheduled for approximately 5:30 p.m. For the remainder of the week, the Senate will continue to work on the supplemental.

The House meet at noon today for a pro forma session. On Tuesday, the House meets at 12:30 p.m. for morning hour and 2 p.m. to consider 14 measures under suspension of the rules. Votes will be postponed until 6:30 p.m. On Wednesday and Thursday, the House meets at 10 a.m. to consider three suspension bills, the lobbying overhaul bill and a port security bill.

BUDGET: The Senate Budget Committee begins hearings this week on the president's line-item veto and expedited rescission authority legislation. The measure would give the president the ability to strike any targeted provisions in spending or tax provisions, and remand them to Congress as a package for an up-or-down vote.

Under the bill, the White House may refuse to act on earmarks or tax items it has singled out -- essentially impounding the items -- for up to 180 days.

That has provoked constitutional questions that the administration has fastidiously sought to avoid, since the last line-item veto authority law was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1998.

Lawmakers like Senate Appropriations ranking member Robert Byrd, D-W.Va., who testifies before the Budget panel Tuesday, likely will urge them to grant senators the right to amend presidential rescission packages. Congress is expected to act on the line-item veto measure this summer.

DEFENSE: The House and Senate Armed Services committees will meet this week to mark up the FY07 defense authorization bill, with both committees hopeful they can bring their versions of the legislation to the House and Senate floors for a vote before the Memorial Day recess.

The House Armed Services panel will mark up its bill during a lengthy public session Wednesday that likely will call for major increases to the Pentagon's $439.3 billion budget request.

The six House Armed Services subcommittees met last week, authorizing hefty increases to the defense budget for National Guard equipment, the fast-attack submarine force and military health care, among other programs.

Not all weapons systems were spared by the subcommittees, however, with some of the deepest cuts made to Missile Defense and the Army's Future Combat Systems.

Meanwhile, the Senate Armed Services panel will conduct both its subcommittee and full committee marks this week behind closed doors, as has become tradition.
The subcommittees will meet all day Tuesday and Wednesday morning, with the full-committee mark expected to immediately follow. The committee expects to finish the markup Thursday night, though work might extend into Friday.

EMPLOYMENT: Conferees will continue meeting this week to iron out differences in pension legislation. With conference talks so far yielding little significant movement, Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Chairman Enzi, who is chairing the conference, might call a full meeting of the negotiators this week to try to spur progress. Negotiators are hung up on a handful of differences, including Senate language that would give troubled airlines an extra 14 years to pay their pension liabilities.

Negotiators also have not settled how to treat companies that convert traditional pension plans to newer "cash-balance" plans that resemble 401(k) plans, or how to tweak Senate language that would require companies with poor credit ratings to pay more into their pension coffers.

ENERGY: House Republicans will attempt to bring at least a portion of an evolving energy package to the floor this week amid heightened public pressure on lawmakers to try to alleviate the impact of high gasoline prices on consumers.

Republican Policy Committee Chairman Adam Putnam of Florida, who has been tapped by Speaker Hastert to lead this effort, said last week that Republicans want to soon push forward with four provisions: a suspension on boutique fuel requirements, an adjustment to the strategic petroleum reserve, tougher enforcement on price gouging and incentives for hydrogen and other innovative fuel initiatives.

But it is unlikely that all four of those provisions will be included in one bill, and it is unclear which provisions Republicans will try to move first.

"We're trying to move price gouging legislation to the floor next week and are working on getting the language prepared," a House GOP leadership aide said Friday.

The Energy and Commerce Committee holds two energy hearings this week, including one Wednesday on draft legislation that authorizes the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to set new federal fuel economy standards for cars.

The 27.5 miles per gallon standard for cars has been in place since 1990. This authority is also included in a Senate Republican energy package unveiled last week.

NHTSA last month announced it was raising the standard for light trucks and SUVs 11 percent -- from 21.6 miles per gallon to 24 miles per gallon -- by 2011 and for the first time included SUVs heavier than 8,500 pounds.

The Transportation Department says the new light truck standards will save 10.7 billion gallons of fuel, but many Democrats and moderate Republicans want Congress to set higher standards.
The Energy and Commerce Committee also holds a hearing Thursday on global crude oil prices.

The Resources Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee will hold a hearing Thursday on the use of coal in creating alternative fuels.

Meanwhile, it remains unclear whether Senate Republicans will try to move their energy package this week. It might be offered as an amendment to the FY06 emergency supplemental bill or as a stand-alone measure. An aide for Senate Majority Leader Frist said the leadership is still exploring options.

The package includes contentious measures such as drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and a plan to expand domestic refinery production that supporters have not been able to pass because of opposition from most Democrats and moderate Republicans. It also would give a $100 rebate to taxpayers, go after gasoline price gougers, authorize President Bush's alternative fuels and advanced technology energy plan, repeal some industry tax incentives and urge the administration to suspend the filling of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve for six months.

ENVIRONMENT: The House Resources Committee holds a hearing Wednesday on competing plans to reauthorize the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

The law, which expired in 1999, established eight regional fishery management councils. A bill by Resources Chairman Pombo and Reps. Barney Frank, D-Mass., and Don Young, R-Alaska, aims to reduce overfishing by requiring the regional councils for the first time to set annual catch limits that would be at or below those recommended by each council's scientific advisers -- an idea supported by the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and conservation groups.

The bill would not mandate how regions would have to meet the limits and also allows the Commerce secretary to exempt councils from meeting the current 10-year deadline for restoring fishing stocks under some circumstances.

Conservation groups say the bill would roll back current protections and are instead pushing for legislation offered by Resources Fisheries and Oceans Subcommittee Chairman Wayne Gilchrest, R-Md. Gilchrest's bill requires an annual catch limit for a regional council to be scaled back by the same amount that the prior year's limit was exceeded.

Gilchrest's bill also does not expedite federal environmental review requirements under the National Environmental Policy Act and Magnuson-Stevens like the Pombo bill does.

Frank also has a separate reauthorization bill that includes health benefits for fishermen and fishing safety.
HEALTH: Senate leaders had planned to dub this week "health week," with a series of health bills and debates aimed at calling attention to the issue and coinciding with national "Cover the Uninsured Week."

The intent was to bring up two pieces of health legislation, one capping medical malpractice awards and another that would allow small businesses to band together in associations to purchase health insurance.

But it appears that work on the supplemental spending bill will dominate the floor this week, and the two health bills will wait until the next week.

Neither bill enjoys widespread support among Democrats and the prospects for passing either are slim, although Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Chairman Enzi said he is working to find more bipartisan support for his insurance bill, which is expected to result in a tighter vote than the malpractice bill.

HOMELAND SECURITY: The debate over overhauling the Federal Emergency Management Agency is expected to intensify this week when Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Chairwoman Collins and ranking member Joseph Lieberman, D-Conn., release their full report on the investigation into what went wrong during Hurricane Katrina. The report will be released Tuesday during a committee meeting.

Among the recommendations is a contentious proposal to abolish FEMA and create a new National Preparedness and Response Authority within the Homeland Security Department.

However, Sens. Frank Lautenberg, D-N.J., -- who sits on the committee -- and Trent Lott, R-Miss, are calling for FEMA to remain intact but be removed from the department and made an independent agency.

Improving port and cargo security will also get top billing this week. The Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee will mark up its port security bill Tuesday.

The leading bill in the House, by Homeland Security Economic Security Subcommittee Chairman Dan Lungren, R-Calif., and Intelligence ranking member Jane Harman, D-Calif., is scheduled for the floor Thursday.

House Democrats might propose an amendment that would require all cargo to be scanned at foreign ports before being shipped to the United States.

Meanwhile, senior defense and military officials, including the chief of the Pentagon's National Guard Bureau and the head of the Colorado-based U.S. Northern Command, will testify Wednesday before the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves.
The hearings will focus on the appropriate roles that the nation's reservists should play in homeland security, homeland defense and disaster response.

TAXES: Under continued pressure from Republican leaders and the White House, tax-writers hope to finalize the details of a $70 billion tax cut reconciliation package and vote on the conference report in both chambers.

House Ways and Means Chairman Thomas and Senate Finance Chairman Grassley fell short of that goal after daily meetings with House and Senate GOP leaders last week.

The key decisions that remained as of late last week were which revenue offsets to include in order to make room for all of the desired tax-cut extensions in the reconciliation package, and what vehicle to use to pass the most popular tax extenders. Tax staff were slated to continue work on the package through the weekend.

If lawmakers can iron out the final details early in the week, the conference report might be on the Senate floor Thursday, according to one Senate aide. The House would be unlikely to act on the conference report before Wednesday.

The tax reconciliation package itself is expected to include a two-year extension of the capital gains and dividend tax cut, a one-year alternative minimum tax cut patch, an increase to $400,000 in annual limits for small business expensing, which quadruples the current limit, and a one-year extension of tax deferral for certain overseas income of U.S. companies.

Republicans plan to move an additional package of tax extenders separately from the reconciliation package, possibly as part of a conference report on pension reform.

One lobbyist said backers of the pension bill would welcome that action, since the tax provisions in question are popular and most have already expired.

"It puts time pressure on the pension bill that doesn't exist now," the source said.

On the other hand, Republicans might move the extenders as a separate bill through regular order, daring Senate Democrats to amend the package and be accused of blocking popular tax items like the state sales tax provision and research and development tax credit.

TELECOM: On the heels of approval of telecommunications legislation last week by the Energy and Commerce Committee, the full House is likely to take up the measure Thursday -- with leading Democrats expected to raise a fuss about what they say are limited "network neutrality" provisions now in the bill sponsored by Energy and Commerce Chairman Barton.

Network neutrality refers to efforts to bar the owners of high-speed Internet "pipes" from discriminating against certain types of Internet content. A key question for the House
Rules Committee will be whether to allow a floor vote on the network neutrality question.

The legislation also would, for the first time, authorize national franchises for entrants into the pay video services market.

The national franchise issue has pitted the regional Bell operating companies, who favor the scheme, against the cable TV industry -- which has traditionally had to obtain local franchises on a municipality-by-municipality basis.

At the same time, the network neutrality issue has put the Bells and cable operators on the same side: They are opposed to efforts by a coalition of the technology industry and public interest groups to adopt stronger net neutrality provisions.

Democratic proponents of neutrality rules are pushing for a vote on an amendment by Energy and Commerce Telecommunications and the Internet Subcommittee ranking member Edward Markey, D-Mass.

Markey's amendment went down to defeat by a 3-2 margin in last week's committee markup. But a Markey aide, looking ahead to the floor debate, declared, "Activation at the grass roots level on the Internet has put some wind at our backs that hitherto hadn't been noticed."

A Democratic leadership aide said, "There is no Caucus position on the bill, although [Minority] Leader Pelosi does believe that there ought to be an opportunity for members to offer their amendments on network neutrality and build-out." Build-out refers to a requirement that companies providing pay TV serve all homes within a given area.

This week's timetable for floor consideration of the telecommunications legislation presumes that the House parliamentarian rules against an expected effort by Judiciary Chairman Sensenbrenner -- a critic of the Bells -- to seek referral of the legislation. Congressional sources predicted the Judiciary panel would not get the chance to consider the measure.

In the Senate, aides to Commerce Chairman Stevens continue drafting his version of telecommunications overhaul legislation.

Senate Minority Leader Reid Friday asked Majority Leader Frist to schedule floor time for legislation that would punish the fraudulent acquisition of telephone numbers. In a letter, Reid cited House passage last week of the bill, saying it is "is a good opportunity for the Senate to complete work on legislation that protects consumers and brings to account fraudulent peddlers of confidential information."

House Telecommunications and the Internet Subcommittee Chairman Fred Upton, R-Mich., will discuss the outlook for enactment of telecom overhaul legislation this year.
when he keynotes a forum on Tuesday sponsored by National Journal's Technology Daily at the Phoenix Park Hotel.

*Susan Davis, Bill Swindell, Megan Scully, Emily Heil, Darren Goode, Chris Strohm, Martin Vaughan and Drew Clark contributed.*