

House Backs Troop Withdrawal in Challenge to Bush's Iraq Policy

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House Backs Troop Withdrawal in Challenge to Bush's Iraq Policy

By Nicholas Johnston

March 23 (Bloomberg) — The House of Representatives voted to require the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq next year in the most direct challenge to President George W. Bush's war policy since Democrats won control of Congress in January.

The requirement to pull most of the 141,000 U.S. troops out of Iraq by September 2008 is part of \$124 billion emergency spending measure that was approved by a vote of 218-212. The measure also would fund the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and provide more than \$12 billion for domestic programs.

Administration officials said Bush would veto the spending measure if it contains the withdrawal provision, setting up a potential standoff over a war that entered its fifth year this week.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a California Democrat, called the war a "grotesque mistake."

"Rather than sending more troops into the chaos that is the Iraqi civil war, we must focus on bringing the war to an end," she said.

Republican leaders said the measure amounted to a retreat.

"Its prevailing tone is one of defeat and its abiding premise is America's mission in Iraq is over," said Republican Whip Roy Blunt of Missouri.

Democrats also tried to buy support among lawmakers by including funds in the measure for ranchers and other special interest groups, said Republican Sam Johnson of Texas.

Even under a veto threat and likely opposition in the Senate, the vote represents a victory for House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who worked for weeks to gain support for the legislation both from Democrats who didn't want to appear to undercut troops in the field and others who demand more restraints on Bush's ability to wage war.

Pointless

White House spokesman Tony Snow said the effort was pointless.

"You got to ask yourself," Snow said. "Why go through this long, drawn-out exercise of cajoling and trying to buy votes within your own party when in fact you know it's not going to go anywhere?"

"The need for funding the troops is urgent, the clock is running," Snow said.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates warned yesterday that failure to enact the supplemental spending measure by May 15 would force the Army to consider steps that could slow the deployment of replacement troops to Iraq and thus extend the tours of forces already there.

Under the House legislation, Bush would have to certify that the Iraqi government is making progress in bringing peace to the nation on July 1 and again on October 1, for U.S. troops to remain in the country. Even if the Iraqis meet those conditions, U.S. troop withdrawals would have to begin by March 1, 2008, and be completed within six months.

Senate

In the Senate, a similar measure fell 12 votes short of the 60 needed for passage on March 15. The Senate Appropriations Committee yesterday renewed the proposal, approving a \$121.5 billion spending measure that calls for the withdrawal most U.S. combat troops from Iraq within a year.

More than 3,100 U.S. military personnel have died in the war since Bush ordered an invasion in March 2003 to overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime.

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