

(February 17, 2007) War plan rebuked by House

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War plan rebuked by House

Emotions high during debate prior to vote

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WASHINGTON -- Rebuking President Bush on a war that enjoyed great support at its outset but has become deeply unpopular, the House went on record Friday opposing Bush's plan to add 21,500 troops in Iraq, with 17 Republicans joining all but two Democrats in voicing their disapproval.

The non-binding resolution, approved on a 246-182 vote, was Congress' most forceful action to challenge Bush's conduct of the war after November's congressional elections, in which the Democrats were catapulted to a majority in both houses of Congress, largely because of the public's growing frustration with the Iraq conflict.

Even some of the strongest opponents of the resolution voiced little faith in Bush's escalation strategy, stressing instead the importance of backing the troops, supporting the commander in chief and showing steadfastness in fighting terrorism.

The White House and Republican House leadership had worked feverishly over four days of debate this week to stem defections from the GOP, concerned about the political impact if a large majority of lawmakers opposed the president. Republican leaders also complained that Democrats did not allow them to offer alternative resolutions more supportive of the president.

But Democrats, confident that the public is with them on Iraq, argued that the war has been misguided and poorly executed and that sending additional troops would only produce more American deaths without turning the tide of what has become a bitter civil war.

The president had no immediate comment on the House action. His spokesman said Bush was too occupied with other duties to watch the proceedings on television.

The rhetoric on the House floor Friday was emotional, sweeping and at times agonized, with orators on both sides speaking of honoring the dead, staying true to the nation's mission and respecting the Constitution. In a chamber that often sees a lone congressman addressing an empty chamber, many seats were filled, and particularly eloquent speeches were met with standing ovations. It was perhaps the closest Congress had come in three decades to the

impassioned debates that animated the nation during the Vietnam War.

"The stakes in Iraq are too high to recycle proposals that have little prospect for success," said House Speaker Nancy Pelosi of California, in a rare speech from the House floor. "The passage of this legislation will signal a change in direction in Iraq that will end the fighting and bring our troops home."

Rep. Sam Johnson, a Texas Republican who spent seven years as a prisoner of war in Vietnam, was equally impassioned as he wrapped up the debate, during which 390 of 434 lawmakers spoke. "Now it's time to stand up for my friends who did not make it home, and for those who fought and died in Iraq already," Johnson said in opposing the resolution.

Rep. Patrick Murphy (D-Pa.), one of five new congressmen who are war veterans, talked about having to drive a Humvee with no doors down what was known as "Ambush Alley" in Baghdad.

"Half those names on the Vietnam [Memorial] wall are there after the civilian leadership in our country knew that it was strategically a mistake to stay there," he said. "But they didn't have the courage to stand up. This Congress is showing the courage to stand up."

Potentially adding to the power of the rebuke, the Senate plans to debate a measure identical to the House resolution Saturday. Republican leaders will try to block that vote, but the Senate action raises the possibility of a unified congressional response.

One supporter of the deployment, Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), characterized the Senate action as a "partisan stunt." The presidential contender was in Chicago and said he intended to keep his campaign schedule in Iowa rather than return to Washington for the debate.

"I think it's an insult to the public and our soldiers to pretend we're discharging our responsibilities to them when all we're doing is debating a meaningless, meaningless resolution," McCain said.

The House vote portends a larger battle next month, when Bush's request for a \$93 billion supplemental Pentagon spending measure will come before Congress. Rep. John Murtha (D-Pa.), who heads the subcommittee that oversees military spending, said he plans to offer legislation that will put such strict standards on deployments--requiring that troops spend a year at home between combat tours, for example--that Bush will have no choice but to start bringing troops home.

Republican critics said Friday's vote was a purely political statement and that the smaller-than-expected number of Republican defections meant a compromised victory for Democrats. "This was a political vote that gave members who wanted to be on the record that they didn't support the war, to be on the record," said Rep. Bill Young (R-Fla.), who held Murtha's post on the House panel until January.

Nevertheless, the vote marked the completion of a dramatic turnaround from the fall of 2002, when the House acquiesced, 296-133, to Bush's request to authorize military action in Iraq. Rep. Rahm Emanuel (D-Ill.) said, "There have been over a half a dozen votes in the United States Congress that have rubber-stamped the president's policy in Iraq. This is the first vote in a four-year war that rejected the policy."

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How they voted

How House members from Midwest voted on the non-binding measure opposing President Bush's decision to deploy more troops to Iraq. A "yes" vote is a vote to pass the resolution. X denotes those not voting:

ILLINOIS: Democrats -- Bean, Y; Costello, Y; Davis, Y; Emanuel, Y; Gutierrez, Y; Hare, Y; Jackson, Y; Lipinski, Y; Rush, Y; Schakowsky, Y. Republicans -- Biggert, N; Hastert, X; Johnson, Y; Kirk, Y; LaHood, N; Manzullo, N; Roskam, N; Shimkus, N; Weller, N.

INDIANA: Democrats -- Carson, Y; Donnelly, Y; Ellsworth, Y; Hill, Y; Visclosky, Y. Republicans -- Burton, N; Buyer, N; Pence, N; Souder, N.

IOWA: Democrats -- Boswell, Y; Braley, Y; Loebsack, Y. Republicans -- King, N; Latham, N.

MICHIGAN: Democrats -- Conyers, Y; Dingell, Y; Kildee, Y; Kilpatrick, Y; Levin, Y; Stupak, Y.

Republicans -- Camp, N; Ehlers, N; Hoekstra, N; Knollenberg, N; McCotter, N; Miller, N; Rogers, N; Upton, Y; Walberg, N.

WISCONSIN: Democrats -- Baldwin, Y; Kagen, Y; Kind, Y; Moore, Y; Obey, Y. Republicans -- Petri, Y; Ryan, N; Sensenbrenner, N.