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Southwest News Herald - City Edition

Cong. Dan Lipinski (D-3rd) on Dec. 19 joined a majority of House Democrats in voting against an amendment to the Fiscal Year 2008 Omnibus Appropriations bill that would provide \$70 billion for military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan without restrictions.

This funding, which was approved with overwhelming Republican support, is expected to fund the war in Iraq until the summer of 2008.

"All year, I have fought to change the President's policy on Iraq and begin bringing the troops home," stated Lipinski. "Unfortunately, today's bill takes a step backward from that fight by giving the President a blank check with absolutely no conditions on the funding. For this reason, I voted against this bill."

Lipinski said The Bush administration had pressured legislators to quickly approve additional war funds by claiming that the military will soon run out of money. According to the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service report, the military could continue to fully operate until at least April without additional funds.

"I do not believe that the way to change direction in Iraq is to cut off funding for our troops, but as noted by CRS, we are not at that point," said Lipinski. "Earlier this year I said that unless we work to find a bipartisan solution on Iraq, we will not have the numbers in Congress necessary to force a change in the President's policy. We are at this point today of approving a blank check funding bill not only because of the intransigence of the president, but also because of a failure on both sides to rise above politics and partisanship to work together for a new direction in Iraq."

Lipinski has introduced two pieces of legislation seeking bipartisan solutions for Iraq. The first, introduced in February 2007, calls for a diplomatic offensive on Iraq, a peace conference for Iraq's ethnic and religious leaders, and greater Congressional oversight over the president's war policies.

In June, Lipinski joined with Democrat Mark Udall as well as Republicans Frank Wolf and Mike McCaul to draft and introduce legislation that would implement the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group (Baker-Hamilton Commission).

H.R. 2574, according to Lipinski, shifts the mission of American forces from combat to training and counterterrorism, makes American economic, political, and military support conditional on the Iraqi government meeting benchmarks, and sets a goal of 2008 for a redeployment of troops from Iraq.

"The Iraq Study Group bill has attracted over 65 cosponsors, including 35 Republicans, more than any other legislation setting a new direction in Iraq," said Lipinski. "Rising above politics and working together is the only way to responsibly redeploy our troops from Iraq while providing the best chance for stability. In the meantime, my thoughts and prayers are with our troops and their families, especially in this holiday season."

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