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G.O.P. Senators Thwart Debate on Iraq Policy

By CARL HULSE
<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/h/carl_hulse/index.html?inline=nyt-per>
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WASHINGTON
<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/national/usstatesterritoriesandpossessions/washingtondc/index.html?inline=nyt-geo>,
Feb. 5 ? Republicans
<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/r/republican_party/index.html?inline=nyt-org>
on Monday blocked Senate debate on a bipartisan resolution opposing
President Bush?s troop buildup in Iraq
<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/iraq/index.html?inline=nyt-geo>,
leaving in doubt whether the Senate would render a judgment on what
lawmakers of both parties described as the paramount issue of the day.

The decision short-circuited what had been building as the first major
Congressional challenge to President Bush over his handling of the war
since Democrats took control of Congress last month, and left each party
blaming the other for frustrating debate on a topic that is likely to
influence the 2008 presidential and Congressional races.

At issue is a compromise resolution drawn up chiefly by Senator John W.
Warner
<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/w/john_w_warner/index.html?inline=nyt-per>,
Republican of Virginia, that says the Senate disagrees with President
Bush?s plan to build up troops and calls for American forces to be kept
out of sectarian violence in Iraq.

The deadlock came after Democrats refused a proposal by Senator Mitch
McConnell
<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/m/mitch_mcconnell/index.html?inline=nyt-per>
of Kentucky, the Republican leader, that would have cleared the way for
a floor fight on the Warner resolution in return for votes on two
competing Republican alternatives that were more supportive of the
president.

One of those alternatives, by Senator Judd Gregg
<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/g/judd_gregg/index.html?inline=nyt-per>,
Republican of New Hampshire, would declare that Congress should not cut
off any funds for forces in the field. That vote was seen as problematic
for Democrats because many of them opposed any move to curtail spending,
raising the prospect that it could have attracted the broadest support
in the Senate.

The procedural vote, which divided mostly along party lines, left the
Democratic leadership 11 votes short of the 60 needed to begin debate on

the bipartisan resolution. Forty-seven Democrats and two Republicans voted to open debate on the resolution; 45 Republicans and one independent were opposed.

The Republicans run a risk with their resistance in the event Democrats are able to persuade the public that Mr. Bush?s allies are stonewalling in the Senate and shielding the president from criticism over an unpopular war. But their show of unity, with war critics including Mr. Warner of Virginia and Senator Chuck Hagel <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/h/chuck_hagel/index.html?inline=nyt-per>, Republican of Nebraska, siding with the leadership, lent some credibility to Republican claims that Democrats were being unfair. ?I am confident that somehow this matter will be worked out,? Mr. Warner said.

But Senator Harry Reid <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/r/harry_reid/index.html?inline=nyt-per> of Nevada, the majority leader, said that ?time was tenuous? and that he would not guarantee that Democrats would try again to bring up the resolution. He did promise that there would be more clashes over Iraq policy as the Senate turned to measures like the president?s request for $100 billion in emergency Iraq spending.

?You can run but you can?t hide,? Mr. Reid told his Republican colleagues on the floor. ?We are going to debate Iraq.?

The results left the future of the Iraq fight unsettled, though Senate leaders indicated that they would continue to negotiate over ways to restart the debate. Lawmakers on all sides of the issue said they anticipated that the Senate would ultimately approve a resolution of some kind because of intense public interest in the issue. Mr. Reid changed his vote and sided with Republicans at the end, a procedural move to allow him the option to reopen the issue.

Still, as they jousted over the terms of debate, senators provided a taste of what a floor fight over the resolution would look like as they traded tough words about the meaning of a resolution challenging Mr. Bush and what would happen if Congress remained silent.

Senator Joseph I. Lieberman <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/l/joseph_i_lieberman/index.html?inline=nyt-per> of Connecticut, the independent who sided with Republicans in agreeing not to take up the resolution, called the proposal ?a resolution of irresolution,? saying it criticized the president?s plan but did nothing concrete to stop it. He goaded colleagues who opposed the buildup to take more definitive action if that was their view. ?Have the courage of your convictions to accept the consequences of your convictions,? he said.

Senator Ben Nelson of Nebraska, a Democratic co-author of the resolution who typically promotes comity in the Senate, accused Republicans of stalling. ?If not now, when?? he said. ?If not now, do we wait for more troops to die before we oppose the president?s plan??

In addition to the resolution introduced by Mr. Gregg, declaring that Congress should not cut off financing for forces in Iraq, Republican leaders had sought a Democratic commitment for a vote on another alternative, one introduced by Senator John McCain <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/m/john_mccain/index.html?inline=nyt-per>, Republican of Arizona. That measure would set 11 conditions for the Iraqi government if it wanted to retain American support. The Republican approach would need 60 votes for passage.

Democrats said that the Gregg initiative was meant as a distraction and that they wanted to focus on the question of whether senators supported Mr. Bush?s plan or opposed it. ?We are witnessing the spectacle of a White House and Republican senators unwilling even to engage in a debate on a war that claims at least one American life every day and at least $2.5 billion dollars a week,? said Senator Richard J. Durbin of Illinois, the No. 2 Democrat.

Some Republicans admitted that they were unsure how long the unity would last and whether Republicans could continue to make a case against the resolution on procedural grounds. And two Republicans facing re-election in 2008, Senators Susan Collins <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/c/susan_collins/index.html?inline=nyt-per> of Maine and Norm Coleman <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/c/norm_coleman/index.html?inline=nyt-per> of Minnesota, joined Democrats in voting to begin the debate.

Democrats tried to immediately pounce on the vote, with Mr. Reid saying Republicans had given Mr. Bush the green light to begin his buildup. They also warned of political consequences for Republicans given public frustration with the war.

?Senator McConnell led his Republican troops off the cliff,? said Senator Charles E. Schumer <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/s/charles_e_schumer/index.html?inline=nyt-per> of New York, chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee.

The White House welcomed the Senate vote. ?All sides have a right to be heard in this debate, and we support Senator McConnell?s and the Republicans? right to be able to offer the amendments they want to offer,? said a spokeswoman, Dana Perino.

Senator John Sununu, a Republican of New Hampshire who is also up for re-election next year, acknowledged that voters were likely to be unhappy with the procedural wrangling over an issue as grave as Iraq.

Mr. Sununu, who sided with Republicans, but declined to say whether he would ultimately vote to oppose the Iraq plan, said, ?It may come as a surprise to my colleagues, but most voting members of the American public think that the Senate spends all too much time talking and not enough time casting votes.?

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7 GOP Senators Back War Debate
Lawmakers Had Blocked Action on Troop Resolution

By Shailagh Murray
Washington Post Staff Writer
Thursday, February 8, 2007; A01

Senate Republicans who earlier this week helped block deliberations on a resolution opposing President Bush's new troop deployments in Iraq changed course yesterday and vowed to use every tactic at their disposal to ensure a full and open debate.

In a letter distributed yesterday evening to Senate leaders, John W. Warner <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/w000154/> (Va.), Chuck Hagel <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/h001028/> (Neb.) and five other GOP supporters of the resolution threatened to attach their measure to any bill sent to the floor in the coming weeks. Noting that the war is the "most pressing issue of our time," the senators declared: "We will explore all of our options under the Senate procedures and practices to ensure a full and open debate."

The letter sent to Senate Majority Leader Harry M. Reid <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/r000146/> (D-Nev.) and Minority Leader Mitch McConnell <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/m000355/> (R-Ky.) was not more specific about the Republican senators' strategy for reviving the war debate. But under the chamber's rules, senators have wide latitude in slowing the progress of legislation and in offering amendments, regardless of whether they have anything to do with the bill.

The letter began circulating yesterday evening after it became apparent the Senate was deadlocked over the war resolution and Reid was prepared to move on to other matters. McConnell and many in his party have aggressively defended their decision to block the bipartisan resolution as an issue of fairness because Democrats would not agree to GOP procedural demands.

But some Republicans were uneasy about appearing to have stymied the debate. The letter appeared so suddenly that, although it was addressed to Reid, the Democratic leader had not seen his copy before Warner read the text on the Senate floor.

"Monday's procedural vote should not be interpreted as any lessening of our resolve to go forward advocating the concepts" of the resolution, the letter said. "The current stalemate is unacceptable to us and to the people of this country."

House Democratic leaders are attempting to formulate their own nonbinding expression of disapproval of Bush's decision to send an additional 21,500 troops to battle, and they intend to devote three days next week to debating it.

A top Pentagon leader weighed in yesterday on the war debate and appeared to undercut the argument advanced by the White House and many GOP lawmakers that a congressional debate challenging the Bush plan would hurt troop morale.

"There's no doubt in my mind that the dialogue here in Washington strengthens our democracy. Period," Marine Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, testified before the House Armed Services Committee. He added that potential enemies may take some comfort from the rancor but said they "don't have a clue how democracy works."

Congress is grappling with several nonbinding resolutions, each of which addresses Bush's deployment plan, even as public support for the war declines and conditions on the ground grow increasingly perilous. The debate has particularly vexed Republicans, who are reluctant to abandon Bush at a critical moment but who also regard the party's defeat in the November midterm elections as a signal that voters want Congress to challenge White House war policy more aggressively.

The Senate was poised to debate a nonbinding resolution opposing the additional troop deployment and calling for a diplomatic initiative to settle the conflict in Iraq. Republicans refused to allow the resolution to reach the floor, relying on a standard procedural objection.

Five of the seven Senate signatories to yesterday's letter -- including Warner, the bipartisan resolution's chief author -- had voted Monday to block the debate. By showing party solidarity, they had hoped to pressure Democrats into allowing the consideration of other nonbinding measures, namely two that are more supportive of the administration's policy. But Democratic leaders refused to relent, and the long-awaited war debate -- or at least the opening chapter -- ended almost as soon as it began.

The Republican senators attempted in their letter to clear up the apparent contradiction. "Monday's procedural vote should not be interpreted as any lessening of our resolve to go forward," the senators insisted. But they voiced the GOP leadership's view that other resolutions should receive an equal vetting.

"The Senate should be allowed to work its will on our resolution as well as the concepts being brought forward by other senators," the letter stated.

The other Republican senators who signed the letter were Susan Collins <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/c001035/> and Olympia J. Snowe <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/s000663/> of Maine, Norm Coleman <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/c001057/> (Minn.), Gordon Smith <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/s001142/> (Ore.), and George V. Voinovich <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/v000126/> (Ohio).

Democrats brushed off the Republicans' declaration as too little, too late. Reid spokesman Jim Manley said in a statement: "Senator Reid gave Senator Warner and the others a chance to vote for their own resolution on Monday, but only two of them chose to do so. Hopefully this letter signifies that the others have had a change of heart, and will be willing to vote for their own resolution in the future."

After reading the text on the Senate floor, Warner hurried back to his office, declining to answer questions. He would not specify whether he and his allies would seek to block specific bills, including a huge spending package that the Senate is expected to take up today, to fund government activities for the current fiscal year. Warner did indicate whether he will attempt to amend the funding package with his resolution.

In the letter, the senators said they will offer the resolution "where possible" on bills as they come before the Senate.

House Democrats had hoped for a large bipartisan Senate vote on Warner's resolution to create momentum in the House and to provide maximum pressure on Republicans to go along. But with the Senate at a standstill, House leaders are considering a straightforward resolution that opposes the troop increase, without the multiple provisions that complicated Warner's text. Senior House Democrats predicted that their measure will attract overwhelming party support and possibly as many as 30 GOP votes.

/Staff writer Ann Scott Tyson contributed to this report./

The New York Times <http://www.nytimes.com/>

February 8, 2007

House Democrats Set Framework for Iraq Vote

By JEFF ZELENY
<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/z/jeff_zeleny/index.html?inline=nyt-per>

WASHINGTON, Feb. 8 ? House Democratic leaders said today that the Iraq war resolution scheduled to be debated next week would be limited to President Bush?s plan to dispatch more troops to Baghdad, leaving any controversial decisions over war spending for a later discussion.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi
<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/p/nancy_pelosi/index.html?inline=nyt-per>, Democrat of California, and other party leaders met with members of the Democratic caucus for more than an hour today to discuss the framework of the first major debate over Iraq since Democrats took control of Congress last month. The three-day debate is set to begin next Tuesday.

The leaders reassured Democrats that the nonbinding, symbolic vote against the troop buildup plan would be the first ? not the final ? expression of opposition to the war. A letter signed by 71 House Democrats urged the party?s leaders to take a stronger stance, including outlining a six-month troop withdrawal plan.

?There?s no doubt that everybody in the caucus understands that this is a first step ? an important step for Congress to express their view of support or opposition to the escalation and the increase of troop levels,? said Representative Steny H. Hoyer
<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/h/steny_h_hoyer/index.html?inline=nyt-per>
of Maryland, the majority leader.

The Iraq resolution will allow lawmakers to voice their support for the troops, Mr. Hoyer said, even as they state their opposition to the Bush administration?s Iraq policy.

Mr. Hoyer said Republicans
<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/r/republican_party/index.html?inline=nyt-org>
would be allowed to propose an alternative plan during 36 hours of debate next week, with each member of Congress being allotted five minutes to speak. But the Democratic leaders said their resolution would be crafted broadly, in the hopes of demonstrating wide bipartisan opposition to Mr. Bush?s Iraq strategy.

The Senate has struggled to bring the Iraq resolution up for a vote, despite having bipartisan support for a variety of plans offered by Senators Joseph R. Biden
<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/b/joseph_r_jr_biden/index.html?inline=nyt-per>
Jr. of Delaware and Carl Levin
<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/l/carl_levin/index.html?inline=nyt-per>

of Michigan, both Democrats, and Senators John W. Warner
<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/w/john_w_warner/index.html?inline=nyt-per>
of Virginia and Chuck Hagel
<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/h/chuck_hagel/index.html?inline=nyt-per>
of Nebraska, both Republican.

Representative Rahm Emanuel of Illinois, the chairman of the House
Democratic caucus, said the House resolution would be a simple
expression of support ? or opposition ? to the White House troop buildup
plan.

?It?s not Biden-Hagel. It?s not Warner-Levin. It?s Bush. Mr. Emanuel
said in an interview today. ?It will be an up or down vote on whether
you support the president?s policy.?

In the Senate, the impasse over the Iraq continued, with Republicans and
Democrats pointing the blame at one another for failing to budge on
procedural maneuvering to bring the symbolic war resolution up for debate.

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Iraq Resolution Typifies Rift in Senate
GOP Leader Won Battle on the Floor, but Perhaps Not in Court of Public Opinion

By Shailagh Murray and Jonathan Weisman
Washington Post Staff Writers
Sunday, February 11, 2007; A03

Since the new Congress convened, Majority Leader Harry M. Reid <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/r000146/> (D-Nev.) and Minority Leader Mitch McConnell <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/m000355/> (R-Ky.) have emerged as the Senate's odd couple, the even-tempered McConnell hurling parliamentary brickbats at the quirky Reid with an even smile and a "Who, me?" shrug.

But though McConnell may be winning procedural battles -- on ethics legislation and a minimum-wage increase and by stopping a high-profile Iraq debate -- Reid, at least this past week, may have played the stronger hand on the war issue, on which public opinion is clearly on his side.

The drama started Monday evening, when McConnell rallied GOP senators to block from the Senate floor a nonbinding resolution opposing President Bush's plan to increase troops in Iraq. But since then, the headlines have been withering, blaming Republicans for sidetracking the debate. Rank-and-file Republican senators are grumbling and threatening to break with McConnell, as the much ballyhooed war debate has morphed into a procedural spat with the GOP playing defense.

"I'm very surprised how they handled this," Reid said of McConnell and his Republican leadership team. "It was so obvious. I just think they miscalculated. And it keeps getting worse."

Julian E. Zelizer, a congressional expert at Boston University, said the Republicans may be "on top" in the short term, but they must be careful how their tactics play with the public in the long term. "They can't look like obstructionists, especially on this war resolution," he said. "This is wartime lawmaking, not peacetime lawmaking."

McConnell asserts that the conflict is less about political tactics than about ensuring "fair treatment" for the Senate GOP, which is barely in the minority.

"This is not about keeping score," the Republican leader told reporters on Thursday, his monotone voice bristling slightly. "This is about an extraordinarily important issue. The American people are not happy with the current status of the Iraq war. Republican senators are not happy about it."

Looking back, did he have any regrets?

"The only thing we could have done differently would have been to capitulate," McConnell shot back. "That didn't happen Monday and won't happen in the future."

Reid and McConnell began the year vowing to cooperate, but so far they have clashed over practically every important issue to come before the Senate. Democrats control the Senate by the slimmest majority, 51 to 49, presenting formidable challenges to both party leaders and suggesting that procedural one-upmanship could become a permanent part of the narrative. "That's just how you have to do things here," Reid said, expressing the relatively sanguine view that he and McConnell are forced by circumstances to take.

As a tactician, McConnell, 64, a four-term veteran, has shown in recent weeks that he is one tough competitor. Both he and Reid, 67, are former party whips, jobs that require a deep knowledge of Senate rules and an instinctive feel for political and ideological idiosyncrasies. They both also sit on the Appropriations Committee, the chief spigot for federal spending, where Republicans and Democrats traditionally have supported each other's pet programs.

The pair share low-key temperaments, although Reid has the more colorful personality. The son of a Nevada miner, Reid became a successful Las Vegas trial lawyer before entering politics, and he views himself as an outsider among the Washington elite. McConnell, who is married to Labor Secretary Elaine L. Chao, is a staunch conservative who is regarded as one of President Bush's closest allies in Congress. He has vowed to do whatever he can to prevent Congress from passing a resolution criticizing Bush's war policies.

In an editorial titled "A Minority to be Reckoned With," the conservative magazine National Review strongly praised the GOP leader. "Under Sen. Mitch McConnell, Republicans have quickly gotten the hang of serving in a minority that can successfully frustrate Harry Reid's partisan maneuvering on the war in Iraq," the editorial declared.

The war debate now shifts to the House, where Democratic leaders will offer their own formal protest next week against Bush's plan to deploy an additional 21,500 combat troops in Iraq. In the meantime, the Senate battle is expected to remain suspended.

Reid and the Democrats had been prepared for a week-long debate on a nonbinding bipartisan resolution criticizing Bush's troop buildup and calling for a political solution to the war, but it ran into a procedural roadblock Monday evening after McConnell complained that the Democrats were denying Republicans a vote on alternative resolutions supportive of the war effort.

McConnell lined up all but two Republicans -- Sens. Susan Collins <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/c001035/> (Maine) and Norm Coleman <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/c001057/> (Minn.) -- to vote in favor of blocking the debate until Reid agrees to GOP terms. But that Republican alliance quickly frayed. On Wednesday night, five Republicans who had voted with McConnell joined Collins and Coleman in signing a letter to the Senate Democratic and Republican leaders, vowing to "explore all our options" to ensure that the bipartisan nonbinding resolution reaches the floor.

Sen. Olympia J. Snowe <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/s000663/>, a moderate Maine Republican, fumed that she had been assured by GOP leaders that the Monday setback would be temporary. Her support for the McConnell position, she said, "was always predicated on the expectation that we would move forward," adding: "No one ever entertained the possibility that it would be a dead end."

Snowe called McConnell and Reid's inability to come to terms "inexcusable," adding that "the House of Representatives is preparing to debate and our Senate is deadlocked. It sort of marginalizes the U.S. Senate as an institution. We can't even determine how to go forward procedurally with a nonbinding resolution."

McConnell and Reid have clashed on other big issues. Early in January, McConnell nearly brought down a major ethics and lobbying bill over GOP demands for a vote on granting the president virtual line-item veto authority. Later, he and other Republicans forced Democrats to accept tax breaks for small businesses as a condition for passing the minimum-wage bill.

But with polls showing that Americans overwhelmingly oppose the war in Iraq and believe that it was a mistake for Bush to commit U.S. troops, the president's decision to boost troop levels and seek billions of dollars more in spending clearly constitutes the most important issue facing Congress this year.

Every Monday, Reid and McConnell meet one on one, and last Monday at 3 p.m., the huddle took place in McConnell's office. The two leaders quickly established that neither side was budging on the procedural dispute surrounding the war resolutions, and a showdown vote was set for 5:30 p.m.

The next morning, newspaper headlines around the country blared that Republicans were to blame for the gridlock, and Democrats pummeled GOP lawmakers for allowing partisan considerations to get in the way of a vital debate.

By week's end, Republicans were breaking ranks.

On the floor of the Senate and before television cameras, McConnell maintained a reassuring and conciliatory air. Almost apologetically, he explained that the impasse over the Iraq war resolution was a minor bump in the road and would surely be worked out. He expressed faith in his relationship with Reid, and looked genuinely taken aback by Democratic charges of obstructionism and nefarious intent.

Reid, for his part, also seemed on shaky ground in the immediate aftermath, appearing to protect Democrats from political controversy at the expense of a war debate. The letter from the seven Republicans vowing to do whatever it takes to get the debate back on track helped to reverse this impression by suggesting buyer's remorse on the Republican side.

"Everything Harry Reid has done this week, and I know some of you had some tough questions, has been vindicated by that letter," Sen. Charles E. Schumer <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/s000148/> (D-N.Y.) told reporters.

But it did not appear to faze McConnell. "I think 40 to 42 of our members are comfortable with where we are," he said. "They all understand that we'll get back to this debate and, at whatever point we get back to this debate, the [funding] amendment or other amendments will be in the mix."

The New York Times <http://www.nytimes.com/>

February 12, 2007

House Democrats Propose Iraq Resolution

By BRIAN KNOWLTON
<http://query.nytimes.com/search/query?ppds=bylL&v1=BRIAN KNOWLTON&fdq=19960101&td=sysdate&sort=newest&ac=BRIAN KNOWLTON&inline=nyt-per>

WASHINGTON, Feb. 12 ? Democratic leaders in the House of Representatives circulated a proposed nonbinding resolution Monday that in simple language opposes the administration?s plan to increase the number of troops in Iraq.

Crafted carefully to draw the broadest support possible, it states that Congress "disapproves of the decision of President George W. Bush <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/b/george_w_bush/index.html?inline=nyt-per>? to send more than 21,500 additional combat troops to Iraq.

But it also states that ?Congress and the American people will continue to support and protect the members of the United States armed forces who are serving or who have served bravely and honorably in Iraq."

The resolution avoids divisive issues ? such as a call for interim troop redeployments, or a threat to cut off financing for the war ? that helped scuttle efforts by Senate Democrats last week to bring forward a more muscularly worded resolution.

But House Democratic leaders see it as a symbolic first step toward ending a war that has grown steadily more unpopular.

With each of the 435 House members to be given up to five minutes to speak when debate begins on Tuesday, the back-and-forth is expected to continue, morning-to-midnight, through late Thursday.

President Bush, asked about the resolution during an interview today with C-Span, said he knew that some in Congress wanted American troops to be withdrawn from Baghdad, while others favored a complete pullout from Iraq.

Withdrawal, he said, would be "a disastrous course," and even a partial pullout would engender "chaos, violence, and would -- would make it much more difficult for us to have an ally in this war on terror."

He said that if U.S. troops were to leave the area "before the job is done, I think there will be great resentment toward America."

House Republicans <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/r/republican_party/index.html?inline=nyt-org> have promised a stiff fight but acknowledge they will lose the final vote, which is expected Friday. At least a few dozen Republicans, mostly from districts where the war is particularly unpopular, are expected to vote for the resolution.

The House minority leader, Representative John Boehner <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/b/john_a_boehner/index.html?inline=nyt-per> of Ohio, was asked Sunday whether as many as one-third of the 202 House Republicans might defect. "I don?t think we?ll lose that many," he said on NBC. There are 233 Democrats in the House.

After the an effort by the Senate Democrats to pass their resolution was blocked last week in a procedural move by Republicans, House Democrats, operating with a larger majority, decided to press ahead with their own proposal.

The House majority leader, Representative Steny Hoyer <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/h/steny_h_hoyer/index.html?inline=nyt-per> of Maryland, said Sunday that Republicans would be permitted to propose an alternative resolution, but that it would probably not be voted on until late next month. That drew sharp complaints from Republicans like Mr. Boehner, who demanded equal treatment.

Last June, the House, then controlled by the Republicans, easily passed a resolution saying that the United States should set no ?arbitrary date? for troop withdrawal but must complete its ?mission to create a sovereign, free, secure and united Iraq.?

washingtonpost.com <http://www.washingtonpost.com/?nav=pf>

House Democrats Unveil Resolution Opposing Iraq Plans

By Jonathan Weisman and Lyndsey Layton
Washington Post Staff Writers
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House Democrats today unveiled a tightly worded resolution of opposition to President Bush's Iraq war plans, declaring that Congress "disapproves of the decision" to deploy more than 20,000 additional U.S. combat troops to Iraq.

The simple resolution, just 10 lines in length, will frame three days of debate on the war, beginning tomorrow and culminating in a vote on Friday that is likely to put the House formally on record against the president.

After the Senate found itself tied in parliamentary knots last week over a far more complicated resolution, House leaders opted for the simplest statement possible, hoping to unite Democrats and drive a wedge between Capitol Hill Republicans and a White House that has commanded their strict allegiance for more than six years.

Republicans were girding for broad defections on their side over the narrowly worded rebuke of Bush's troop-surge plan.

The nonbinding "concurrent resolution" says that while Congress and the American people "will continue to support and protect" U.S. military personnel serving in Iraq, "Congress disapproves of the decision of President George W. Bush announced on January 10, 2007, to deploy more than 20,000 additional United States combat troops to Iraq."

It was submitted by Rep. Ike Skelton <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/s000465/> (D-Mo.), the new chairman of the House Armed Services Committee; Rep. Tom Lantos <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/l000090/> (D-Calif.), chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs; and Rep. Walter B. Jones <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/j000255/> (R-N.C.), a member of the Armed Services Committee.

Both parties were jockeying for prime time on the House floor before the C-SPAN cameras, with leaders claiming the best time slots and rank-and-file members trying to make the most of the five minutes each will be allotted. If all 435 House members use their five minutes, debate will last 36 hours. It is likely to begin by late morning Tuesday and run until late Thursday, with a vote on the resolution coming Friday.

After watching their counterparts in the Senate stall and sputter last week, unable to agree on ground rules for a debate on Iraq, House leaders are forging ahead, determined to send a statement to the White House to condemn a troop buildup.

Republicans were expected to try to broaden the dispute and seed doubt in the Democratic approach. Although Senate Republicans were able to block debate on a resolution condemning Bush's war policies last week, it will be much easier for Democrats in the House to bring a measure to the floor.

The GOP, whose members have conceded they are likely to lose, is treating the debate like a mini-political campaign, deploying a rapid-response team to counter Democrats' statements, aggressively trying to get its leaders on television and radio, and creating a "resource center" off the House floor where members can fill their arms with maps, research material, videos or other visual aids to use during their floor time.

"We may lose the vote, but we'll win the debate," said Kevin Smith, a spokesman for House Minority Leader John A. Boehner <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/b000589/> (R-Ohio).

Other Republicans are not so sure they will win even that much. If Democrats stick to their plan of narrowly focusing debate on the president's deployment of 21,500 additional troops to Iraq, the more contentious issues that Republican leaders want to highlight could fail to resonate.

"What we have now is a dispute in tactics," said Rep. Phil English <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/e000187/> (R-Pa.), who once supported the administration but is opposed to the troop increase. "This is a situation where we've been dealt a bad hand, where we've made a lot of mistakes, where we should have addressed the problems in Baghdad a long time ago, and now a surge on the scale the president has proposed is unlikely to move us forward."

One House Republican close to the GOP leadership spoke on the condition of anonymity in order to be blunt. "This next week is going to be a very tough one for us to get through," he said. "The Democrats know that. We can sit back and hope they overplay their hand, but I don't think they will."

Although the order of speakers has not yet been set, Democrats and Republicans are vying for the most desired slots at a time when attention in Washington will focus on the House. Lawmakers from the West Coast do not want to speak early in the morning, when their constituents are asleep; those from the East do not want to appear at 11:25 p.m. And nearly everyone wants to talk in time to make the evening news and beat the daily newspapers' deadlines.

The last time an Iraq resolution came before the House was in June, when the Republicans controlled Congress. After two days of largely partisan debate, the House easily approved a measure declaring that the United States must complete "the mission to create a sovereign, free, secure and united Iraq," without setting "an arbitrary date for the withdrawal" of troops. Forty-two Democrats bucked their leadership to join a virtually united GOP.

But this debate will be different, lawmakers from both parties agree.

This time, Democrats drafted the resolution, and the war -- already unpopular in June -- is now clearly opposed by most voters. The party is united, even the left wing, which ultimately wants troop withdrawal from Iraq but is content to see the resolution as a first step.

House Republicans say as few as 20 or as many as 60 Republicans could vote with the Democrats, regardless of the wishes of the Republican leadership and the White House.

"Every time I go to another funeral, every time I go to Walter Reed, people are really gracious, but what do you say? What are we doing over there now?" asked Rep. Wayne T. Gilchrest <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/g000180/> (R-Md.), whose Eastern Shore district has lost 23 service members in the war.

GOP leaders and conservatives may apply some pressure to stay off the Democratic resolution, but, Gilchrest added: "My internal soul goes a lot beyond my minuscule political career."

By its nature, the House is quicker to bend to public opinion than the Senate; House members are never more than two years away from an election. Gilchrest voted with the Republican leadership in June, but last month he was one of eight House Republicans who signed a letter stating that the deployment of additional U.S. troops to the sectarian fighting in Iraq would only make matters worse.

A senior Republican aide said the GOP leadership knows that Republicans from districts where the war is unpopular will have to vote with the Democrats to protect themselves. "And that's okay," he said, adding that Republican leaders will not tell their members to stick with the party line.

Gilchrest collected 29 Republican signatures on his own letter pleading with Bush to open diplomatic dialogue with Syria and Iran to find a way out of Iraq, then personally handed the letter to Bush at a bill-signing ceremony in the Oval Office. He is now working with Democratic Reps. Gregory W. Meeks <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/m001137/> (N.Y.), James P. McGovern <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/m000312/> (Mass.) and Solomon P. Ortiz <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/members/o000107/> (Tex.) to further that diplomatic push.

For some Republicans, the Democratic takeover of Congress has been liberating. A barrage of recent hearings into malfeasance under the U.S. occupation authority in Iraq, the stretched state of the military and the cost of the war have brought to light new information while underscoring congressional acquiescence under GOP control, said Jones, a longtime Republican war critic who co-sponsored the resolution introduced today.

"My party did not want to do anything to embarrass the administration," he said.

The New York Times <http://www.nytimes.com/>

February 13, 2007

House Democrats Unveil Measure Denouncing Iraq Buildup

By ROBIN TONER
<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/t/robin_toner/index.html?inline=nyt-per>
and MICHAEL LUO
<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/l/michael_luo/index.html?inline=nyt-per>

WASHINGTON
<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/national/usstatesterritoriesandpossessions/washingtondc/index.html?inline=nyt-geo>,
Feb. 12 ? Democrats unveiled a resolution on Monday that would formally express the House?s disapproval of President Bush?s troop buildup in Iraq
<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/iraq/index.html?inline=nyt-geo>,
beginning an intense debate and political struggle that is to end in a vote on Friday.

The nonbinding resolution, two simple clauses that also express support for the troops, is expected to pass with overwhelming Democratic support but also with a bloc of votes from Republicans
<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/r/republican_party/index.html?inline=nyt-org>
increasingly disenchanted with the administration?s Iraq policy.

?I?m just not convinced that deploying 20,000 additional troops is going to resolve anything favorable for us,? said Representative Howard Coble, Republican of North Carolina, who estimated that 20 to 25 Republicans would vote for the resolution, although other estimates ran higher.

Republicans who take umbrage at those who break ranks, he said, need to face political reality. ?We lost our majority in the Congress last November primarily because of the issue of the Iraq war,? he said, adding that telephone calls and letters to his office are critical, by 10 to 1, of the conduct of the war.

Republican leaders tried to hold the line.

In an interview on Monday with C-Span, President Bush suggested that he would not be focused on the week?s discussions on Capitol Hill. ?In terms of watching the debate, I?ve got a lot to do,? he said. ?It?s not as if the world stops when the Congress does.?

Representative John A. Boehner
<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/b/john_a_boehner/index.html?inline=nyt-per>,
the Republican leader, said the Democrats? resolution was ?the first step in the Democrats? plan to cut off funding for American troops who are in harm?s way.? He urged consideration of an alternative resolution that renounces any cuts in financing.

Democrats scoffed at the Republican charges as a diversion from the fundamental debate over Mr. Bush?s war strategy.

?They?re trying to do everything but focus on the policy,? said Representative Rahm Emanuel of Illinois, chairman of the Democratic Caucus. ?The more there?s a focus on the escalation, the more they lose Republicans.?

Democrats are planning 36 hours of floor debate, beginning Tuesday, showcasing early the party?s military veterans ? including the newest members who fought in Iraq. Party leaders expressed confidence that ?a strong majority of the House? would vote for the resolution, in the words of Brendan Daly, spokesman for Speaker Nancy Pelosi <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/p/nancy_pelosi/index.html?inline=nyt-per>. ?It?s important to show there?s significant opposition in both parties to the president?s plan.?

Democrats were intent on avoiding the procedural and political stalemate that stymied debate over Iraq in the Senate last week; in the House, the Democratic majority has much greater control over what legislation comes to a vote, and Democratic leaders intended to use it. They are expected to block a vote on a Republican alternative.

The House resolution is co-sponsored by Ike Skelton, chairman of the Armed Services Committee; Tom Lantos, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee; and Walter B. Jones of North Carolina, a longtime Republican critic of the war.

It declares the House to be resolved that ?Congress and the American people will continue to support and protect the members of the United States Armed Forces who are serving or who have served bravely and honorably in Iraq? and that ?Congress disapproves of the decision of President George W. Bush <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/b/george_w_bush/index.html?inline=nyt-per> announced on January 10, 2007, to deploy more than 20,000 additional United States combat troops to Iraq.?

Both sides foreshadowed a bitter debate. Republican talking points, circulated in the House, warn that a ?nonbinding resolution weakens morale? and ?gives comfort to the enemy.?

Speaker Pelosi said in a statement that the vote on Friday would signify ?whether the House understands the message the American people are sending about the policies used to implement this war: they have not worked, they will not work, and they must be changed.?

But for many lawmakers, this will also be an intensely personal choice. Representative Wayne T. Gilchrest, Republican of Maryland, said he had no qualms with breaking with his party on this issue. He has attended 21 funerals in his district for service members who have died in Iraq or Afghanistan, he said. Two more are scheduled this week.

?This is not about my party,? said Mr. Gilchrest, who received a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star as a marine in Vietnam. ?This is not about party politics. This is about your conscience, your soul, your mind, your heart, your gut.?

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February 13, 2007

Democrats Deny GOP a Wedge in Iraq Debate

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Filed at 1:22 a.m. ET

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Given a chance, many House Democrats might support a resolution committing Congress to fund U.S. troops in Iraq. But fearing that might muddle their message opposing President Bush's Iraq policy, party leaders are not giving them the opportunity.

As the House opens debate on a symbolic resolution registering opposition to Bush's proposed troop buildup in Iraq, Democrats are set to prevent Republicans <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/r/republican_party/index.html?inline=nyt-org> from offering their own version. The fear is that a GOP alternative could expose a potentially messy divide within Democratic ranks over whether to cut off or restrict funding for troops on the ground.

The choreography of this week's Iraq debate reflects the dilemma facing Democrats on the war, which figured prominently in their rise to power. There is broad support for the Democratic-written resolution opposing Bush's plan to add 21,500 troops. But many rank-and-file members -- particularly moderate newcomers who rode to Congress on a wave of public discontent about Iraq -- are wary of ending funding for the mission.

''We don't think that it ought to be confused by any other issues that might be raised,'' House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/h/steny_h_hoyer/index.html?inline=nyt-per> of Maryland said of his party's resolution Sunday on NBC's ''Meet the Press.''

Hoyer had said earlier that Republicans would have a chance to offer their own measure, but reversed course over the weekend and said that was ''not necessarily'' the case.

The tightly controlled approach to running the House is becoming a habit with Democrats, who complained bitterly during their dozen years in the minority about similar Republican tactics. When Rep. John Boehner <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/b/john_a_boehner/index.html?inline=nyt-per> of Ohio, the Republican leader, groused about it Sunday, Hoyer shot back sarcastically, ''Poor John.''

''If Democrats are serious about supporting our troops, they will allow Republicans to offer a substantive alternative that binds the Congress to an unwavering and unambiguous commitment to fund the American men and women who wear our uniform,'' Boehner said Monday.

On Iraq, the new House leaders' strategy is particularly important to holding together a newly shaped Democratic Caucus that includes several moderate newcomers who unseated Republicans amid public dissatisfaction with the war, but whose conservative constituents might balk at the notion of setting deadlines or spending constraints on troops in harm's way.

It also echoes the tack Senate Democrats took earlier this month, when they declined to allow Republicans the chance to debate a measure declaring that Congress should not cut off funding for troops in the field.

Rep. Ed Perlmutter, D-Colo., a first-termer who said he plans to back his party's measure rejecting the troop increase, said he would be inclined to support a resolution committing Congress to funding U.S. troops.

''I don't want to cut off funding. Our troops are performing magnificently,'' Perlmutter said. But he added that a funding debate was premature, and said Republicans were trying to ''trip us up'' by proposing such a measure now, realizing there is ''no consensus on funding'' among Democrats

''What we are trying to achieve as a caucus is unanimity. We're pretty spread out in terms of where we are,'' said another freshman Democrat, Rep. Michael Arcuri of New York. ''We feel that we want to do what is best for the troops, but we have some differences in terms of how you do that.''

Will Marshall of the center-left Democratic Leadership Council has consulted with freshman Democrats on Iraq. He said there is ''broad unity on the fact that we have to start winding the occupation down, not doubling down on it, but after that, I think it's harder to find consensus.''

The dilemma is especially profound for newer members.

''They're in marginal districts, competitive districts, almost by definition, so most of them would be leery of voting to cut off funding for the troops. It would be too easy to be caricatured by the Republicans as turning against the troops in the middle of a mission,'' Marshall said.

Republicans say they recognize that a resolution expressing a commitment to funding the troops would put Democrats in a bind.

''There is virtually no support in the country for an effort that would eliminate funding for the troops, and a great many Democrats realize that, and don't want to be put in a position of taking a vote to do just that,'' said Brian Kennedy, a Boehner spokesman.

Democrats concede that by flexing their muscles to constrain the minority, they risk becoming what they criticized during last year's elections.

''We're going to run a fair House, but we're not going to be naive about it.'' said Stacey Farnen Bernards, Hoyer's spokeswoman. ''We're just

trying to give the American people a clear debate and a clear answer''
on Iraq.

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EDITOR'S NOTE -- Julie Hirschfeld Davis has covered Congress and the
White House since 1997.