

House Calls for Plan to Pull Forces From Iraq

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - In a rare show of bipartisanship on Iraq, the [U.S. House of Representatives](#) on Tuesday voted to make the Pentagon produce plans to withdraw U.S. troops -- but did not mandate the withdrawals.

Some House Democrats went much further than that vote, however and warned they would hold try to hold up President [George W. Bush's](#) latest war funding request until he agrees to a goal of ending combat operations in Iraq by the time he leaves office in early 2009.

The chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, Wisconsin Democratic Rep. David Obey, said his panel would not even consider the funding request -- which Pentagon chief Robert Gates says will be about \$189 billion -- until early next year.

Obey also threatened to try to raise taxes to fund the war, saying it was wrong to keep borrowing to pay for it. But that idea was quickly shot down by House Speaker [Nancy Pelosi](#).

The legislation that passed the House 377-46, gathering votes from nearly as many [Republicans](#) as Democrats, would require the Pentagon to submit regular reports on withdrawal planning to Congress' defense committees.

The House has voted several times this year to pull U.S. troops out of Iraq, but the Senate -- where the Democratic majority is narrower -- is gridlocked over the issue.

With the outlook grim for breaking the Senate stalemate, House leaders decided to bring up other measures this week focused on pullout planning and cracking down on abuses by military contractors.

Tuesday's successful legislation was written by two Democrats -- Neil Abercrombie of Hawaii and John Tanner of Tennessee. It was backed by 196 Democrats and 181 Republicans, including the leaders of both parties.

START TALKING

Supporters argued that lawmakers needed to start talking to the Pentagon, and to each other, about winding down the war.

"We went into Iraq on a bipartisan basis," said Rep. [Christopher Shays](#), a Connecticut Republican, noting that two-thirds of the House and three-fourths of the Senate voted in 2002 to authorize the use of force in Iraq.

"We need to leave Iraq on a bipartisan basis. It's called compromise," Shays said.

House Minority Leader [John Boehner](#), an Ohio Republican who backed the bill, said contingency planning was a core function of the Pentagon, and the bill just expressed the wish that it continue "standard operating procedure."

Democrats who opposed the bill also said it had little real effect. Rep. Maurice Hinchey of New York said it did nothing to get the approximately 165,000 U.S. soldiers out of Iraq, but instead required reports.

"What we are likely to see is four, five, maybe even six reports coming out of this administration, and no responsible action taken with regards to the disastrous circumstances that occur on the basis of this illegal military occupation."

Last month, U.S. Iraq commander Gen. [David Petraeus](#) announced gradual U.S. troop reductions in Iraq through next summer. Democrats said this would leave troop levels at about 130,000 -- the same as before Bush added forces this year.

Outside the House chamber acrimony over the war continued. Obey said more war funding would not be approved unless it is linked to a plan to bring home U.S. combat troops by January 2009.

"As chairman of the appropriations committee, I have no intention of reporting out of committee any time in this session of Congress any such (war funding) request that simply serves to continue the status quo," he said.

Obey said he and some other Democrats also would introduce a surtax to pay for the Iraq war. But Pelosi, a California Democrat, opposed that idea, and Republicans poked fun at their differences. "Finally, we found a tax that Mrs. Pelosi is not for," said Republican Rep. Roy Blunt of Missouri.

Only about 25 percent of Americans support the administration's \$190 billion war funding request for this fiscal year that started on Monday, while about 70 percent want the proposed funding reduced, a Washington Post-ABC News poll published on Tuesday said.