

Abercrombie backs timeline to withdraw Iraq troops

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HONOLULU — On the fourth anniversary of the Iraq war, Rep. Neil Abercrombie said the Middle East and the United States "continue to bleed" as "U.S. troops are trapped in the middle of a civil war."

The Hawaii Democrat said Monday that he plans to support a House bill that would effectively withdraw U.S. combat troops by next fall. The legislation would also speed up that withdrawal if President Bush cannot certify that the Iraqi government is meeting its own benchmarks for providing security, allocating the oil revenues and making constitutional amendments.

"Congress has a choice: endorse President Bush's open-ended commitment to a strategy that has not worked in four years, or hold the Administration and the Iraqi government accountable and set a responsible timeline for the phased redeployment of U.S. troops," Abercrombie said.

With the war lumbering into its fifth year, it has claimed the lives of more than 3,200 members of the U.S. military.

The public overwhelmingly opposes the war, and Bush's approval rating stands near an all-time low. Bush has ordered nearly 30,000 additional combat and support troops to Iraq, mostly to stabilize Baghdad.

Protests were held throughout the country this weekend, including about 300 people in Honolulu who gathered downtown to march against the war.

Bush on Monday asked for patience to give his strategy more time to work.

But Abercrombie said voters in November supported the Democrats and troop withdrawal.

"The American people made a clear statement that they wanted an end to the war," Abercrombie said. "Instead, President Bush has escalated our involvement, demands an open-ended commitment of U.S. combat troops in Iraq and a blank check from Congress to pay for it."