

US Congress ratifies Democratic cave-in on Iraq war funding

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The US House of Representatives and Senate voted Thursday to approve an additional \$100 billion to fund the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, with Democrats supplying ample votes in both chambers to give President Bush all of the money he requested and a free hand to further escalate the military violence in Iraq.

The legislation was the product of negotiations between Democratic Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and Democratic Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, Republican congressional leaders, and the White House. The Democratic leadership abandoned all of its earlier demands for troop withdrawal timetables, enforceable “benchmarks” and other limitations on Bush’s conduct of the war.

At a press conference Thursday morning, in advance of the House and Senate votes, Bush endorsed the war-funding legislation. He is expected to sign it on Friday.

The wide margins in support of the bill in both legislative chambers underscored the abject character of the Democrats’ capitulation to the administration. The measure was passed in the House of Representatives by a vote of 280 to 142, with 86 Democrats voting in favor. Among the Democrats voting “yes” were House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer and Rahm Emanuel, the chairman of the House Democratic Caucus.

It was approved in the Senate by a lopsided vote of 80 to 14, with more than twice as many Democrats voting “yes” as those who voted against. The top Democrat in the Senate, Reid, voted “yes,” along with Richard Durbin, the Democratic majority whip, Joseph Biden, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and 2008 presidential contender, and Carl Levin, the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. Among the nominal liberals who supported the bill was Michigan Senator Debbie Stabenow.

Contenders for the Democratic presidential nomination Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama and Christopher Dodd all voted “no.” But they allowed the measure to pass by default, refusing to fight for a filibuster or other procedural device to block its passage.

With the completion of their capitulation to Bush’s war policy, following months of antiwar posturing, the Democrats fulfilled their pledge to pass a war-funding bill that Bush would sign before the Memorial Day recess.

The congressional action is in defiance of the sentiments the American people, expressed in last November’s congressional election. Only hours before the votes were taken, a new poll commissioned by the *New York Times* and CBS News found a

record level of opposition to the war. The findings included 61 percent believing the US should never have intervened in Iraq, 76 percent saying the war was going badly, and 47 percent who described it as going “very badly.”

Only 30 percent gave President Bush a positive approval rating, with 63 percent opposed. Only 23 percent approved of Bush’s handling of the war. More than three quarters, 76 percent, including a majority of Republicans, said the Bush plan to “surge” additional troops to Iraq had either accomplished nothing or made conditions worse.

One figure sums up the enormous gulf between mass opinion and the sentiments of the US political establishment: 63 percent of those polled said the US should set a date in 2008 for withdrawing troops from Iraq.

The Democrats have sought to navigate between this massive popular opposition to the war and the determination of the Bush administration and the entire US ruling elite to control Iraq’s oil resources and dominate the Persian Gulf. Democratic congressional leaders Reid and Pelosi have attempted to fob off public opinion with antiwar noises, while they proceeded to give the Bush administration everything it asked for in terms of funding to continue the bloodbath in Iraq.

However, the Democrats’ craven cave-in will further antagonize and disgust millions of people who deeply oppose the US aggression in Iraq and voted the Republicans out of power in Congress six months ago in order to bring a speedy end to the war.

In an effort to give rank-and-file House Democrats—many of them elected on the basis of the groundswell in antiwar voting last November—some political cover, Pelosi adopted a cynical parliamentary stratagem. Instead of a single up-or-down vote on the war-funding, there were two votes: the first to approve the funding of domestic measures, including aid to Hurricane Katrina victims and an increase in the minimum wage. That part of the bill passed by a vote of 348 to 73. The second vote was on the military portion of the emergency funding bill.

This maneuver insured that a solid Republican bloc would approve the military funding, with significant Democratic support, while a solid Democratic bloc would approve the domestic funding over mainly Republican opposition. Pelosi herself announced that she would vote against the military funding, although she helped negotiate the agreement with the White House and congressional Republicans that produced the bill, and then approved the parliamentary procedure that ensured its passage.

During the 12-year period of Republican control of the House of Representatives, Republican speakers of the house like Dennis Hastert laid down the rule that no bill would be brought to a vote unless it had the support of the Republican caucus, regardless of whether there was majority support in the House as a whole. This “majority of the majority” principle was invoked repeatedly to prevent any legislation from being passed through a coalition of the Democrats and dissident Republicans.

Facing the first major vote on the most important of issues, war funding, Pelosi adopted the opposite position, in order to make sure that the war-funding measure garnered a sufficiently large Republican vote to succeed.

This decision, in and of itself, demonstrates a major difference between the Democrats and Republicans. The Republicans are more ruthless and determined because they openly represent the interests of the corporate ruling class. The Democrats are just as committed to defending the moneyed elite. But in order to maintain the political monopoly of the two-party system, they have to pretend to represent the interests of working people. Hence the vacillating, half-hearted, intrinsically two-faced character of this party.

Thursday’s debate in the House produced an effusion of outpourings from Democrats professing anguish over the prospect of approving war funding, but concluding either that they had to vote for more killing in Iraq—in the name “supporting the troops”—or vote, for the record, against the funding, while supporting a leadership that had worked to make sure the money was authorized.

House Appropriations Chairman David Obey epitomized the duplicity and hypocrisy of the Democrats, declaring, “I hate this agreement. I’m going to vote against it, even though I negotiated it.”

The response of the Bush administration to the capitulation of the Democrats was to press forward with its policy of escalating the violence in Iraq. Bush appeared at a Rose Garden press conference to proclaim his determination to achieve “victory” in Iraq. Repeatedly invoking 9/11, he resorted to his staple tactic of fear-mongering, telling two different reporters that their children could die at the hands of terrorists if the US withdrew from Iraq.

Bush stated flatly that the ensuing months would see an increase in violence and death among both Iraqis and American soldiers. August could be a “bloody” month, he declared.

This is what the Democrats are sanctioning by granting Bush’s war funding request and giving him a free hand to further escalate the war.

In a front-page story May 23, the *Washington Post* reported that top US commanders and diplomats in Iraq have drafted a detailed plan for intensifying the war over the next 18 months, elaborating both military operations and political interventions such as the purging of Iraq’s government and security forces of elements suspected of undermining the US occupation regime.

According to the newspaper, “The plan anticipates keeping US troop levels elevated into next year,” meaning that the “surge” level of 160,000 troops will be sustained indefinitely, and with it, the increased death toll among both American troops and Iraqi civilians.

May seems likely to become the bloodiest month of the year, and perhaps the bloodiest of the war in terms of American casualties. Nine more soldiers and Marines were killed Tuesday, May 22, bringing the death toll for the month to 81. Wednesday was one of the worst days of the year for Iraqi casualties, with more than 100 people killed and 130 wounded in a series of bombings, shootings and other incidents.

MoveOn.org, the liberal lobbying group founded by former Democratic Party and Clinton administration officials, sent an email alert Wednesday declaring that “every single Democrat must oppose this bill.” Eli Pariser, the group’s executive director, told the press, “This is going to be a very important vote. It will signal who is very serious about ending the war, and who is posturing.”

In fact, as MoveOn.org well knew, appealing for Democratic congressional action to defeat the war funding bill was an exercise in futility. There is not a single Democratic congressman or senator who is genuinely committed to ending the war. All are posturing, in a variety of ways, but all voted for Pelosi as speaker and Reid as majority leader, and all would vote for them again today.

Pariser added, “The perplexing thing about this moment is that the Democrats have the political wind strongly at their backs, and the country wants them to fight.”

Such apologetics—the stock-in-trade of MoveOn.org and similar liberal groups—only conceal the central political reality: The Democratic Party is a party of American imperialism, and, as such, is beholden not to the will of the people, but to the demands of the US financial elite. The war was launched—on the basis of lies—to further the economic and geo-political interests of this ruling elite in the Middle East and internationally.

If anything, the massive popular opposition to the war placed even greater pressure on the Democrats to withdraw their tactical objections to Bush’s conduct of the war and give him what he demanded. The Democratic Party has become the critical enabler and facilitator of a neo-colonial war to which the US ruling elite remains fully committed.



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