

Congressional Democrats resume phony “antiwar” votes

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In a transparent effort to pull the wool over the eyes of millions of antiwar voters, the congressional Democratic leadership has taken up the issue of the war in Iraq for the first time in two months, scheduling days of debate and voting on measures that would not—even in the unlikely event they were adopted and signed by Bush—actually bring an end to the war.

The House of Representatives held the first vote, approving by a narrow 218-203 margin a \$50 billion emergency funding bill for military operations in Iraq that would require Bush to withdraw an unspecified number of troops (as few as one soldier) within 30 days, and set a nonbinding goal of December 15, 2008 for an end to most combat operations in the occupied country.

The bill would also ban the use of federal funds to establish permanent bases in Iraq or to establish US control over Iraq’s oil supplies, although both provisions are worded so loosely that they would not be enforceable—the current massive US bases, for instance, are described as “temporary” by the Pentagon.

The bill also bars the use of torture in interrogations by all US government personnel, extending the current ban on military torture to apply to the CIA and other intelligence agencies. That provision alone would ensure the bill’s ultimate veto.

The vote was largely along party lines. Fifteen Democrats opposed the bill, most because they opposed any limits on the US presence in Iraq, a few because they felt the bill was too weak. Only four Republicans supported it.

There initially appeared to be some doubts about the House passing the bill at all, since its restraints on the war were so toothless that many Democrats felt it would only anger opponents of the war. Eventually, however, after a delay in the vote of several hours, until

nearly 10 p.m., three California Democrats who lead the misnamed “Out of Iraq” caucus, Lynn Woolsey, Barbara Lee and Maxine Waters, agreed to support the measure, ensuring its passage.

House Democratic leaders engaged in their usual antiwar rhetoric, including the top three responsible for the emergency funding bill, Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, and David Obey, chairman of the Appropriations Committee. All three have adamantly opposed for the last year any congressional action that would actually end the funding of the war, in favor of empty gestures that would make a pretense of opposition while allowing funding to continue.

Pelosi declared, “The fact is, we can no longer sustain the military deployment in Iraq. Staying there in the manner that we are there is no longer an option.”

Hoyer referred to the 2006 election, saying, “The American people voted for change. We’re frustrated. The American people are frustrated. We ought to extricate American men and women . . . from refereeing a civil war.”

Obey claimed the Democrats were taking a stand with the passage of the latest funding bill. “Instead of giving the president \$200 billion to continue the war, it gives him \$50 billion to shut the war down,” he said. Earlier this year, Obey denounced antiwar protesters who sought a real, not a phony, cutoff of funds for the war, calling them “idiot liberals.”

The bill could be taken up in the Senate as early as Friday morning, under an arrangement being worked out between Majority Leader Harry Reid and Minority Leader Mitch McConnell. Republicans will filibuster against the bill until Reid allows a separate vote on a bill to provide \$70 billion in emergency funding with no strings attached.

A similar deal was worked out in the spring: the Republicans agreed not to filibuster the bill so the Democrats could cast an “antiwar” vote, Bush vetoed the bill, and then the Democrats agreed to pass a “clean” bill providing the funding without any restrictions on the duration or extent of the war.

In a pathetic attempt to strike a demagogic pose as a determined opponent of President Bush, Reid declared, “He damn sure is not entitled to having this money given to him just with a blank check. Americans need someone fighting for them taking on this bully we have in the White House.” Reid’s actual determination to fight Bush is in inverse proportion to his use of invective.

As the magazine *Congressional Quarterly* noted: “After considering whether to shelve the bill in the Senate, Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., decided to permit a little political theater.”

McConnell cut through the pretense, telling the press, “We’ve had fights over troop funding bills before, and in the end, the money’s been there for the troops. That will be the case again.”

Reid also contended—in a declaration that exposes the sham character of his antiwar stance—that the Pentagon could simply use money from its \$470 billion regular budget to cover the costs of the war, until the supplemental passes. The Defense Department “should be able to do ok for a couple of months,” he said. A few weeks ago, the congressional Democratic leadership blocked an amendment to the defense authorization bill that would have barred such a reprogramming of funds.

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates issued a warning that such a reprogramming of funds might be insufficient. He threatened that without congressional passage of the emergency funding bill, he would order mass layoffs of civilian Defense Department employees, cut off contracts and reduce operations at stateside military bases. “There is a misperception that this department can continue funding our troops in the field for an indefinite period of time through accounting maneuvers, that we can shuffle money around the department,” Gates told a press conference at the Pentagon. “This is a serious misconception.”

Any holdup in the emergency funding bill would produce “real consequences for this department and for our men and women in uniform,” he added. “The

military would cease operations at all Army bases by mid-February of next year.” The Marines would shut down a month later.

No one in official Washington believes for a minute that the Pentagon will halt its military operations because of the antiwar posturing by the congressional Democrats. Gates knows very well that all he has to do is hint at shutdown and Pelosi, Reid & Co. will collapse like a popped balloon, and meekly pass whatever bill is demanded to fund the US war machine.

The defense secretary’s statement is one more indication that the White House and Pentagon have taken the measure of the congressional Democrats and are planning to pressure them into an even more humiliating retreat.



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