

MFSO TALKING POINTS – MARCH 15, 2007

The House Supplemental Appropriations Bill: “U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans’ Health and Iraq Accountability Act”

These talking points cover why **Military Families Speak Out** is urging a “no” vote on this bill

Remember: when you are making a speech or speaking with the press – two things are very important:

- **Tell them your personal connection with this war; and**
- **Tell them that you are a member of Military Families Speak Out.** There are many military families across the country who are against the war, but have not found MFSO and are feeling alone and isolated. Mentioning the name “Military Families Speak Out” in a speech or in the press allows these families to get connected to MFSO and other military families opposing the war, gain support and join their voices to ours so we can all be stronger.

- President Bush submitted his supplemental budget request to Congress in February, 2007 for approximately \$93 billion to continue the war in Iraq.
- The House Leadership, headed by Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, crafted this supplemental budget request into a funding bill that will most likely be voted on in the Defense Appropriations Committee on Thursday, March 15 and come before the full House of Representatives sometime during the week of March 19th. March 19th is the 4th anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq.
- The House Supplemental Appropriations Bill as written would give funds to President Bush to continue the war in Iraq.
- The House Leadership is trying to get all Members of Congress who oppose the war in Iraq to support this House Supplemental Appropriations Bill, which they named the “U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans’ Health and Iraq Accountability Act”. They claim it has the following provisions which are supposed to support our troops and bring about the end of the war in Iraq, but their claims are not supported by the facts:

Claim: Troop Readiness Requirements: no funds can be appropriated to deploy any unit of the Armed Forces to Iraq unless the unit is fully trained, equipped and “mission capable”

Reality: The bill includes a provision that allows the President to waive troop readiness requirements

Claim: No Extended Deployments: no funds can be appropriated for extending the deployment of the Army, National Guard or Reserves beyond a 365-day deployment, or a Marine unit beyond a 210-day deployment

Reality: The bill includes a provision that allows the President to waive the prohibition on extended deployments

Claim: Rest Period Between Deployments: no funds can be appropriated for deploying any Army unit that has been deployed within the previous 365 consecutive days, or an Marine unit that has been deployed within the previous 210 consecutive days

Reality: The bill includes a provision that allows the President to waive the specified rest periods between deployments

Claim: Requirements for Iraqi Government Progress: if the Iraqi government isn't making substantial progress by October 1, 2007 and again by March 1, 2008 in making the country secure, democratic and reducing sectarian violence, the Secretary of Defense shall commence the redeployment of the Armed Forces from Iraq within 180 days.

Reality: The bill allows the President to unilaterally certify "Iraqi Government Progress"

Claim: Date Certain for U.S. Withdrawal from Iraq: combat troops out of Iraq by August, 2008 at the latest

Reality: With three U.S troops dying each day the war continues, August, 2008 is not an acceptable deadline for withdrawal of US troops. It is not bringing our troops home now. Furthermore, the bill allows U.S. troops to remain in Iraq after the August, 2008 withdrawal date if they are "engaging in targeted special actions limited in duration and scope to killing or capturing members of al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations with global reach" [note: the terms "limited in duration and scope" are undefined in the bill]; and/or if they are "training members of the Iraqi Security Forces". **This provision could be used to keep tens of thousands of U.S. troops in Iraq for years to come.**

- The House Supplemental Appropriations bill as written would allow thousands of additional US troops and untold numbers of Iraqis to die before the U.S. occupation of Iraq is ended.
- The Supplemental Appropriations bill as written is really about positioning the Democrats for the 2008 election, not about bringing our troops home quickly and safely.
- It is wonderful that the House Leadership is putting more funds than the President asked for, specifically targeted toward military and Veteran's health care. However, by providing the funds to continue the war in Iraq, they are ensuring that there will be thousands more troops whose lives will be damaged or destroyed, who will be

wounded, who will return with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, who will be at risk of long-term health problems from exposure to Depleted Uranium.

- It appears that many in Congress, including self-described “anti-war” Members of Congress, feel the need to vote for the House Supplemental Appropriations bill in order to deflect charges from Vice President Dick Cheney and others that they are not “supporting the troops”. These Members of Congress seem more afraid of a newspaper headline than they are about the reality that three U.S. troops and countless Iraqi children, women and men are dying each day this war continues.
- As military and Gold Star families, no one is more concerned about the safety and well-being of our troops than we are. It has been our sons, daughters, husbands, wives, brothers, sisters, fiancés, partners, grandchildren, cousins, nieces, nephews, mothers and fathers on the front lines of this war; our loved ones who have and are paying the price for it.
- We know the President’s supplemental budget request is not about providing funding for our troops – rather, he is seeking funding to continue "forward combat operations", to continue this war that is so damaging to our loved ones and all of our troops.
- What we are seeking is a fully-funded safe and orderly withdrawal from Iraq, so that our loved ones and all of our troops can come home quickly and safely, and have all the equipment, supplies, armor, food, and water that they need during this re-deployment.
- The most important thing Members of Congress can do to protect those who swore an oath to protect us all, is to vote *against* the House Supplemental Appropriations bill that will provide President Bush with funding to continue the war in Iraq.
- As military families, we know that there are funds available to bring our troops out quickly and safely. If more is needed, funds from the Department of Defense budget could be re-programmed for this purpose.
- Congress needs to understand that by continuing to fund this war, and leaving our loved ones in Iraq, they are abandoning them.
- Congress can not both oppose *and* fund this war.
- Members of Congress may be afraid for their political futures, and afraid of being “swift-boated” if they were to vote to de-fund the war. We are afraid for the lives of our loved ones. We are afraid that if we are lucky enough to get our loved ones home, they will return with wounds both physical and psychological. We are afraid that our loved ones who return will never be the loved ones we knew before they deployed.

- The Constitution gave Congress the ‘power of the purse’ for a reason. The unjustifiable war in Iraq is just such a reason. President Bush is not going to end this war. It’s up to Congress to bring this misbegotten war to an end.
- It is time for Members of Congress to support our troops by voting against the funds that allow this war to continue.
- To Members of Congress we say: if you vote to continue funding the war in Iraq, it will no longer be President Bush’s war. It will be yours. If you fund it, you’ve bought it and you own it. And we will remember.
- We are asking Congress now to show the courage and leadership that our loved ones have shown when they signed up to defend the Constitution of the United States.
- Ending this war is the right thing to do. And Congress can make this happen.

We call on Congress now -- Don’t abandon our troops! De-fund this war!

Note: Information about the “Barbara Lee Amendment”:

Congresswoman Barbara Lee has put forward an amendment to the Supplemental Appropriation bill that would limit the use of the appropriated funds to spending for a fully-funded safe and orderly withdrawal of US troops from Iraq. It would further set a firm deadline for withdrawal of December 31, 2007. As we write these MFSO Talking Points, there is uncertainty about whether or not Congresswoman Lee’s amendment to the House Supplemental Appropriations bill will be allowed to be put forward in the House Appropriations Committee deliberation of the measure on Thursday, March 15th or on the House floor when the measure comes to the full House of Representatives next week (the week of March 19th).

While it would be wonderful to have this amendment to the House Appropriations bill be introduced, accepted and become part of the bill passed by the U.S. House of Representatives, there is little chance of this happening. Therefore, the core message Members of Congress need to hear now is: Support our troops, de-fund the war, and vote against any funds for continuing the U.S. military occupation of Iraq.

Below is a recent Associated Press article from the morning of March 15, 2007 that reports on the situation as of now. Stay tuned for further developments, twists and turns in this turbulent situation.

Posted on Thu, Mar. 15, 2007

Democrats predict passage of Iraq bill

By ANNE FLAHERTY

House Democrats confidently predicted they can pass a bill to end the Iraq war before September 2008, even as their counterparts in the Senate struggle just to get their war debate off the ground.

The House Appropriations Committee planned to vote Thursday on a \$124 billion spending bill that includes \$95.5 billion for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The measure was expected to pass narrowly - mostly along party lines with a few Democratic defectors - paving the way for a floor vote next week.

The bill has been the first major test of unity among Democrats since they took control of Congress in January. Party members agree the war should end, but have been deeply divided over how far to go to force President Bush's hand.

"The members are thinking about the need for unity and the need to make sure the president doesn't go unchecked," said Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, D-Fla., a chief deputy whip.

Members will be allowed to offer amendments but leaders will likely try to thwart them. Prior to the final vote, chairman Rep. David Obey, D-Wis., the committee's chairman, was expected to add a provision to delay Pentagon plans to close Walter Reed Army Medical Center in 2011.

But prospects of the bill becoming law are dim. In addition to a White House veto threat and overwhelming GOP opposition to the bill, the legislation is unlikely to survive in the Senate, where Democrats have been reluctant to adopt a firm timetable to end the war.

Senate Democrats have opted instead to back softer legislation that would identify March 2008 as a goal for troops to be out of Iraq.

Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, a Democratic presidential candidate, said in a New York Times interview that if elected she would maintain a scaled-down American military force in Iraq that would stay off the streets in Baghdad and no longer would try to protect Iraqis from sectarian violence.

She cited "remaining vital national security interests" for a continued deployment of U.S. troops in Iraq aimed at fighting al-Qaida, deterring Iran, protecting Kurds and possibly supporting the Iraqi military, the newspaper reported Wednesday night on its Web site.

She said her plan was consistent with the Senate resolution, saying it called for "a limited number" of troops to stay in Iraq to protect the U.S. Embassy and other personnel, train and equip Iraqi forces and conduct "targeted counterterrorism operations."

The Senate voted 89-9 on Wednesday to begin consideration of the measure, but debate quickly became hamstrung again after Republicans and Democrats failed to agree on the parameters for a debate.

Aides said leaders were waiting to see a proposal by Sen. John Warner, R-Va. According to a draft, Warner's resolution would outline benchmarks for the Iraqi government and call for an assessment of Iraqi security forces.

Warner's resolution stops short of calling for troops to leave Iraq by any particular date.

While the House bill is unlikely to sail through unchecked, Democrats say its passage - even if by a slim majority - would be a loud message to the president to end the war. Its passage also would be a political victory for House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., who has struggled in trying to unify party members on the war.

Rep. Jim Moran, D-Va., who had been skeptical of earlier drafts of the war spending bill, said he is now on board and believes Democratic defections will be few.

Pelosi was trying to line up votes from party liberals who want troops out of Iraq sooner than the 2008 deadline, as well as more conservative Democrats who are concerned the bill would micromanage the war.

Rep. Barbara Lee, a member of the Appropriations Committee, has not said whether she will vote in favor of the bill. As co-chair of the Progressive Caucus, Lee, D-Calif., supports an alternative proposal that would cut funding for all military operations.

In a statement Tuesday, Lee called the supplemental proposal a step forward.

"Still, too many of our troops are dying in an occupation that needs to end sooner rather than later, and I will continue to push for enforceable timelines and to protect our troops and to fully fund their safe and orderly withdrawal from Iraq at the earliest practicable date."

But other members of the Progressive Caucus said they would support the measure once it is on the floor.

"I think people have to take a close look at the best way to get out of Iraq," said Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn. "I think this is the best framework to do that."

Rep. C.W. Bill Young, the top Republican on the Appropriations Committee, said he opposed the spending legislation because of the timetable to end the war.

But Young was not expected to oppose Obey's suggestion to delay the closing of Walter Reed.