

## **Statement by Congressman Dave Obey, Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee on the Iraqi War Issue**

There are two sets of issues before us.

1. The President's request for almost \$100 billion to finance the cost of the war in Iraq for the remainder of this fiscal year which ends October 1<sup>st</sup>.
2. And another set of urgent needs for this year.
  - Pandemic flu protection for the country,
  - Additional funding for the State Children's Health Insurance Program to prevent many thousands of poor children and some of their parents from losing health coverage,
  - Gulf Coast recovery from Katrina, and
  - Drought relief for farmers in the 70% of U.S. counties that the president named as disaster areas,

And other areas where we believe we must do more than the President wants.

- Defense Health, such as efforts to provide more help for veterans with traumatic brain injury,
- Veterans Health, to overcome the ridiculous backlogs,
- Homeland Security to strengthen our ports, our borders and our cargo inspection systems,
- Full funding for BRAC, the base realignment requirements,
- Additional funding for military housing needs, and
- Greater resources to root out Al Qaeda in Afghanistan.

Dealing with these issues is complicated by the fact that this country and this Congress are deeply divided on our involvement in the Iraqi civil war which has dragged on now for more than four years.

Several weeks ago House Democrats tried to use the President's funding request to establish a process to responsibly end our involvement in that Iraqi civil war.

To that end, we passed and sent to the President a plan that:

- Spent almost \$4 billion more than the President wanted on the health and safety of our troops,
- Established limits on how much sacrifice could be asked of U.S. military units while no one else, except for military families are appreciably sacrificing anything in this so-called war effort, and

- Set standards for judging the success or failure of Administration policy.

Why did we do that?

Because we agree with virtually every general who has said that this civil war will not be resolved militarily. It will be resolved only politically and diplomatically by Iraqi factions making the compromises necessary to bring it to a conclusion.

The President vetoed that proposal. To override that veto we needed 2/3 of the House and Senate to concur. We didn't get it because Democrats do not have 2/3 of the seats in the Congress.

So next we tried to send another proposition to the President. It gave the President a limited amount of money and tried to set another more flexible set of standards for proceeding with this war. That proposal failed in the Senate.

On Friday, we met with the Administration and offered to drop all domestic items if the Administration would accept meaningful benchmarks and timelines for ending our involvement in that civil war. They flatly refused.

That left us with the Senate passed plan which sets a much weaker set of benchmarks than those passed by the House. It is clear that we do not have the 60 votes necessary to end debate in the Senate and force a policy change on the Administration using the fiscal year 2007 supplemental.

Because there are only 4 months left in the fiscal year, no serious person expects that it is possible to begin to redeploy our troops during that time.

So the question becomes how do we continue to press for an end to our involvement in that war on a reasonable timeframe. The proposition that we expect will shortly be before the Congress shifts that debate to the President's budget request for the next fiscal year which begins on October 1<sup>st</sup>.

Weak as it is, the Senate adopted Warner amendment with its 18 new benchmarks does at least end the totally blank check that previous Congresses have provided.

Weak as it is, it does at least give members of Congress whose feet are not firmly planted in the status quo another opportunity to review the futile administration policy by establishing a requirement for two reports to the Congress – one in July and one in September.

The proposal before us will mean that in September, using the required reports, the Congress will have an opportunity to decide what course of action to take on this war. That decision will be just four months away.

Meanwhile, we have also insisted that the President accept the fact that there are other pressing needs to which we must respond.

The proposal will contain a long overdue increase in the minimum wage for America's lowest paid workers, a wage which unconscionably has been frozen for a decade.

It will contain \$17 billion above the President's package for:

- added defense and veterans healthcare,
- Base Realignment and Closure,
- Military housing,
- Homeland security,
- Katrina, Gulf Coast recovery,
- Drought relief, and
- The State Children's Health Insurance Program.

Some items it should contain, it does not, including: Low Income Home Energy Assistance and funding for the pandemic flu.

This proposition falls far short of containing everything that it should on both the Iraqi war and our own domestic needs, but I take some comfort in the knowledge that even Babe Ruth struck out more than 1,300 times.

But, weak as it is, this proposition does provide a structure and a process to continue the fight and it recognizes reality.

I will vote for the first proposition, which contains the minimum wage and \$17 billion of the \$21 billion that we sought to respond to crucial national needs.

I will vote against the second proposition that contains the President's military request and the Warner benchmarks because I believe they are far too weak and I believe it is important to maximize the pressure on Iraqi politicians to compromise by having as many votes as possible for a stronger proposition.

This proposition will transfer the Iraq fight to September. At that time, after the reports required by the Warner Amendment – but before consideration of the President's fiscal 2008 Defense Supplemental request – it will require a vote as to whether or not funds appropriated be used to redeploy troops on a responsible time schedule.

This proposition is the best that we can achieve given the votes that we have.

It is my fervent hope that when those votes occur in September, that a firm majority in both houses will see through the smokescreens being produced by the administration and send an unequivocal message to both the administration and Iraqi political leaders that our patience is over.

Some news stories have said that democrats have “given up” on a timeline. That is patent nonsense. There has never been a chance of snowball in hell that Congress would cut off funding to the troops in the field.

Some people say to us ‘why don’t you do what you did in Vietnam and simply cut off the funds even while troops are in the field?’ but that is not what Congress did in Vietnam. I know, I was here. When Congress passed the Addabbo amendment there were less than 500 troops left in Vietnam. What the Addabbo amendment did was to cut off American aid to the South Vietnamese government.

Even if the Congress were to cut off aid to troops in the field the President would not abide by that. He would simply assert his Commander in Chief authority to manage the troops any way he wanted and we would be in court for months, long past the time period covered by this fiscal year 2007 supplemental.

The last proposal we sent the Senate attempted to limit the amount of money available to the President to two months operating expenses – fencing the rest to try to force a policy change. All we are doing by this arrangement is to slip the timetable an additional two months from that proposal – shifting the debate from the 07 supplemental to the 08 supplemental. That means that our Republican friends who continue to support the President on this misbegotten war will have to face votes in July and in September on this same issue. We are not giving up, we are simply recognizing that no one believes that it is possible, given the Senate’s inability to produce 60 votes to shut down debate, to change course during the remainder of this fiscal year. That may not be a pleasant fact but it is reality. Opponents of the war need to face this fact just as the president and his allies need to face the fact that they are following a dead end policy which we will continue to make every possible effort to change.