

THE STRUGGLE FOR IRAQ: WAR COSTS; Democrats Lean Against Bush Spending Request

By DAVID FIRESTONE - The New York Times

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At least half the Democrats in the House are expected to vote against President Bush's \$87 billion spending request for Iraq and Afghanistan later this week, and scores of others will support it only under protest, according to lawmakers and Congressional officials.

The spending bill will almost certainly pass both houses with virtually unanimous Republican support, but since President Bush announced the size of the spending request on Sept. 7, enthusiasm has diminished considerably across the political spectrum, reflecting its unpopularity around the country. A sizable though smaller proportion of Senate Democrats may also vote no on Thursday or Friday. The number is likely to grow if either chamber refuses to accept amendments that would require Iraq to repay part of the \$20 billion in reconstruction aid.

The Senate voted on Tuesday night 57-to-39 against a Democratic amendment to use future Iraqi oil revenues to pay for the reconstruction.

Earlier on Tuesday, Senator John Edwards, Democrat of North Carolina, became the first presidential candidate in the Senate to oppose the bill, saying that he supported the war but not what he called the haphazard approach to reconstruction.

"It's clear to me there is not going to be a change of direction unless somebody stands up to him and says no," Mr. Edwards said while campaigning in New Hampshire, referring to the president.

Among other Democratic candidates, Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts said recently that he was leaning toward voting against the bill, and Representative Dennis J. Kucinich of Ohio said he would vote against it.

A year after a contentious Congressional vote to authorize the invasion of Iraq, members of both parties say they have heard an enormous amount of opposition from constituents who have read the details of the administration's ambitious plan to rebuild Iraq at a time of record-high budget deficits. Many conservative Democrats say they would readily vote against

the reconstruction aid if it were a separate bill, but feel obliged to vote for the entire package in order to avoid being charged by Republicans with abandoning the troops.

"We've got to support whatever the troops need, but they're going to make us swallow a pretty bitter \$20 billion pill to do it," said Representative John S. Tanner, a moderate Democrat from Tennessee who said he would reluctantly vote for the bill. "The voters know that piece has a lot of fat and pork in it, and that it's helping some American contractors do pretty well with their no-bid contracts. But the Republicans have put us between a rock and a hard place."

Mr. Tanner was one of 31 members of the Blue Dog Coalition, a group of conservative and moderate House Democrats, who wrote to President Bush on Tuesday demanding that he find a way to keep the Iraq bill from increasing the deficit. The coalition members, who often support the president's initiatives, also said the administration needs to supply a better justification for spending such a large amount.

"Many of the items in the reconstruction package are not limited to war reconstruction, and are more appropriately the responsibility of the Iraqi provisional government or have extremely inflated costs," the letter said.

While most Blue Dog members are expected to vote for the bill in the end, many other Democrats say they will not do so. The 39 members of the Congressional Black Caucus are considered likely to vote unanimously against the bill no matter what amendments are added, as will scores of other Democratic members. "It's increasingly clear that this administration and this president cannot be trusted with the money, even for the troops," said Representative **Jani**

ce D. Schakowsky,
Democrat of Illinois.

As many as a dozen Democratic senators are expected to vote against the spending bill, but the percentage voting no will probably be less than in the House. Senator Tom Daschle, the Democratic leader, said Tuesday that he expected close votes this week on Democratic amendments to lend the money to Iraq, increase the amount of detailed spending information provided by the administration, and improve veterans health care. He did not say how he would vote, but predicted that a majority of Democratic Senators would eventually vote to approve the bill.

Democrats had hoped to split the reconstruction aid from the \$67 billion in military funds, but that move was fiercely resisted by Republicans who knew that a combination of the two was the only way the reconstruction financing would pass.

Many conservative Republicans have also expressed strong misgivings about the reconstruction aid and its effect on the deficit, but have been pressured by the White House into dropping amendments requiring Iraqi repayment.