

Illinois lawmakers split on Iraq

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By Teresa Mask

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The safety of American troops and other U.S. citizens must take precedence over a hasty decision on war, some members of Illinois' congressional delegation said Monday.

The United States should give U.N. weapons inspectors more time to gain disarmament cooperation from Iraq before going to war, a senator and two representatives said. The extra time also will allow the country to build international support for a potential war, they said.

Rep. Henry Hyde, a Wood Dale Republican and chairman of the House International Relations Committee, however, stopped just short of saying the United States should prepare for battle with Iraq.

Based on Saddam Hussein's actions, it's clear the United States soon must make some tough decisions, Hyde said in a statement.

"The disarmament of Iraq cannot succeed if inspectors are reduced to playing 'hide and seek,'" he said. "The fact that no amount of evidence of Iraq's bad faith will ever be enough for some members of the international community should not stop that community - and cannot stop the United States - from acting to defend its interests."

Talk of war fired up Monday after a report from U.N. weapons inspectors confirmed what many

had suspected: that Iraq has not been completely forthright with U.N. about its weapons.

Hyde said Iraq has failed to come clean about weapons of mass destruction that it had promised to give up.

Sen. Dick Durbin, however, said he isn't ready to jump into battle so soon and wants the United Nations to continue aggressive inspections. "We have yet to come up with hard evidence of the kind that would justify a land invasion of Iraq," the Springfield Democrat said.

Republican Rep. Mark Kirk of Highland Park says the United States should work on building an international coalition. Already, he said, Turkey, Spain and Italy appear to be on the same page as the United States.

"Time is running out," he said echoing the president.

But, Kirk added: "It has not yet run out," referring to the chance for last-minute diplomacy.

Rep. Jan Schakowsky agrees.

"I do not think this eventually means we should go to war," said Schakowsky, a Democrat from Evanston. "War is not just another policy action. It's a failure of diplomacy."

She said she believes disarmament can happen peacefully. Besides, she said, there has been no convincing evidence that Iraq is a threat to this country. Nor does the evidence support putting up to 300,000 U.S. men and women in harm's way, Schakowsky said.

She said she worries that Bush's impatience might mean the United States will have even more enemies in the Muslim region.

"I have no doubt the U.S. can win a military confrontation with Iraq, but what happens afterwards?" she asked.

Sen. Peter Fitzgerald of Inverness and House Speaker Dennis Hastert of Yorkville, both Republicans, could not be reached for comment.