

War cries drown out voters

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Although the House has authorized the president to use force against Iraq, the ideal thing would have been for Congress to wait until after the Nov. 5 election, and although it's probably too late, a non-binding vote on what action the American people favor should be on the ballot.

Why not? It would give lawmakers some guidance on how people feel about going to war with Iraq and whether Americans are willing to foot the bill for what everyone believes would be a costly war. Experts estimate the cost would run \$300 million per day, \$9 billion per month--not including the cost of rebuilding Baghdad, a city the size of Los Angeles.

Is taking out Saddam Hussein right now more important than getting Americans back to work? Than fixing our economy? Than getting the stock market moving in the right direction? Two million people have lost their jobs since President Bush took office, and 2,200 workers are losing their jobs daily. The economy is sputtering, and tens of millions of Americans lost their life's savings in the stock market. Americans need to tell Congress what's more important right now. A referendum would enable Americans to say how they feel about nation-building. How long would we have to occupy Iraq? Will we need a Marshall Plan? We stayed in Germany more than 40 years before the Berlin Wall came down. We've been stuck in the Korean demilitarized zone for more than 50 years! We are still in Bosnia, and God knows how long or how much it will take to rebuild Afghanistan. Just how much of this expense will the American taxpayers have to bear? Or are we supposed to pay the cost with oil revenues?

Speaking of oil, a referendum would let Congress know whether Americans are willing to sacrifice the blood of their sons and daughters in uniform for oil, while slaughtering innocent Iraqi civilians. Saddam may be "the butcher of Baghdad," but millions of Arabs, especially Muslim fundamentalists, will see America as the butcher that used weapons of mass destruction to get rid of a single scorpion in the cradle of civilization.

Do Americans believe that taking out Saddam would really make life here safer? Will we really be able to stop living in fear? Or do enough Americans believe, as I do, that terrorists will retaliate with an attack on us--perhaps in Chicago, Dallas or Los Angeles--the minute a bomb destroys the first mosque?

Are we prepared to leave tens of thousands of American men and women in Iraq during the tribal wars and civil strife that is surely to follow in the post-Saddam era? Do we really expect the Kurds, Sunnis and Shiites to forget their bitter rivalries and form a peaceful coalition government based on our Jeffersonian principles? Most Iraqis just want to live in peace, under what form of government is secondary. They care more about practicing their Islamic faith than

voting. And it doesn't help having the Rev. Jerry Falwell playing the "useful idiot" by saying that Mohammed, the founder of Islam, was a terrorist.

Exactly what are young Americans going to be putting their lives on the line to protect? Congress needs to hear from the American people.

Are we prepared to aid so-called moderate states like Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan when Muslim militants rebel in violent opposition to their support of the U.S. invasion of a Muslim nation?

Some Americans may see this as a war between good and evil, but tens of millions in the Muslim world would see this as a religious conflict between Christianity and Islam. Bush has passed on every opportunity to address the question of the regional instability that would follow a regime change in Iraq. That's not because he's just not telling us. It's because he doesn't know. Well, the American people need a chance to ask, and somebody better damn well know!

On Tuesday night I listened to roughly 50 to 60 House members say how they would vote on the resolution and why. Illinois Rep. Jan Schakowsky's speech was brilliant, and she carried to the podium copies of e-mail she had received on the issue.

There were 18 in favor of the war resolution and more than 5,000 against. The American people need to be heard on this issue before it's too late.