Congress Wrestles With Iraq Language

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WASHINGTON (AP) - Democrats continued to resist giving President Bush all the powers he wants to wage war against Iraq, and one senior Republican said some give-and-take is necessary. "I still remain," said House Majority Leader Dick Armey, "the toughest sell in this town."

Both parties promised prompt action and a broad consensus on a resolution authorizing the president to use force if necessary to eliminate Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and remove Saddam Hussein from power. But finding the proper wording for the resolution was proving elusive.

Democrats pushed for moderation of a draft proposal the White House sent to Congress last week, saying it diminished the need for international action in dealing with the problem of Iraq and was overly broad in giving the president authority to use force to bring security to the region around Iraq.

"I can't believe any member of Congress with good conscience could give such a broad delegation of authority to any president," said Sen. Richard Durbin, D-Ill.

Two House Democrats, Jim McDermott of Washington and David Bonior of Michigan, said they would leave Wednesday for a weekend visit to Iraq.

President Bush said he was confident Democrats would support him.

"I believe you'll see, as we work to get a strong resolution out of Congress, that a lot of Democrats are willing to take the lead when it comes to keeping the peace," he told reporters.

On Tuesday, armed services and foreign relations committees offered their suggestions to leaders from both parties, who in turn were negotiating with White House officials on how the resolution should be worded. The House International Relations Committee offered a formal document making clear that the United Nations should be involved in ensuring regional peace and security.

Armey, R-Texas, one of the few Republicans to publicly express doubts about going to war against Iraq, said it was normal that the president sought "maximum latitude" in his original proposal. Armey said he was confident the two sides ultimately would "come out of the process with a very broad consensus."

Armey said he met Tuesday with Vice President Dick Cheney and later with Defense Secretary Donald. H. Rumsfeld and CIA Director George Tenet to hear why they thought it was necessary to debilitate Saddam. "I am still not prepared to say how I will vote on the resolution when it is brought to the floor."

Earlier Tuesday, a former Iraqi nuclear physicist who defected in 1994 told a House hearing that he did not believe Iraq was turning to the black market for nuclear materials, as feared, to gain a nuclear capability within months.

"Iraq's program is more serious," Khidhir Hamza told a House Government Reform subcommittee. "It is meant to produce an arsenal of nuclear weapons, not just one," a process

that could take two or three years, he said.
Democratic Rep. Janice Schakowsky of Illinois asked the panel why the administration was focusing on Iraq and not other insecure nuclear facilities around the globe. "By concentrating our efforts on Iraq, it is getting harder to convince the world that this is just about weapons of mass destruction, not domestic politics or oil or revenge."
Durbin also asked whether it was "White House strategy to drag this debate out indefinitely to get this as close to the election as possible so the White House ... does not have to face the reality of an economy that is flat on its back."
"This is a serious deal," Armey said on Democratic claims the White House was trying to avert attention from the faltering economy before the election. "You are talking about war and peace, national security. I am personally not capable of looking at that through a political prism."