

Legislators want to hear Bush's case against Iraq

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By Eric Krol

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House International Relations Chairman Henry Hyde of Wood Dale told President Bush Wednesday he should exhaust diplomatic avenues before mounting an invasion of Iraq.

"I suggested going to the United Nations to get a resolution to readmit weapons inspectors any time, any place and anywhere," said Hyde, part of a team of congressional leaders who met with Bush at the White House. "If he (Saddam Hussein) refused, that would give the president a key argument to make his case (for an invasion)."

His comments came as Bush agreed to ask Congress for a vote of support before taking action against Iraq. A quick poll of Illinois' seven suburban congressmen and two senators shows Bush has some convincing to do before they'll vote yes.

Hyde is joined by fellow Republican Rep. Donald Manzullo, whose district includes McHenry County, and Democrats Sen. Dick Durbin of Springfield and Rep. Jan Schakowsky of Evanston in opposing an Iraqi invasion until Bush puts forth better arguments.

Already supporting Bush on Iraqi action based on what they know are Republicans House Speaker Dennis Hastert of Yorkville, Rep. Mark Kirk of Highland Park and Rep. Philip Crane of Wauconda.

"This is a growing national security threat," said Kirk, a former legal counsel to the House international relations panel. "Iraq is back. It's clear the weapon of choice for terrorists is a nuclear one. That would kill 3 million people, not 3,000."

Remaining in the undecided column while waiting for Bush to make his case are Sen. Peter Fitzgerald of Inverness and Rep. Judy Biggert of Hinsdale, both Republicans.

Hyde plans to hold hearings in the capital starting Sept. 23 to ask the Bush administration to lay out its reasons to justify a pre-emptive strike.

"I'm not sure there is a smoking gun, but there at least ought to be a gun," Hyde said. Durbin, who attended a Democratic fund-raiser with former President Clinton at the Adler Planetarium Wednesday night, said he hasn't ruled out voting in favor of war. But first, Durbin wants Bush to spell out why this is in the best interests of national security and specifically define the military mission.

Schakowsky, whose district includes Des Plaines, said her office received nearly 1,000 e-mails Wednesday from people opposed to action against Iraq, far more than the 100 or so daily e-mails her office receives on all subjects.

"It will unite the Arab-Muslim world against us, and that can't be good for safety," she said. "I want to know what makes Iraq so unique. (Saddam) admittedly is a bad actor, but he's not alone on that stage."

Kirk, who flew patrol missions over Iraq while a Naval Reserves officer, admitted he hasn't seen a groundswell of support for an Iraqi invasion. But, Kirk said, the nation needs to brace itself for a foreign policy change toward pre-emptive action against nations that pose nuclear threat, a switch as major as joining NATO was more than 50 years ago.

Crane and Hastert simply are waiting for Bush to state his case to the people.

"He believes there is a very strong case to be made," Hastert spokesman Brad Hahn said. "He'll support the president at the appropriate time."