



Sen. James Webb (D-Va.), shown at a hearing last week, proposes extending home stays for combat troops.

## Withdrawal Push Put on Hold

### Senate Democrats Say They Will Seek Timelines Next Year

By SHAILLAGH MURRAY  
Washington Post Staff Writer

Unable to garner enough Republican support, Senate Democratic leaders said yesterday that they are abandoning a bipartisan effort to bring U.S. troops home from Iraq by next spring.

Senate Majority Leader Harry M. Reid (D-Nev.) said that Democrats had been willing to make the troop withdrawal a "goal" in order to attract GOP support, but it never materialized. Instead, Reid will again push for a firm deadline, this time June 2008, along with a stronger effort at cutting off war funding.

"It's all definite timelines," Reid said.

The Senate will resume the war debate today, and Reid invited Republicans to offer proposals. His spokesman said that several possibilities are being negotiated, although it appeared unlikely they will meet the 60-vote threshold to pass.

In recent weeks, Reid and other Democratic lead-

ers had indicated they were willing to look for compromise with Republicans. Last week, the U.S. commander in Baghdad, Army Gen. David H. Petraeus, reported to Congress that he might be able to begin a small withdrawal later this year but that force levels would still be about the same next summer as they had been before President Bush's January order of an increase of 21,500 combat troops.

"The Senate faces a series of stark choices — whether to build on the success of the surge and fight for additional gains, or whether to set a date for American surrender in Iraq and suffer thereby the terrible consequences that will ensue," said Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), a presidential candidate and strong supporter of the war. "As we consider each of the Iraq-related amendments filed on this bill, let us understand the enormous consequences of decisions taken here."

The fight will begin today as the Senate takes up

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## GOP Moderates Weigh Loyalty To Bush vs. Political Realities

By JONATHAN WEISMAN  
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With a difficult war debate looming and presidential vetoes for a host of popular legislation threatened, moderate Republicans in Congress are facing a tough choice: Stand by President Bush or run for their political lives.

Votes are due soon on Iraq, an expansion of a children's health insurance program and an array of spending bills. GOP leaders hope to use them to regain credibility with their base voters as a party for strong defense and fiscal discipline. But moderates, many of them facing the possibility of difficult reelection bids next year, are dreading the expected showdowns.

"We are at a very significant juncture," said Rep. Jim Ramstad (Minn.), a moderate who on Monday joined seven other Republicans in announcing that he will not seek reelection. "I'd use a metaphor, but it can't be printed — something about something hitting the fan."

"Obviously, it's perilous," said Charles Bass (N.H.), who was swept from Congress last year in the Democratic wave and now heads the Republican Main Street Partnership, a moderate group.

This week and next, Senate Republicans will face crucial votes on measures to shift course in Iraq, probably beginning with a proposal by Sen. James Webb (D-Va.) that would require home stays for troops that are at least as long as their most recent combat tours before they can be redeployed to the war zones.

House and Senate negotiators are closing in on a major expansion of the State Children's Health Insurance Program that would largely mirror a \$35 billion Senate version and be stripped of the House's controversial plan to trim back subsidies for private Medicare managed-care plans. The bill already has veto-proof support in the Senate, and opposition may be crumbling in the House.

"Most of the moderates will vote for S-CHIP if the Medicare piece is taken out," said Rep. Deborah Pryce (R-Ohio).

Over White House opposition, the House voted 348 to 72 yesterday

to expand federal backing of mortgages, the first legislative response to the brewing housing crisis.

And the president has promised to veto nearly every one of the 12 appropriations bills in the works over \$22 billion that Democrats are adding to Bush's request of nearly \$1 trillion. While Republicans emphasize the total of increased spending, Democrats are hammering the GOP on the specifics: \$3 billion for border security, \$1.2 billion for emergency preparedness, \$1 billion for bridge repair, \$700 million to house low-income seniors and \$75 million for homeless veterans.

To be sure, Bush could find Republican support holding up if Democratic leaders are unable or unwilling to moderate their positions on Iraq or come to timely agreements on S-CHIP and the spending bills. Rep. Phil English (R-Pa.), who has been exploring bipartisan accommodations, especially on Iraq, complained yesterday that, for all their talk of bipartisanship, the "House Democratic leadership has not reached out to us at all."

And Senate Majority Leader Harry M. Reid (D-Nev.) said yesterday that he is abandoning efforts at compromise with Republicans over proposals to bring troops home, saying that the GOP has not responded to his plea.

For many Republicans, especially conservatives, the coming showdowns are the fights they have been waiting for. But even they are reluctant to say they are standing with the president, who has low approval ratings, especially over his handling of the Iraq war.

"I think Republicans in Congress do see this as a time of decision, but it's not whether we'll stand with the president but with the principles that minted the majority in 1994," said Rep. Mike Pence (R-Ind.), referring to the GOP. "To be candid, Republicans think less in terms of fealty to the president than loyalty to principle."

But for moderates, the coming clashes will be a major test. House Minority Whip Roy Blunt (Mo.) met with moderate Republicans Monday night to try to soothe their nerves on Iraq, only to hear a chorus of concerns. Rep. Michael N. Castle (Del.)

let the GOP leadership know that he does not intend to stop his efforts to find a bipartisan way to shift course in Iraq, then left for a Republican-Democratic dinner on the issue, organized by Reps. Steve Israel (D-N.Y.) and Wayne T. Gilchrest (R-Md.).

Between efforts to push legislation requiring a change of mission in Iraq, Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) is trying to stave off a veto of the S-CHIP bill; and she is fuming about Bush's newfound zeal for fiscal rectitude. "There is a marked contrast between this year threatening to veto all of these bills and the last few years," she said. "He's clearly trying to send a message. I think it's a belated message, and the choices are not ones I would have advised."

On Iraq, Republicans who once might have yielded to White House appeals for unity are finding such salesmanship far less persuasive.

"My tendency is to try and be supportive of the president," said Sen. George V. Voinovich (R-Ohio), who is considering voting for Webb's rest-time amendment, which he opposed in July. "But if I have looked at something and studied it and conclude that that's not the right course, then I'm going to do what I do."

All of this has clearly weighed down the Republican Party. Six House Republicans and two GOP senators — including independent-minded lawmakers such as Ramstad, Pryce and Rep. Ray LaHood (Ill.), as well as Sens. John W. Warner (Va.) and Chuck Hagel (Neb.) — have announced their retirements.

At a gloomy meeting of House Republicans yesterday, lawmakers hashed over the updated list of retirements while leaders again exhorted their rank-and-file to get out and raise money if they do not want to be in an even deeper hole in November 2008.

Rep. Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.) said a meeting that once would have been depressing has become so commonplace that it is now boring.

"People are taking very seriously the notion that Democrats are far ahead of us in having top-tier candidates for the White House and are well-positioned to defend their own on Capitol Hill," LaHood said. "There are no illusions out here."

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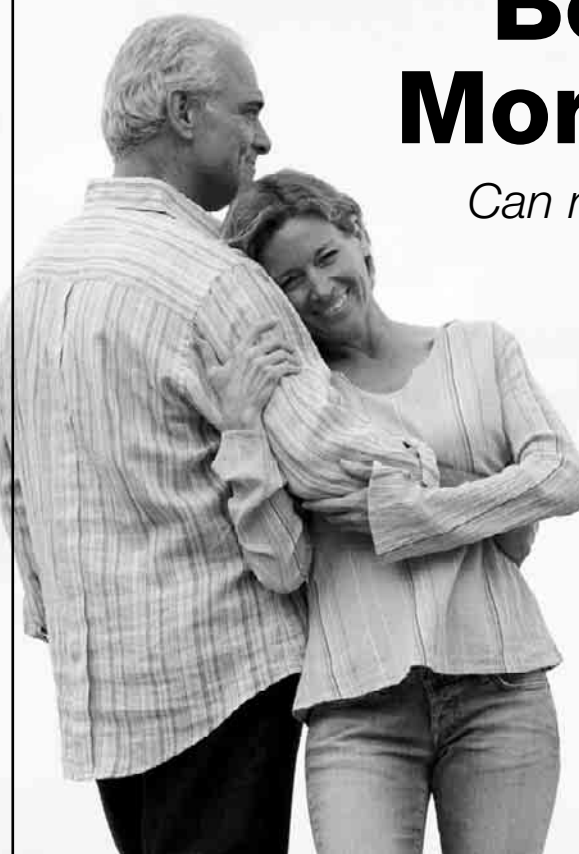
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