

WORLD-HERALD BUREAU

WASHINGTON - As the U.S. House launched debate today on the war, Midlands congressmen aren't following the example set by Nebraska's senators in directly challenging President Bush's troop buildup.

The Senate remains stalled on a resolution opposing Bush's plan that is co-sponsored by Nebraska Republican Chuck Hagel, Nebraska Democrat Ben Nelson and others.

But Democrats in charge of the House, where rules allow the majority party to push conduct votes more easily, are considering a similar nonbinding resolution that would denounce Bush's decision to send 21,500 more soldiers to .

A vote could come Friday, and the resolution is expected to draw some Republican support.

Rep. Lee Terry, R-Neb., said he will wait to see the anti-surge resolution before deciding how to vote, although he didn't expect to vote for it.

"I would like to say that we should re-communicate our support for our troops there and not cut funding for them, while standing silent on the surge."

Terry cast himself as cautiously hopeful that Bush's strategy can work.

"I'm not willing to pull the rug out from under the troops that are over there," Terry said. "I'm willing to go along with (the surge) with the goal that this could actually quicken our ability to get out of . That's my hope and desire."

Nationally, polls have shown that a majority of Americans oppose Bush's new strategy. Midlands lawmakers report that their e-mails, mail and phone calls are showing more evenly mixed viewpoints.

Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa, has introduced his own resolution supporting troops in and opposing any attempt to curtail their funding.

King's resolution concludes, "The United States must remain committed to helping the government of establish a nation that can govern, sustain and defend itself."

But King has no illusions that House Democrats will allow a vote on his measure.

He charges that the anti-surge resolution "undercuts our troops." It embodies a contradiction, he said, suggesting support for the troops but not their mission.

"That's the equivalent of saying, 'I'm all for you, but you're putting your life on the line for a bad cause,'" King said.

Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, R-Neb., said he wants clear benchmarks for the government to meet, more aggressive congressional oversight and support for troops now in the field.

Fortenberry said nonbinding resolutions don't have the ability to address the complexities involved in the situation, the concerns about 's involvement, the role of other Arab nations and the broader Middle East peace process.

Such resolutions "have the unintended consequence of undermining our effort," he said. "That concerns me."

The newest member of the Nebraska delegation, Republican Rep. Adrian Smith, said he will oppose any resolution that doesn't offer solutions to the problems in . Bush's plan represents a shift in strategy and a series of possible solutions, he said, and it deserves to play out.

Most Nebraskans serving in and their families whom Smith has talked with view Bush's troop surge as a move forward, Smith said. "I want to give the president's strategy a chance because I believe that's how we best support our troops."

Seeking to break the Senate stalemate, Sen. John Warner, R-Va., Hagel, Nelson and others on Monday offered their nonbinding resolution as an amendment to a spending bill that must be passed by Thursday.

Hagel said he was "deeply disappointed" that a full debate has not yet occurred in the Senate.

"We owe it to our soldiers and their families," he said. "We owe it to the American people."

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