

Supplemental Conditions by Dan Jacoby

The House of Representatives passed a supplemental funding bill for the continued occupation of Iraq today. For the first time since we invaded that country, however, the House attached some conditions. Specifically, they set a timeline (sort of) for our troops to come home. Putting aside for the moment the fact that the loopholes in that timeline are so large you could drive an army truck through them, what political steps are next?

George W. Bush has threatened to veto this bill if it gets to his desk. Meanwhile, he has Senate Republicans running interference to make sure it never gets that far. (He may be hoping those Senate Republicans don't cave in, or he will have to veto the bill – and take the heat for it.)

If this bill doesn't get passed and signed within a few weeks (April 15, according to the Secretary of Defense), the occupation will run out of money. The next question is, who will get the blame for defunding the troops? And that's where Nancy Pelosi and other Democratic leaders are going to have to do something they've never done before. They're going to have to create strong talking points and make sure Democrats flood the airwaves with them.

Allow me to submit, “humbly,” some suggested talking points:

1. The Democrats are willing to give the President the money he needed, but George W. Bush and the Republicans didn't want it.
2. The American people have spoken, and George W. Bush had better start listening.
3. Our troops are dying in order to occupy (the key word – “occupy”) a country that was never a threat to us.
4. The people of the region – including Syria, Saudi Arabia and, yes, even Iran – must ensure stability in their own area.

In short, Democrats can blame George W. Bush and the Republicans for failing to fund the continued occupation of Iraq in defiance of the will of the American people. The question is, can Nancy Pelosi and other Democratic leaders get their act together? In other words, can they create the kind of organized effort that Republicans are so good at formulating and implementing?

Unfortunately, they probably can't, and that will be an enormous failure. For only if Democratic leaders can hold the party together with a forceful message will they gain the support of the American people. Right now, America is united against both parties; it's “a pox on both your houses.” But Democrats have a golden opportunity right now to gain a tremendous upper hand.

If Nancy Pelosi and the Democratic leaders fail to take advantage of their opportunity now, the gains of the 2006 election will soon fade away.