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House Passes Resolution Backing Troops

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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WASHINGTON (AP) -- A House resolution intended to show Congress' unified support for U.S. troops in Iraq passed overwhelmingly early Friday, but angered some Democrats who said they felt pressured into backing President Bush's decision to go to war.

The Democrats said the Republican House leadership was forcing them to offer "unequivocal support" of Bush "for his firm leadership and decisive action in the conduct of military operations in Iraq" -- or reject a resolution showing support for soldiers and their families at a time of war.

"I trust the American people to see through this attempt to coerce endorsement of his preventive war doctrine," said Rep. John Conyers, D-Mich., who voted against the resolution.

The 392-11 House vote, with 22 members voting present, came after a sometimes angry and emotional debate. It contrasted with the few reservations expressed in a 99-0 Senate vote Thursday for a similar resolution with less effusive praise for the president. One senator, Zell Miller, R-Ga., was absent because of an illness in his family.

Senate Democratic leader Tom Daschle of South Dakota said Friday the Senate vote was "a wonderful opportunity for us to demonstrate that whatever differences we have had before this started are gone."

After Bush abandoned efforts Monday to obtain a U.N. resolution for the war, Daschle drew Republican fire for saying Bush had "failed so miserably at diplomacy that we're now forced to war."

In an interview on CBS's The Early Show, Daschle said he felt those critics had questioned his patriotism.

"It's unfortunate that in this time when we're fighting for democracy there are some in this country who would squelch it," he said. "But that's behind us. I think now the most important thing we can do is show the unity, show the support and show our great appreciation for the work and the effort of our troops."

In the House, Rep. Randy Cunningham, R-Calif., urged lawmakers not to let political differences damage a resolution supporting the troops. He recalled how his mother passed out when she learned he had been shot down as a Navy fighter pilot in Vietnam.

"In my district and in your district, I bet you, there are children right now weeping for their parents," he said, his voice cracking. "I know that different people believe certain ways. But let's not do it here, ladies and gentlemen."

Rep. Marilyn Musgrave, R-Colo., who has a son in the Navy, said she wanted Congress to give a message to service members: "Never again in this nation should we tell anyone who is serving that we don't appreciate what you've done."

Opponents of the resolution said they want to show support for American troops, but did not want to support a war they didn't believe in.

"In all good conscience, I cannot and will not vote for a resolution that supports and endorses a failed policy that led us to war," said Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga.

Despite the differences, both the Senate and House resolutions passed with support from some lawmakers who had voted against a resolution in October authorizing the war.

"When we go into battle, despite our differences on policy, when we go into battle, it will be one team, one fight," said House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi of California, who opposed that war resolution.

The October resolution authorizing war passed the House 296-133 and the Senate 77-23. Many Democrats with reservations about the war were reluctant to oppose a popular president on a national security issue one year after the Sept. 11 attacks -- and just weeks before tight midterm congressional elections.

Democrats have taken on Bush for failing to win broad international support for the war, for not providing estimates of the war's costs and for making Iraq a higher priority than other potential threats such as North Korea. But with the resolution authorizing force behind them, lawmakers had little leverage over war plans.

Republicans have remained solidly behind Bush.

"This war is justified by our own laws, by international laws and by the laws of nature, which state all people are created equal and with the right to live in liberty," said Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist of Tennessee.