

February 7, 2008 - Murtha Prepares War Bill

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By KIMBERLY HEFLING, Associated Press Writer

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A top Democrat said Thursday he is preparing legislation that would give President Bush the war funding he wants this year, but on the condition that troops leave Iraq by the end of the year.

Rep. John Murtha, D-Pa., chairman of the House defense appropriations subcommittee, said he'll propose that the House vote this March on the spending measure. In addition to the troop withdrawal, he said he'll ask for other conditions such as that all deploying troops must be fully trained and equipped.

Similar bills scraped by on party line votes in the House last year only to fail in the Senate, where Democrats hold a more narrow margin of control and 60 votes are needed to overcome procedural hurdles.

Murtha, speaking to reporters following a speech to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said he's confident this bill would pass the House, but he's not sure about the Senate.

Bush has requested about \$189 billion for military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Congress has approved only about \$87 billion, leaving the Defense Department \$102.5 billion short for this budget year, which began Oct. 1.

Democratic leaders have said they believe the military has enough money to last through April. They also suggested they want to hear first from Gen. David Petraeus, the top commander in Iraq, before approving more money. He is expected to testify by mid April, likely the week of April 7.

Murtha's comments suggest he is willing to give the military the money it needs, but he doesn't want to wait for Petraeus before he starts the next round of anti-war votes.

"What I told General Petraeus is you can't continue to spend money like he's spending it over there," Murtha said. "The public is fed up with it."

Defense Secretary Robert Gates warned Congress this week that if it doesn't approve the money soon, the military's ability to train the Iraqi and Afghan security forces and replace battle-damaged equipment would be in jeopardy.

"The Department of Defense is like the world's biggest supertanker," Gates told the House and Senate armed services committees on Wednesday. "It cannot turn on a dime and cannot be steered like a skiff."