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War Supplemental Conference Slips to Next Week

By Josh Rogin, CQ Staff

House leadership has decided not to hold a conference or a vote on the war supplemental spending bill this week, as leaders worked behind the scenes to secure enough Democratic votes to pass the measure absent GOP support.

Multiple lawmakers and aides confirmed the expected Thursday session to finalize negotiations over the bill (HR 2346), which is mainly to fund the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, will not occur until at least early next week. Democratic leaders were trying to convince as many as 18 of the 51 Democrats who voted against the House version in May to change their votes, but many said they would not do so.

Republicans are promising to vote against the conference report en mass if it includes \$5 billion worth of funding related to the International Monetary Fund. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said Thursday it would.

“I believe there are people in the Republican Party who support [the IMF funding]; they just don’t want to support it on this bill,” Pelosi said Thursday, “So we have to do that with all Democratic votes.”

She also pushed back against two key pillars of the House Republican leadership’s argument against the IMF funding, which is meant to accommodate an increased U.S. credit extension to the organization.

Responding to statements of Minority Leader John A. Boehner of Ohio that the IMF money is unrelated to the war spending measure, Pelosi said the IMF help was a “national security initiative” because it helps to alleviate sources of instability, such as poverty.

Pelosi also accused House Minority Whip Eric Cantor, R-Va., of fear mongering by putting out a statement warning that IMF assistance could somehow fund terrorism.

“I don’t know why anyone would say that the money is going to the hands of terrorists,” she said. “It simply is not based in fact and is a scare tactic, and most unfortunate.”

House Democratic aides said the conference on the supplemental bill probably would be early next week.

“We’re going to come up with a supplemental conference report in the next few days,” said Senate Majority leader Harry Reid, D-Nev.

Whipping Votes

House leaders had planned to hold the conference session Thursday and had said the House floor vote could be as early as Friday. But their effort to convince members to switch their no votes was still underway Thursday afternoon.

Although several high ranking Democrats have pledged to switch their no votes, including Reps. Barney Frank, D-Mass., and George Miller, D-Calif., many others have said they would not.

"It's a conscience vote," said Rep. Alan Grayson, D-Fla., who said he was inclined to not change his stance on the bill

"I haven't cracked yet," said Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass., who along with other anti-war Democrats has pledged to be against any war funding that does not provide for the withdrawal of troops from southwest Asia.

Still, many Democrats said that the leadership was lobbying them relatively intensely.

More Details Emerge

Meanwhile, more details of the near finalized supplemental conference report negotiations came out Thursday.

Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Daniel K. Inouye, D-Hawaii, said that the final bill will "in all likelihood" include money for 5 C-130 transport planes and 8 C-17 cargo planes, none of which was requested by the administration or in the Senate's bill. The House bill had sought 11 C-130s and the 8 C-17s.

Overall, the defense portion of the bill is expected to be about \$4 billion less than the House version but still billions above the Senate version and the administration request, House Appropriations Defense subcommittee chairman John P. Murtha, D-Pa., said.

As for the fate of prisoners at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, the conference report likely will include language barring the administration from transferring prisoners to U.S. soil for the remainder of the fiscal year, said House Appropriator James P. Moran, D-Va.

No money towards the president's effort to close the prisons will be in the conference report, Moran added. The president had requested \$80 million but neither the House nor Senate versions included those funds.

John M. Donnelly and Katherine Hunter contributed to this story

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