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Protestors stage sit in outside Markey's office

By Dan Baer/dbaer@cnc.com
Tuesday, February 20, 2007 - Updated: 05:28 PM EST

More than 20 local representatives from Veterans for Peace began a two-day sit-in protest at the Medford office of U.S. Rep. Edward Markey Tuesday morning, in an effort to sway House Democrats to vote against President Bush's proposed multi-billion dollar supplemental spending measure for the war in Iraq.

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While Markey did not attend the protest, he released a statement on the issue later in the day and agreed to meet with the group in private Feb. 21 to discuss their request. Campaign representatives provided protestors with coffee and doughnuts and held a press conference inside Markey's office.

Veterans for Peace, a non-profit anti-war organization composed of veterans and their family members, organized the sit-in as part of their "National Occupation Project," with which the group hopes to sway at least 218 House members. They said 218 votes would provide the

necessary majority to veto the president's supplemental budget request for additional military funding, thereby facilitating the end of the Iraq war.

Event organizer Nate Goldschlag, an Army veteran from Arlington, said the group is targeting members of Congress who have spoken out on the war and voted against past supplement requests.

"Our goal is simply for Rep. Markey to sign a pledge stating that he will vote 'no' on President Bush's \$100 billion supplemental spending request," he said. "We want Congress to stop funding for the war. There is enough money in the pipeline to get our troops safely home. This is a critical time. Congress needs to stand up and say 'no more funding for this war.'"

Markey's Chief Aide Joe Dalton told the group that Markey "intends to vote in a way that would bring a prompt end to the war," and said his office supports the group's goals. He said Markey looks "forward to meeting with the group and discussing how to address those goals."

Markey also released a statement pledging to vote against the budget if it is "another blank check to continue the war in Iraq." He also said he would continue to direct his energy toward "getting a majority vote in Congress that places meaningful conditions on the President's request, which are concrete steps to disengage from Iraq, redeploy and bring our troops home."

Protestors arrived at the congressman's office in Medford Square when it opened at 9 a.m. on Feb. 20 and said they would stay until the 5 p.m. closing time, protesting inside and outside, reading names of the 3,140 American troops killed during the war to date. Group representatives said they planned to continue the protest again on Wednesday morning straight through the meeting with Markey, scheduled for 6 p.m.

Many protestors donned signs and banners protesting the war. Some said they were protesting in an effort to end the war before their loved ones could be re-deployed for second and third tours in the Middle East.

"It is unbearable to be a military family. To think that we could lose someone so close to us forever because of an illegal, immoral war," said Nina Douglass, a Jamaica Plain resident whose stepson John Paul has done three tours outside of Fallujah. "He is a young man of honor, and that will guide his decisions that he makes."

Melrose native Jackie Wattenberg held an "Impeach Bush" sign as she stood in the cold



Protestors from Veterans for Peace hold a banner outside of Congressman Edward Markey's Medford office on Feb. 20. (Photo by Dan Baer)



Jamaica Plain native Nina Douglass holds a picture of her stepson John Paul at the Veterans for Peace protest outside of Congressman Edward Markey's Medford office Feb. 20. John Paul has done three tours in Iraq and is still at risk of being called to a fourth. (Photo by Dan Baer)

among the other protestors on High Street. She said she is hoping Congress will “step up” and stop future warfare.

“We worry about terror, but is killing Muslims in Iraq any way to stop terror?” she said. “Bush keeps saying that the Iraqi people want peace, that they want to live in a peaceful environment. Well, all he is bringing is war and death and destruction to a country that overall did nothing to us. We have to be the leader of the world for human rights and for peace. Then there wouldn't be such a drive for hatred and terrorism.”

If Congress votes against the president's supplemental budget request in coming weeks, anti-war advocates believe he will have no option but to pull troops out of Iraq and effectively end the war. Protestors said they hope to see all troops back in America by July.

“For the people who think that voting against this is unpatriotic, I say that is nonsense,” said Goldschlag. “By bringing the troops home now, and not wasting any more lives, we are doing all we can to support them.”

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