

AP Associated Press

**Levin:
Senate
will
keep
paying
for
war**

Sun Apr 8, 6:53 PM ET

WASHINGTON - The Senate will not stop paying for the



AP Photo: In this photo provided by ABC News, Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Carl Levin, D-Mich,....

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Iraq war or relent from insisting that President Bush keep pressing the Baghdad government for a negotiated end to the violence, a top Democrat said Sunday.

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Michigan Sen. Carl Levin (news, bio, voting record), the Senate Armed Service Committee chairman, took issue with an effort by Majority Leader Harry Reid (news, bio, voting record) to limit war spending after March 2008 as a way to end U.S. involvement.

"We're not going to vote to cut funding, period," Levin said. "But what we should do, and we're going to do, is continue to press this president to put some pressure on the Iraqi leaders to reach a political settlement."

Bush has asked Congress for more than \$100 billion to pay for the wars in Iraq and

Afghanistan this year. The House and Senate have approved the money, but their bills seek to wind down the war by including timelines for troops to come home — something Bush will not accept.

The Senate bill would require a U.S. troop exit to begin within 120 days, with a completion goal of March 31, 2008. The House bill would order all combat troops out by Sept. 1, 2008.

Democratic leaders have not negotiated a final version to send the president. Bush has made clear he will veto it, which will start the process all over.

"We're going to fund the troops. We always have," Levin said. He added, "We're very strong in supporting the troops, but we're also strong on putting pressure on the Iraqi leaders to live up to their own commitments without that political settlement on their part, there is no military solution."

Sen. Arlen Specter (news, bio, voting record), R-Pa., said "there have not been sufficient efforts at discussions" between lawmakers and White House. "We cannot leave the troops unfunded in the field. That just can't be done. And Congress is not in a position to micromanage the war. But we do not have any good alternative. Right now, you can't see the end of the tunnel, let alone a light at the end of the tunnel."

Specter said he was not prepared "to withdraw funding at this time. But my patience, like many others, is growing very thin."

Reid, D-Nev., said last week that if Bush rejects the Democrats' legislation, he would join with Sen. Russ Feingold (news, bio, voting record), D-Wis., one of the party's most liberal members who has long called to end the war by denying funding for it. Reid's latest proposal would give the president one year to get troops out, ending funding for combat operations after March 31, 2008.

"We can keep the benchmarks part of the bill without saying that the troops must begin to come back within four months," Levin said. "If that doesn't work and the president vetoes because of that, and he will, then that part of it is removed, because we're going to fund the troops."

"And what we will leave will be benchmarks, for instance, which would require the president to certify to the American people if the Iraqis are meeting the benchmarks for political settlement, which they, the Iraqi leaders, have set for themselves," he said.

Sen. Jon Kyl (news, bio, voting record), R-Ariz., said it is unacceptable to set a goal and timetable for withdrawing the troops. He said lawmakers who support that are basing it on a false notion that the Iraqis are not listening to the United States.

"I was over there about a month ago. We saw the reaction of the Iraqis. They are cooperating with us. So that's old news that they're not cooperating. That's one of the reasons this new surge strategy is working," he said.

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"You're also sending a message to our troops and to our enemies, who know that all they have to do is wait the conflict out. This is not the way to try to micromanage a war from the U.S. Senate," he said.

Levin and Kyl were interviewed on "This Week" on ABC and Specter appeared on "Late Edition" on CNN.

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