

Gulf buildup worries Congress members

WASHINGTON - Members of Congress expressed increasing worry Monday over President Bush's latest moves in the Persian Gulf, warning that he is stepping out ahead of his carefully created international consensus and that Americans as well as allies may balk at going to war.

"If George Bush wants his presidency to die in the Arabian desert, he's going to get his wish," Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, D-N.Y., a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, said in an interview.

Bush's spokesman Marlin Fitzwater quickly retorted, "Not a shot's been fired. What are these guys talking about?"

Fitzwater said Bush has no intention of leaving Congress out of his decisionmaking.

"They know what we're doing," Fitzwater said. "They've been kept informed every step of the way. It's appropriate that they be cautious, that they express these concerns. There's nothing wrong with that."

Following Bush's announcement last week that the United States will begin a huge new deployment to gain an offensive capability in the region, the tone on Capitol Hill has shifted

from cautious support to apprehension.

Speaking in Albany, Ga., on Monday, Democratic Sen. Wyche Fowler said Congress should come back into session after Thanksgiving to debate the issue and to better define America's goals, namely, "What will constitute victory, how long it might take, and, more importantly, to pursue every economic and diplomatic strategy so that hopefully we can eliminate the military option."

Rep. William Broomfield, R-Mich., the senior GOP member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, has voiced concern over the president's failure to consult broadly with Congress on the latest deployment.

But Fitzwater said public support for Bush "has been very strong."

"We don't want to go to war. President Bush will say the same things these congressmen are saying — be cautious, follow the policy, support the U.N. resolutions, consult with Congress," Fitzwater said.

Bush has said he still hopes economic sanctions backed by United Nations resolutions and supported by most foreign nations will persuade Iraq to leave Kuwait without fighting.

“**We don't want to go to war. President Bush will say the same things these congressmen are saying-- be cautious, follow the policy, support the U.N. resolutions, consult with Congress.**”

Fitzwater
presidential spokesman

One senior congressional aide, speaking on condition of anonymity, said lawmakers who have spent time among the voters in recent weeks are reflecting public unease with the gulf situation. The aide predicted that Bush would come under heavier fire from the Democratic-controlled Congress in the coming weeks.

Senior administration officials, including Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Colin Powell, are to brief lawmakers today for the first time since Congress adjourned Oct. 28. And members of the bipartisan leadership were scheduled to meet with Bush at the White House on Wednesday.

Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Sam Nunn, D-Ga., said he was not consulted about the latest troop buildup and received a call only Friday, the day after Bush announced it publicly.

"I haven't been told reasons why we have to rush this thing," Nunn said in a weekend television interview. "Why not let the embargo work? . . . War should be the last option."

Nunn said Bush has failed to explain, either to Congress or the American people, why the liberation of Kuwait is "an interest so important we're willing to spend thousands of American lives, if necessary."

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The Daily Nebraskan (USPS 144-080) is published by the UNL Publications Board, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE, Monday through Friday during the academic year; weekly during summer sessions. Readers are encouraged to submit story ideas and comments to the Daily Nebraskan by phoning 472-1763 between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. The public also has access to the Publications Board. For information, contact Bill Vobejda, 436-9993. Subscription price is \$45 for one year. Postmaster: Send address changes to the Daily Nebraskan, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588-0448. Second-class postage paid at Lincoln, NE. ALL MATERIAL COPYRIGHT 1990 DAILY NEBRASKAN

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Social Security now off-limits to budget cutters

WASHINGTON - Monthly Social Security checks are now virtually off-limits to politicians trying to cut the federal deficit because of a budget shortfall calculation change.

The change is a relief for 39 million elderly, handicapped and other Americans who rely on the \$265 billion program. But critics say the shift formally removes the biggest single domestic program from shouldering the burden of future budget cuts. As a result, other federal endeavors would have to bear a greater brunt of whatever reductions are made, they say.

As part of their budget deal last month, the Bush administration and congressional leaders agreed to take Social Security out of the calculations used to determine the federal deficit.

Proponents said with the pension program running an annual surplus of tens of billions of dollars, the overall budget gap was being shrunk artificially under the old system.



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