

# House passes Medicare drug bill

## Legislation faces presidential veto

By JIM KUHNHEHN  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

### WASHINGTON

Defying a presidential veto threat, the House approved legislation Friday directing the government to negotiate with drug companies in an effort to lower prices for Medicare recipients.

Democrats, winding up an opening-week legislative rush after taking control of Congress, said the measure would help the nation's seniors. The Bush administration called it an unwise government intrusion in a system that is already working well.

The 255-170 vote was short of the two-thirds margin that would be needed to override a presidential veto. The legislation still must pass the Senate, where it could undergo significant changes or be defeated.

The Senate, meanwhile, regained momentum on ethics legislation after running aground Thursday on an effort to shine more light on special-projects earmarks. Senators voted 87-0 Friday for a measure that would deny pensions to members of Congress convicted of serious crimes.

The House drug legislation directs the secretary of Health and Human Services to bargain directly with drug companies, altering a fundamental provision of the 2003 law that created the Medicare drug benefit for seniors.

That Republican-inspired law specifically left government out of the pricing decisions and placed the negotiations over cost in the hands of drug companies and the private insurers that sponsor the Medicare plans.

"Let us not solely entrust the negotiations of drug prices to the very companies who profit from the sales of these drugs," said Rep. Jo Ann Emerson of Missouri, one of 24 Republicans to vote for the new legislation.

Not a single Democrat voted against the bill and all 170 no votes were cast by Republicans.

The legislation underscored one of the more profound differences between the political parties — the Republicans' faith in the ability of the markets to best serve consumers and the Democrats' belief that government can sometimes do better.

"It allows the secretary to do what he was hired to do, to put the interest of the American people first," House Democratic Leader Steny Hoyer of Maryland said.

"If passed," countered Ron Lewis, R-Ky., "this bill would allow the federal government to get into the medicine cabinets of millions of Medicare beneficiaries across the country."

## THE WAR AGAINST TERRORISM



Iraqis detained in a joint U.S. and Iraqi army raid sit blindfolded in the back of a truck in Muqadadiyah, Iraq, on Monday. President Bush has said that a crackdown on militias is critical to U.S. success in Iraq, but Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has yet to voice support for that plan.

# Supporters of Iraq plan speak out

By ANNE FLAHERTY  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

### WASHINGTON

Senators who back President Bush's plan to send more troops to Iraq tried Friday to bolster support for the unpopular strategy.

A day after Bush's proposal was pelted with bipartisan criticism on Capitol Hill, Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., a leading presidential contender for 2008, said he supports the plan. He tried to shift the burden to war critics.



BUSH

McCain said those advocating the start of a troop withdrawal, which includes many Democrats, "have a responsibility to tell us what they believe are the consequences of withdrawal in Iraq. If we walk away from Iraq, we'll be back, possibly in the context of a wider war in the world's most volatile region."

In a second day of hearings, there was still plenty of congressional skepticism about Bush's strategy, which would add 21,500 U.S. troops to the 132,000 already in Iraq.

Bush struck a defiant note in an interview to be televised Sunday by CBS on "60 Minutes." Asked if he believes he has the authority to send additional troops to Iraq no matter what Congress wants to do, Bush said: "I think I've got, in this situation, I do, yeah. And I fully understand they will ... they could try to stop me from doing it but I've made my decision, and we're going forward."

Democratic leaders in the House and Senate intend to conduct symbolic votes in coming days to demonstrate the extent of opposition to Bush's troop increase. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., told fellow Democrats in a closed-door meeting she intends to allow the Senate, where several Republicans have been vocal in their criticism of the president, to begin debate first.

Besides McCain, others on the Armed Services panel voicing support for Bush included Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut, elected as an independent last fall when Democrats backed an anti-war candidate, and Republicans John Cornyn of Texas, Jeff Sessions of Alabama and Saxby Chambliss of Georgia.

# Waiting on al-Maliki

## Iraqi prime minister yet to assure Bush of his support

By STEVEN R. HURST  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

**BAGHDAD, Iraq**  
President Bush called a crackdown on militias critical to success in Iraq, but Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has been noticeably silent, perhaps because the plan would mean confronting the same violent radicals who have been helping Shiites expand their political dominance.

### ANALYSIS

In announcing a new Iraq policy Wednesday night, Bush said earlier efforts to tame bloodshed in Baghdad had been snarled by "political and sectarian interference (that) prevented Iraqi and American forces from going into neighborhoods that are home to those fueling the ... violence."

"This time, Iraqi and American forces will have a green light to enter those neighborhoods," Bush said. "Prime Minister Maliki has pledged that political or sectarian interference will not be tolerated."

But whatever he said in private, Al-Maliki, a devout Shiite, so far has avoided making that pledge in public. Instead, he has stuck with formulaic utterances, saying that anyone illegally carrying weapons would be dealt with harshly.

Announcing his vision of the new security plan last Saturday, al-Maliki said he would fight against "safe haven for any outlaws, regardless of (their) sectarian or political affiliation."

WASHINGTON — Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton and two other lawmakers are headed to Iraq this weekend.

Clinton, a Democrat from New York, is traveling with Sen. Evan Bayh, D-Ind., who had also eyed the 2008 race but opted out, and Rep. John McHugh, a Republican from upstate New York.

The three, all members of armed services

committees, are to meet with top Iraqi officials and U.S. military commanders. Their trip will also take them for a visit to Afghanistan.

Bayh stressed he wants to meet with top Iraqi officials and judge for himself how serious they are about using their own troops and leadership to stabilize the country.

"The essential truth in Iraq is that we can't do this for them," said Bayh.

"We need to take away their security blanket."

gences at the Defense Intelligence Agency. "In my view, Maliki is one of any number of Shiite Arab activists who are seeking to consolidate Shiite control."

The radical Shiites already were predicting Bush's plan was doomed.

"We reject Bush's new strategy and we think it will fail," said Abdul-Razzaq al-Nidawi, a senior official in al-Sadr's office in the Shiite holy city of Najaf.

"We call upon the American people to oppose sending more of their sons to Iraq so that they will not be flown back in coffins," he said.

Al-Maliki has never sought an increased U.S. military footprint in Iraq. He has argued for the Americans to pull out of the cities and leave security to the Iraqi Army, which is 80 percent Shiite.



BAYH

# Official says detained Iranians were working at liaison office

By KIM GAMEL  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

### BAGHDAD, Iraq

Five Iranians detained by U.S.-led forces were working in a decade-old government liaison office that was in the process of being upgraded to a consulate, the Iraqi foreign minister said Friday.

Tehran condemned the raid in the Kurdish-controlled northern city of Irbil and urged Iraq to push for the Iranians' release.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari

said the building where the Iranians were detained Thursday had operated with Iraqi government approval for 10 years.

"We are now in the process of changing these offices to consulates," he said. "It is not a new office. This liaison office has been there for a long time."

He also echoed concerns the U.S. and Iran were dragging Iraq into their fight.

"We don't want Iraq to be a battleground for settling scores with other countries," Zebari, a Kurd, told CNN.

The diplomatic tussle came at an unwelcome time for the United States as

President Bush faces criticism over his new strategy for ending the violence in Iraq. Bush also vowed to isolate Iran and Syria, which the U.S. has accused of fueling attacks in Iraq.

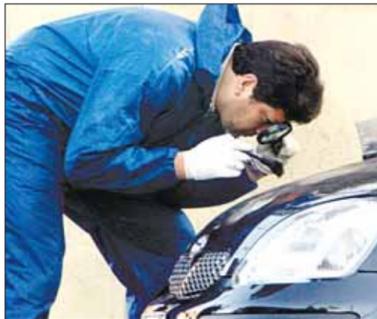
Zebari's Iranian counterpart, Manouchehr Mottaki, called on the Iraqi government to secure the release of the five Iranians, Iranian state television reported. "Such illegal and adventurous acts by the U.S. should be stopped," the broadcast quoted Mottaki as saying.

Mottaki condemned the raid, saying it contravened the Vienna Convention.

"This behavior by the United States contradicts its claims of providing security in Iraq," he was quoted as saying.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Mikhail Kamynin also harshly criticized the detentions, calling them a "flagrant violation" of international conventions.

"It's absolutely unacceptable when the military storms a foreign consular office on the territory of another state," Kamynin said. "The unlawful actions by the U.S. servicemen mark an open abuse of a mandate issued to the multinational forces in Iraq."



A police anti-terrorist officer investigates a car outside the U.S. Embassy in Athens, Greece, on Friday. An anti-tank shell was fired at the embassy early Friday but caused no injuries.

# U.S. Embassy in Greece attacked, no injuries reported

By DEREK GATOPOULOS  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

### ATHENS, Greece

A rocket-propelled grenade slammed into the U.S. Embassy on Friday, causing limited damage and no injuries but reviving fears of a resurgence of far-left Greek militant groups that carried out deadly attacks over three decades.

The shoulder-fired missile narrowly missed a large blue-and-white U.S. seal on the embassy's facade and damaged a third-floor bathroom near the ambassador's office.

U.S. Ambassador Charles Ries called

the attack "very serious" and said no warning had been given.

"There can be no justification for such a senseless act of violence," he told reporters outside the cordoned-off embassy, which officials closed for the day. "The good news is no one was hurt and (there was) minimal damage."

Greek authorities blamed domestic militant groups that have carried out a bombings against police and government buildings despite a crackdown on terrorism before the Athens Olympics in 2004.

Police are examining the authenticity of two calls claiming responsibility

from the group Revolutionary Struggle, which has carried out six bombings since 2003. The shadowy group has criticized the United States in past statements, citing treatment of prisoners at the U.S. military detention center in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

"It is very likely that this is the work of a domestic group," Public Order Minister Vyron Polydoros said. "We believe this effort to revive terrorism is deplorable and will not succeed."

State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said the United States also saw no early signs of international involvement. The Pentagon received a

report on the attack but not a request for any action, a U.S. military official said.

The blast shortly before 6 a.m. shattered windows in nearby buildings. Traffic in the downtown area came to a standstill for three hours as police blocked streets around the building to gather evidence — dusting cars for fingerprints and gathering discarded chewing gum and cigarette butts from the street.

The government said it was seeking permission from the courts to view video from traffic cameras, which under Greek privacy laws is officially excluded from the police investigation.

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