

THE WAR AGAINST TERRORISM

Keeping their word

Democrats work to fulfill campaign promises as anti-terror legislation speeds toward House passage



The 110th Congress is sworn in at the U.S. Capitol in Washington on Thursday. Democrats are working to make good on their campaign promises. Anti-terror legislation made it easily through the House on Tuesday on a bipartisan vote of 299-128.

By DAVID ESPO
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON
Anti-terror legislation sailed through the House on Tuesday, the first in a string of measures designed to fulfill campaign promises made by Democrats last fall.

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President's Iraq plan seems familiar.

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Patterned on recommendations of the commission that investigated the Sept. 11 attacks, the far-reaching measure includes commitments for inspection of all cargo carried aboard passenger aircraft and on ships bound for the United States.

The vote was a bipartisan 299-128, and Speaker Nancy Pelosi took the rostrum to announce the passage of the first legislation to clear under the new Democratic majority. Democrats said the bill's

Democrats begin: Anti-terror legislation passed the House on Tuesday, as Democrats met the first of their campaign promises from the fall.

The proposal: Patterned on the 9/11 Commission recommendations, the bill calls for inspection of all cargo carried aboard passenger

passage was a top priority. "Our first and highest duty as members of this Congress is to protect the American people, to defend our homeland and to strengthen our national security," said Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md.

Several Republicans criticized the legislation as little more than political posturing in the early hours of a new Democratic-controlled Congress.

Democrats want to "look aggressive on homeland security. This bill will waste billions of dollars, and possibly harm homeland security by gum-

aircraft and on ships bound for the United States.

Republicans react: Several Republicans criticized the legislation as political posturing. The Bush administration said it could not support the measure as drafted but stopped short of a veto threat.

ming up progress already under way," said Rep. Hal Rogers, R-Ky.

In a written statement, the Bush administration listed several objections and said it could not support the measure as drafted but stopped short of a veto threat.

Democrats have pledged to make fiscal responsibility a priority in the new Congress, but they advanced the bill, their first of the year, without even a bare-bones accounting of the estimated cost.

The funding will require follow-up legislation.

Legislation introduced in the Senate a year ago to implement the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission had a price tag of more than \$53 billion over five years.

The terrorism legislation is the first of six measures the House is expected to pass in its first 100 hours in session under Democratic control.

Next up is an increase in the minimum wage, set for passage today, followed by relaxation of the limits on stem cell research conducted with federal funds and a measure directing the administration to negotiate with drug companies for lower prices for Medicare recipients.

Next week, the Democrats intend to clear legislation to cut the interest rate on student loans and to curtail tax breaks for the energy industry.

Each of the six bills would go to the Senate, and it could be months, if then, before they reach the White House.

AT A GLANCE

Iraqi, American raid kills 50 militants

By STEVEN R. HURST
AND QASSIM ABDULZAHRA
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD, Iraq

U.S. jets screamed low over the capital and helicopter gunships swooped in to pound a central Baghdad battleground Tuesday, supporting Iraqi and American troops in a daylong fight that officials said killed 50 insurgents in a militant Sunni Arab stronghold.

The battle raged on Haifa Street about 1½ miles north of the heavily fortified Green Zone, home to the U.S. Embassy and other facilities, on the eve of President Bush's expected announcement that he would send 20,000 more soldiers to Iraq despite growing opposition on Capitol Hill.

It was the second major confrontation on Haifa Street in the four days since Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki announced a new drive to rid Baghdad of sectarian fighters.

The U.S. military said about 1,000 Iraqi and U.S. soldiers carried out "targeted raids to capture multiple targets, disrupt insurgent activity and restore Iraqi Security Forces control of North Haifa Street."



U.S. military Apache helicopters fly as smoke rises over Baghdad's Haifa Street area in Iraq on Tuesday. Iraqi soldiers backed by U.S. troops battled gunmen in central Baghdad on Tuesday, and explosions were heard in the area, police, witnesses and the U.S. military said.

U.S. launches attack on al-Qaida in Somalia

By SALAD DUHUL
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MOGADISHU, Somalia

Attack helicopters strafed suspected al-Qaida fighters in southern Somalia on Tuesday, witnesses said, following two days of airstrikes by U.S. forces, the first U.S. offensives in the African country since 18 American soldiers were killed here in 1993.

In Washington, a U.S. intelligence official said American forces killed five to 10 people in an attack on one target in southern Somalia believed to be associated with al-Qaida.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the operation's sensitivity, said a small number of others present, perhaps four or five, were wounded.

A Somali lawmaker said 31 civilians, including a newlywed couple, died in Tuesday's assault by two helicopters near Afmadow, a town in a forested area close to the Kenyan border. The report could not be independently verified.

A Somali Defense Ministry official described the helicopters as American, but witnesses told The Associated Press they could not make out identification markings on the craft. Washington officials had no comment on the helicopter strike.

INDIANA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

State schools chief seeking 4 percent boost in budget

Additional \$144M requested for full-day 'K'

By DEANNA MARTIN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

INDIANAPOLIS

The Indiana Department of Education wants a 4 percent increase in basic school funding in each of the next two years, a total of more than \$300 million over current levels, plus an extra \$144 million for full-day kindergarten.

The agency's budget requests total more than \$8.64 billion in state funding, roughly a third of estimated \$26 billion available for state government to spend over the next two-year budget cycle.

Suellen Reed, the state superintendent of public instruction, told the budget-writing House Ways and Means Committee on Tuesday that a 4 percent increase over the 2006-07 base level of school funding is in line with inflation. The increase means the department's total request for basic school funding is \$7.9 billion over two years.

"Our number one objective, as it has been for the last many years, is to make sure that our tuition support is sufficient — to make sure that our schools not only can keep the doors open and the lights on and the teachers working, but also that we are making sure we attend to the needs of our students," Reed said.

The terrorism legislation is the first of six measures the House is expected to pass in its first 100 hours in session under Democratic control.

Republican Gov. Mitch Daniels has said he will propose an aggressive increase for basic education funding, although he has not released specific numbers. The Daniels administration is slated to present its budget proposal to lawmakers Wednesday.

Democrats who control the House say they will push for increases in school funding. They say the current budget, approved by a Republican-controlled legislature, meant funding cuts for more than half of Indiana's school districts.

Reed, a Republican, said school districts also face growing health



Superintendent of Public Instruction Suellen Reed presents the budget for the Indiana Department of Education at the Statehouse in Indianapolis on Tuesday.

care expenses, utility bills and other increased costs.

"Our recommendation makes sense," she said. "Schools have had a very difficult time over the last several years."

Reed urged lawmakers to fund the full-day kindergarten plan Daniels has touted. The plan phases in optional, state-funded full-day kindergarten over three years, starting with the state's neediest children this year.

Advocates say full-day programs give teachers more time to help struggling students prepare for more advanced work, while keeping bright students interested in school.

But Rep. Eric Turner, R-Marion, questioned how many students arrive for first grade unprepared.

"I don't understand how we can fix a problem if we don't know what the problem is," Turner said.

In some districts, a majority of pupils may not be ready for first grade, Reed said, although she said she did not have an exact figure because young children are not tested upon entering school.

Bill to give all voters voice on bond issues

By MIKE SMITH
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

INDIANAPOLIS

All registered voters in affected taxing jurisdictions could take part in a petition process to decide whether school districts or local governments can borrow money for bonded projects under legislation endorsed by a Senate committee on Tuesday.

The Senate Tax Committee approved the bill in hopes of ultimately complying with an Indiana Court of Appeals ruling that said limiting the petition and remonstrance process for school bond projects was unconstitutional because only property owners could participate.

But lawmakers acknowledged concerns that the proposed fix could disenfranchise some people from the petition process, such as those who own property in a taxing district where a bond is proposed but who live outside the district.

The state's petition and remonstrance process allows those for and against a bond worth \$2 million or more to finance school or other local government projects to collect signatures from property owners, with the side collecting the most prevailing. But the appeals court said the process was a de facto election and there-

fore cannot be limited only to property owners.

Senate Tax Chairman Luke Kenley, R-Noblesville, said the legislation would put the state in line with the appeals court ruling. Some school groups said they supported it because renters also pay property taxes through their landlords.

"We believe it helps parents (who rent) feel like they are part of the process and have an investment in the new building and new piece of property, whatever it is that is the investment that becomes part of the bond issue," said Gerald Mohr with the Indiana Association of School Principals.

But Therese Brown, Allen County clerk of courts and co-chairwoman of the Indiana Clerks Association, said there were procedural questions in how a new remonstrance process including all registered voters would work. She also had concerns about some property owners being barred from future remonstrances.

"I could live in Florida, I could live out of the district, I could live just across the line and technically I own property (in the taxing district)," she said. "They wouldn't be able to have any say so."

Kenley said there was ample time in the session to work on the bill as it proceeds.

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