

# The Nation.

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## Lobbying for Peace

by PETER DREIER

All social movements need an "outside" strategy and an "inside" strategy. The growing number of people participating in rallies and marches in opposition to President George W. Bush's plans to invade Iraq is heartening. The participants in protest events have included large numbers of ordinary Americans with no experience as activists and no ideological ax to grind. They think Bush's war plans are premature or reckless.

But most Americans who oppose Bush's war plans don't show up for these protests. Polls show that since last October, when--under the pressure of the November elections--Congress voted to give Bush the broad authority he asked for to use military force against Iraq, and to act alone if necessary, Americans have become more ambivalent, hesitant and skeptical about going to war with Iraq. In growing numbers, Americans now oppose giving a free hand to a President with an itchy trigger finger. Without an "inside" strategy that gives people more conventional ways to voice their dissent, however, the peace movement will appear smaller and more marginal than it really is.

The street protests, along with petitions, newspaper and TV ads, and bumper stickers, have forced Bush to proceed more slowly than he and his advisers had planned. But ultimately, only Congress can effectively stop the Bush Administration from waging war--directly, by tying Bush's hands, or indirectly, by reflecting the public's mounting aversion to war with Iraq. Antiwar forces have begun to acknowledge this reality by focusing attention on Congress's role and mobilizing support for resolutions to limit Bush's options.

"We have to put up as many obstacles as we can," explained Erik Leaver, a foreign policy expert at the Institute for Policy Studies. "We need to pressure members of Congress to come out against the war. Legislation gives the grassroots something to grasp onto."

The strategy seems to be having an effect. On January 24, as Bush was putting the finishing touches on his State of the Union speech, 129 Democratic members of the House of Representatives--more than a quarter of all members--sent him a letter asking him "to use the opportunity provided in the upcoming State of the Union Address to offer assurances both to the American people and the international community that the United States remains committed to the diplomatic approach and comprehensive inspections process agreed to in the UN Security Council."

The letter, written by Representatives Sherrod Brown of Ohio and Ron Kind of Wisconsin, called on Bush to "sufficiently weigh future decisions regarding Iraq on the assessment" given by the UN weapons inspectors, "including additional inspection time and resources as appropriate." Kind was among the twenty-six signers who had voted for the war resolution last October. These original signers changed their minds as a result of grassroots organizing and public opinion in their districts--an indication that the antiwar movement outside the Beltway is being felt inside it, even though only a few major newspapers published stories about the letter.

Since then, some members of Congress have taken the next step to reassert Congress's authority in the war-making process. Senators Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts and Robert Byrd of West Virginia, and Representatives Pete DeFazio of Oregon and Ron Paul of Texas, have filed resolutions to limit Bush's room for maneuver. The Kennedy/Byrd resolution requires Bush to go back to Congress for approval before using military force in Iraq. The DeFazio/Paul bill--which was filed within hours of Secretary of State Colin Powell's February 4 speech to the UN and immediately drew thirty co-sponsors--repeals last October's use-of-force vote.

No one expects that all 133 House members and twenty-three senators who voted against the war resolution last October will immediately sign on to these bills. Too many of them--Democrats as well as Republicans--have been intimidated by the Bush Administration's willingness to challenge the patriotism of anyone who opposes its march to war. But the legislation provides the antiwar movement with an organizing tool to reach Americans with a simple message: Write your senator and representative to co-sponsor a resolution to limit Bush's recklessness in getting the country into a war most people don't want.

A piece of legislation makes the stakes clear and forces elected officials to answer the question: Which side are you on? It provides antiwar advocates involved with churches, labor unions and other groups an opportunity to get their organizations to support the bill, their leaders to speak out and their elected representatives to sign on. It provides local activists with a tool to lobby city councils to urge their congresspersons to co-sponsor the legislation. (As of February 5, at least sixty-six city councils in twenty-four states--as well as the Maine State Senate and the Hawaii House of Representatives--had passed antiwar resolutions.) Newspaper columnists and editorial writers will have to take sides.

As the antiwar movement builds momentum, each day the number of Congressional co-sponsors will grow. A steadily increasing groundswell of opposition might even give some of the Democratic Party's presidential hopefuls the backbone to speak out strongly and forcefully against Bush's plans for Iraq, even if they support some aspects of the war on terrorism or some of Bush's other foreign policy goals.

The initial leaders of today's antiwar movement were schooled in the politics of street protest. They skillfully used the Internet to mobilize large public demonstrations that attracted many middle-of-the-road Americans who view Bush's war plans as reckless. In growing numbers, people are adding their names (and contributions) to newspaper ads and petitions. A month ago these were primarily longtime peace activists and intellectuals, but as the national mood has turned more skeptical of Bush's plans, a broader range of people have been willing to put their names on these ads and petitions and join street protests.

Peace activists have also been behind other creative tactics, including last month's full-page letter in the *Wall Street Journal*, "A Republican Dissent on Iraq," supported by business executives, and the thirty-second soundbites starring actress Susan Sarandon and former US Ambassador to Iraq Ed Peck with the message: "Why rush into war? Let the inspections work," sponsored by [www.truemajority.com](http://www.truemajority.com), a group started by Ben & Jerry's founder Ben Cohen.

The protests, rallies and ads should continue, but their target and message should now be aimed not only at Bush but also at getting Congress to tie Bush's hands. Unless the antiwar movement can reach out beyond those willing to march in the streets, and provide people with more conventional ways to express their concern and outrage, it will fail to fulfill its potential to galvanize much of Middle America, which doesn't trust Bush's eagerness to put American soldiers and tax dollars in harm's way on behalf of his holy crusade.