

House votes to give Bush war authority

Jill Zuckman

Chicago Tribune (KRT)

WASHINGTON — Fearful of Saddam Hussein and his dangerous weaponry, a somber House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly Thursday to allow President Bush to embark on war if Iraq fails to abandon its biological, chemical and nuclear arms programs.

The Senate was expected to follow with a similarly strong vote authorizing Bush to unilaterally launch a preemptive strike.

Despite passions running high on both sides and quarrels over whether the United States must work more closely with the United Nations, the outcome of Thursday's vote was not in

doubt. The large margin, 296-133 in the House, is expected to bolster Secretary of State Colin Powell as he works to persuade the U.N. Security Council to demand a new round of unfettered weapons inspections in Iraq.

The resolution, the result of a bipartisan compromise brokered by House Democratic Leader Richard Gephardt, gives the president most of the power he sought. But the resolution also calls on the president to exhaust all diplomatic efforts before using force, and it narrows Bush's focus to Iraq, rather than the whole Middle East as the White House initially proposed.

Finally, the measure requires the president to report to Congress every 60 days if he does go to war.

Thursday's action comes 11 years after Congress first decided to take on the Iraqi president for his invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. Back then, the atmosphere was markedly different.

Congress had not directly confronted the prospect of sending American soldiers into combat since World War II. Lawmakers were anguished over the responsibility and conflicted about whether to give diplomacy more time or to turn to military force. This time, the debate over the Iraqi dictator was colored by the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, fear that Hussein could develop nuclear weapons to be used against the United States, and the

looming midterm election.

Even Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, who had spent weeks voicing grave concerns about the president's handling of Iraq, voted to give him the authority to use force.

Many lawmakers insisted that the resolution did not mean that the nation would soon be at war. Indeed, Bush has said he has not yet decided whether to activate the military.

"It is not an act of war. It is an act to deter war," said Sen. John Warner, R-Va.

But other lawmakers said that Congress was making a monumental mistake.

Sen. Robert Byrd, D-W.Va., said Congress was repeating history by not

asking enough questions and not taking enough time before granting a president's request. Thirty-eight years ago, Byrd said, he voted for the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, which gave President Lyndon Johnson a free hand to expand the war in Vietnam.

"It was this resolution that led to the deaths of 58,000 Americans and 150,000 Americans being wounded in action," Byrd said. "After all of that carnage, we began to learn that in voting for the Tonkin Gulf resolution, we were basing our votes on bad information."

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Sniper kills again, enlarges range

Francis X. Clines and Sarah Kershaw
New York Times

MANASSAS, Va. — The sniper preying on the Washington area killed his seventh victim on Wednesday night, a man who was struck down outside his car at a gas station here, the police confirmed Thursday. The gunman remained at large.

"It's a very frightening case," said Chief Charlie Deane of Prince William County in confirming ballistic evidence that the sniper had once more needed only a single rifle shot to kill an unaware victim from afar.

In a nine-day spree of terrifying marksmanship, the sniper has slain seven people and critically wounded two, stalking his victims from 100 yards or more with a high-powered hunting or military rifle as they went about mundane daily errands.

The latest victim was identified as Dean H. Meyers, a 53-year-old civil engineer from Gaithersburg, Md., who had stopped for gas on his way home from his job here.

Meyers was shot once in the head. He crumpled to the ground by the gas pumps of the Battlefield Sunoco station just off Interstate 66, about 30 miles southwest of Washington.

"We have witnesses we think are of value," Deane said.

This might mean relative progress in comparison to the sniper's earlier assaults, where he eluded detection in shooting his victims from cover

with no eyewitnesses coming forward. The only witness until Wednesday told the police of seeing a white cargo truck speed from one shooting scene a week ago in Montgomery County, Md.

The sniper began enlarging his range of fire after he killed his first six victims last week. They were unaware of being stalked as they pursued simple activities — mowing a lawn, cleaning a car, taking a constitutional — within a five-mile circle of the suburbs of Montgomery County and northern Washington.

On Friday, the gunman ranged 50 miles south to Fredericksburg, Va., and critically wounded a woman shopper outside her car. On Monday, he ventured eastward to Bowie, Md., took aim from 150 yards in the woods, and critically wounded a 13-year-old boy at the threshold of his school.

The shooting here, in a western suburban county that only Wednesday began relaxing its restrictions on outdoor school activities, compounded general fear and anger that the sniper seems to be treating the commuter belt as a kind of grotesque preserve for hunting innocent strangers.

The police, acting in a coordinated federal, state and local manhunt, once more pleaded for tips from the public. Thousands called in, jamming the phone lines.

U.N. likely to support Bush

Jon Sawyer

St. Louis Post-Dispatch (KRT)

WASHINGTON — With Congress giving President George W. Bush strong support on a resolution authorizing military action against Iraq, attention now turns to the United Nations, where most observers predict another strong show of support.

Private negotiations are continuing with France and Russia, two permanent members of the U.N. Security Council that have object-

ed to U.S. and British demands for a single resolution to authorize military action unless Iraq agrees unconditionally to destroy its weapons of mass destruction.

Key leaders are still negotiating over the exact language of a compromise resolution. Bush spoke directly with French President Jacques Chirac on Wednesday. On Thursday, British Prime Minister Tony Blair met outside Moscow with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Sources close to the negotiations said the parties were moving toward compromise language in a resolution that would not make military action "automatic" in the event of continued Iraqi noncompliance but would promise "consequences" instead — an opening for U.S.-backed action without further resort to the Security Council.

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