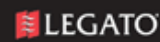




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Daily Briefing

December 10, 2003

Democrats unveil plan to increase troop strength

By Amy Svitak, [CongressDaily](#)

House Democrats are fueling the longstanding debate over the demand to increase U.S. military troop numbers with new legislation that would increase Army, Air Force and Marine Corps end strength by 8 percent over the next five years.

Rep. Ellen Tauscher, D-Calif., introduced legislation Monday that would increase Army troop levels from 482,400 to 522,400, Air Force from 359,300 to 388,000, and Marines from 175,000 to 190,000. The bill is co-sponsored by 25 House Democrats, including House Armed Services ranking member Ike Skelton, D-Mo., and Defense Appropriations Subcommittee ranking member John Murtha, D-Pa.

The issue could come to a head next year if Tauscher and other Democrats garner Republican backing for the measure. During a telephone news conference Tuesday, Tauscher and Skelton told reporters they expect bipartisan support for the measure when Congress reconvenes in January.

"You will see a bipartisan effort toward these goals, and we'll have testimony to back this up," Skelton said.

Although Tauscher and others said they are frustrated by what they see as a lack of majority attention to the issue, House Armed Services Committee Chairman Duncan Hunter, R-Calif., has raised the subject publicly on several occasions, according to a committee spokesman. Hunter has long favored an increase in end strength, the spokesman said, adding that the chairman opposed end-strength cuts during the 1990s when the Army's 18 divisions were whittled down to 10, and Air Force wings were cut nearly in half, from 24 to 13.

"He has directly discussed this with President Bush and [Defense] Secretary [Donald] Rumsfeld," the spokesman said.

Historically, Rumsfeld has opposed the idea of increasing troop numbers, arguing repeatedly that added personnel would be very expensive over the long term, and that



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measures should instead be taken to reduce demands on the force.

Last year the House Armed Services Committee, then chaired by the late Rep. Bob Stump, R-Ariz., passed the annual defense authorization bill with a provision to increase end-strength across the services, including the National Guard and Reserves, by a total of 12,552 troops. The Congressional Budget Office said the increase would cost over \$1 billion per year.

At that time, each service asked for increases in end-strength, according to a Dec. 6, 2002, issue brief by the Congressional Research Service on defense spending. Conferees deleted the House-approved increases and agreed instead to allow "the secretary of Defense to increase end-strength by up to 3 percent above the authorized level," according to the issue brief. The existing law had allowed a 2 percent increase.

This year, a failed Senate amendment to the president's fiscal 2004 Iraq supplemental would have boosted troop levels by 10,000. Rumsfeld opposed the amendment, introduced by Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I.

In the 2004 defense authorization bill, House and Senate conferees authorized an increase in Army active-duty end strength by 2,400 above the president's budget request, with \$68 million in additional funding to support the increase, according to the House Armed Services Committee spokesman.

Tauscher and Skelton said they plan to engage Hunter and other Republican members when Congress returns in January. "We're in a different environment now," Tauscher said. "The debate is changing."

