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Congress Set for Final Vote Authorizing Force

By Adam Entous
WASHINGTON (Reuters) –

The U.S. Congress on Friday neared final passage of a resolution authorizing President Bush to "use all necessary and appropriate force" against the perpetrators of this week's deadly hijack attacks, including any nations that may have helped them.

The Senate voted 98-0 in favor of the bipartisan measure requested by the president as he moves toward identifying those responsible and retaliating. The House of Representatives was poised to follow suit later on Friday. "We are coming after you -- and the fury of hell is coming with us," Rep. Charles Norwood, a Georgia Republican, said at the start of the House debate.

The use-of-force resolution is not a formal declaration of war, but is modeled after it, authorizing Bush to respond militarily while also assuring lawmakers some oversight and consultation.

"The president is authorized to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons," the one-page resolution declares.

As commander in chief, Bush has the power to authorize limited military action, but he sought congressional approval to wage what could prove to be a lengthy conflict. Lawmakers likened the resolution approved by the Senate on Friday to the measure passed by Congress in 1991 for Bush's father, President George Bush, in the Persian Gulf War. That measure was narrowly approved, 52-47, following stormy debate, while Friday's measure was unanimous. The last time Congress formally declared war followed the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

U.S. officials have made clear the war against "terrorism" will go far beyond any single military response and that the administration has already begun to seek support from a variety of foreign nations.

"This is an action, a war, that will probably take time," Senate Republican leader Trent Lott of Mississippi said. House Speaker Dennis Hastert, an Illinois Republican, said the fight "may take years" and could "cost additional lives."

The Democrat-led Senate passed the resolution before attending a prayer service for the victims of Tuesday's attack and after approving \$40 billion in emergency relief. Thousands were missing and several hundred confirmed dead after hijackers slammed three commercial jets into New York's World Trade Center and the Pentagon. A fourth crashed in western Pennsylvania.

While some Democrats sought a firmer commitment for congressional oversight, aides predicted the resolution would win broad bipartisan support in the House. "This is the most solemn responsibility that the Congress can undertake," Hastert said. "We do not do so gladly or with a bitter sense of revenge. We do so because we must in order to preserve freedom and democracy in our nation."

'A TIME TO ACT'

"There is a time to talk and a time to act," said Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, a Texas Republican.

In addition to seeking support for retaliation to this week's attacks, Bush wanted "preemptive" authorization to use force in the future to prevent acts of terror.

Lawmakers balked at Bush's proposal, and said the final resolution struck a balance by specifying Congress is authorizing strikes in response to this week's attacks rather than giving the Republican president a "blank check" for future military action.

"It's broad enough for the president to have the authority to do all that he needs to do to deal with this terrorist attack. I also think that it's tight enough that the constitutional requirements and limitations are protected," Lott said.

Lawmakers said the measure was consistent with the so-called War Powers Act, which states only Congress can declare war.

In recent history, presidents have asked for congressional approval before major military operations largely to build support.

White House press secretary Ari Fleischer said Bush "has authority vested in him to take actions as he deems appropriate," but wanted to see Congress pass a use-of-force resolution as "a show of unity."