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Arkansas delegation talks with president

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After faulty assumptions and costly mistakes, Sen. Mark Pryor, D-Ark., said President George W. Bush now has a "burden of proof" to Congress and the American people that war plans are sound before he will support a possible surge of 9,000 more U.S. troops to Iraq.

In a conference call with members of the press Friday, Pryor and Sen. Blanche Lincoln, D-Ark., said they took part in a bipartisan discussion of Iraq at the White House Friday, where Pryor gave Bush his request for more details.

Bush's guests included about 20 senators, whom Pryor said were evenly split between war supporters and dissenters who realize that since American troops are in Iraq, it is important they succeed.

Alongside Bush and the senators were Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Vice President Dick Cheney and some of Bush's key advisers, Pryor said. He said the discussion lasted about an hour.

"It was a good example of the bipartisan spirit we all hope Washington will come to embrace in coming months," Pryor said.

After Bush's brief statement, senators asked questions and made comments.

Pryor said that despite his reservations about an Iraq War plan said to be coming in the next one or two weeks, he told Bush that he and his children pray for Bush, knowing the president has the weight of the world on his shoulders.

Pryor said he does not support a troop surge now but was open to Bush convincing him otherwise.

Lincoln said Congress must be given a detailed, specific and measurable plan for moving forward in Iraq.

Two key topics of discussion were the definition of victory in Iraq and a possible increase of about 9,000 U.S. troops in Iraq in coming months, Pryor said.

Before she would support such a surge, Lincoln said she needs evidence that sending more troops would have a real effect and she wants the president to offer a way to measure it.

On the definition of victory in Iraq, Pryor said Bush's offhand comments during the discussion suggest a stable, functioning government that can provide security and services to its people as America's aim for Iraq. This definition of victory, he said, is toned down from a previous hope that Iraq would become a western-style democracy.

In other Iraq war news, the Associated Press reported Gen. John Abizaid, top U.S. commander in the Middle East, and Gen. George Casey, chief general in Iraq, are expected to leave their jobs in the coming weeks.

Abizaid would be succeeded by Pacific Adm. William Fallon and Casey by Army Lt. Gen. David Petraeus, who led the Iraqi forces training effort.

In response to a question from *The Bulletin*, Lincoln said generals hopefully were not being punished for comments to the press that were skeptical of the benefit of any troop increase.

"I hope that they would not be swayed from giving an honest opinion for fear of retribution," Lincoln said.

Continuing the leadership changes, U.S. ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad reportedly is be nominated for the position of U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, with U.S. envoy to Pakistan Ryan Crocker set to take over for Khalilzad in the Iraq post.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi urged Bush in a letter to forego a troop surge and begin pulling troops out of Iraq in four to six months. Pryor said in the conference that the letter reflects public opinion, with Arkansans and other Americans increasingly anxious about Iraq.

But with the Democrats in control of Congress, Lincoln said war plans will undergo more scrutiny than ever before.

"It is truly a new day," she said.

The Associated Press contributed to this report

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