

Lincoln, Pryor meet with Bush

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WASHINGTON — Arkansas' two Democratic senators, Blanche Lincoln and Mark Pryor, were part of a bipartisan group of 15 senators invited to the White House on Friday to share their views on Iraq with President Bush.

Both will need a lot of convincing to go along with a troop escalation in Baghdad.

"I don't support the surge approach unless President Bush will convince me he has a plan to go with it. I'm talking about a real nuts-and-bolts plan. He needs to convince the American people it's worth the fight," Pryor said.

Lincoln said such a plan had to include a "date certain" for U. S. troops to be redeployed.

"I do not support an openended commitment of troops to Iraq," she said.

In the next month, as the administration finalizes its budget request for fiscal 2008, Pryor said, Senate members from both parties will push to have spending on the Iraq war included in the regular budget rather than in a supplemental spending bill, as it has been since the war started.

He said the administration is likely to get all the money it wants for the war, but said that the "possibility is out there" that Congress would trim spending to force a policy change.

Next week, the Senate Armed Services Committee, on which Pryor sits, will hear testimony from Robert Gates, the new secretary of defense.

"That could be a long hearing," Pryor said.

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