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Bush made the right call with his veto
Congress should fund troops without dictating strategy

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President Bush did the right thing Tuesday when he vetoed a war spending bill from Congress that set a deadline to bring American troops home from Iraq. Congress should pass a new bill that gives American troops the resources they need to fight this war.

In its \$124 billion war-funding bill that passed in April, Congress included a provision that would have required troops to begin coming home as early as July 1. Such a deadline would not give a new U.S. strategy in Iraq time enough to work.

There's no doubt the Iraq war has been costly. The toll on American families has been significant, and Americans understandably are growing weary of war.

But military decisions -- including when troops should come home -- should be left to military commanders.

Advertisement President Bush aptly described the results of letting Congress dictate military strategy: "American commanders in the middle of a combat zone would have to take fighting directions from politicians 6,000 miles away. ... This is a prescription for chaos and confusion, and we must not impose it on our troops."

If Congress wants the war to end, it can end fighting by cutting off funding for this war. That would be a reckless action that would leave Iraq and the Middle East far less stable than they are now, but it at least would be a departure from the political posturing that's taking place now.

Rep. Gresham Barrett, a Republican and a former U.S. Army captain, was correct in a statement issued after the House on Wednesday sustained Bush's veto: "The politics has to end.

"Congress must get a clean bill to the president's desk for his signature as soon as possible -- our military deserves nothing less."

There is reason for cautious optimism that progress is being made in the war. Rep. Bob Inglis, just back from the Middle East, said he saw progress while there. Inglis voted against increasing troop levels in Iraq, but he also contends immediate withdrawal is the wrong course.

In an interview last week with The Greenville News, Inglis said troops should be given a chance to bring "reasonable stability" to Iraq. He's right. And they can't accomplish that if they are brought home. At the same time, as Inglis has said, strong pressure must be put on the Iraqi government to work out differences between competing factions and lessen the violence.

Debates over justification for the war are pointless. Accusations about the president's motives for invading Iraq have little meaning now. Like it or not, Americans are engaged in this war that has not gone as expected. But prematurely pulling out would be harmful to American and Iraqi interests.

Sen. Lindsey Graham got it right in a statement issued after Bush vetoed the bill. Graham said the bill "would have ensured our nation's defeat in a war we cannot afford to lose." There is truth to the idea that telling our opposition when we are withdrawing would allow them to bide their time until any obstacles to taking over the Iraqi government are gone. And that would leave the Middle East unstable and further erode the United States'

national security.

Iraq is a mess. Saddam Hussein posed a threat to the fragile stability of the Middle East, but so does the violence and chaos that has replaced him. The United States needs to bring a measure of peace and stability to Iraq before it washes its hands.

Iraq also is a front in the war on terror. Whether it began as that or not, there's little dispute that members of al-Qaida are fighting American troops on the streets of Baghdad and elsewhere in Iraq.

For those reasons, Congress should fund the American effort in Iraq and leave out any artificial deadline to end the war.
