

### 'The balance of power'

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One of the first lessons in civics class is that our government--and Congress in particular--is all about compromise.

The three branches of government offer checks and balances so no one branch can become too powerful. The president can suggest legislation, but legislators must ultimately propose and vote on bills. And within each chamber of Congress, rules typically lend themselves to a cooperative approach to governing.

Our system is the best in the world and a wonderful gift from our Founding Fathers. But believe me when I tell you that it sure can be maddening sometimes.

Compromise, most people rightfully believe, is a good thing. It generates consensus and keeps tempers cool. And the results generated from compromise are usually the best possible.

But what about war?

I think our forefathers probably guessed that any right-thinking man or woman would, by default, seek the quickest route toward a peaceful resolution to conflict. Compromise, in the case of war, should involve angling for the speediest way to stop it. The policy we should all be striving for is peace, not war.

After nearly five years of war, I am just as convinced as I was at its debut: we must end this occupation immediately by cutting off funding to a White House that has become addicted to conflict.

I know I'm not alone in my frustration. I've been hearing from many of our neighbors in the Central Coast, and they're very upset with how the administration initiated, sustained and recently escalated this war.

It's useful to know why recent action (and inaction) has occurred in the halls of Congress. Let me offer a little background, then fill you in on some of the options we have.

A perfect example of political frustration can be found in a recent Senate vote. An amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act was offered two weeks ago by Sen. Jim Webb, who suggested that our soldiers shouldn't be sent back to Iraq or Afghanistan unless their stateside time is at least as long as their previous deployment.

It sounded like a very logical addition to the bill. Letting our soldiers spend some time with their families before they're shipped back to a war zone seems like the least we can do.

But even though 56 senators supported the idea, it was quashed by 44 opponents. In the Senate, 60 votes are needed to end debate and vote on a measure. Otherwise, "debate" continues and a vote never happens. You may remember this as a filibuster from government class.

Of course, the next day we heard from pundits that "Congress blocks action on Iraq." In reality, the headline should have read: "Republicans block action on Iraq."

So what can we do about this mess? First of all, all of the opponents of this ill-conceived war will continue to pressure our House and Senate colleagues to vote to end it. Some Republicans are realizing that the president's policy is fatally flawed, but too many are standing by his side.

Second, the Democratic leadership will continue to put forth bills requiring a timetable for withdrawal. White House stall tactics will only stave off the will of the people for so long.

Finally, there's the purse. The Appropriations Committee in the House of Representatives, on which I serve, originates funding bills for government. With Democrats back in charge, the decision was made to include no funding for the war in the regular funding bill. We're forcing the president to come to Congress and ask for more money.

And he is preparing to do just that, to the order of \$190 billion. It's time to tell the president that enough is enough. It's time to say no. Congress has tried to find middle ground, sending sensible bills to the president with benchmarks and timetables. He has rejected every one, or used his proxies in the Senate to kill them.

If the president refuses to negotiate, it's time to bear down. It's time to turn off the money spigot and end this debacle. I vow to pressure my colleagues toward that end.

Our government is the fairest, most open in the world, and I'm proud to serve my district in Washington. I just hope a few more of my colleagues begin to realize their role in our system--the heavy burden they must bear--and join with Democrats to end this war as quickly as possible.