

Pasadena Star-News (California)

January 21, 2007 Sunday

HEADLINE: Local voices respond to Iraq plan

BYLINE: By Nisha Gutierrez Staff Writer

BALDWIN PARK - President Bush's call for more troops in Iraq has prompted a string of anti-surge resolutions at local and national levels.

While Senate Democratic leaders are expected to introduce a resolution this week to oppose the buildup of troops, Baldwin Park officials are preparing a similar, if completely symbolic, resolution on the war strategy.

Baldwin Park Councilman Ricardo Pacheco said the resolution should come before the City Council in February and will allow the city to register its opposition to the plan to send more than 20,000 American soldiers into Baghdad.

"I see this going in the direction the nation was in during Vietnam, when we had failed policies," Pacheco said. "Sending more troops in has been a failed policy to solving the issues in Iraq. I support our troops, but it's time for them to come home."

The idea of passing a local resolution to take a position on a national issue is nothing new. In the months before the war began, hundreds of cities across the country, including New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, adopted resolutions opposing any preemptive military strike against Iraq.

And in 2003, the South Pasadena City Council joined a consortium of cities in adopting a resolution against certain provisions of the USA Patriot Act. The resolution was proposed by Victor Magistrale, president of the local chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union.

"People need to speak out and notify their Congress members and senators," Magistrale said. "People should be aware of what is going on."

Experts say elected officials have different reasons for drafting such nonbinding resolutions.

"Oftentimes they have little to do with political jurisdiction and instead political positioning for an incumbent who wants to run for another office like Assembly," said Steven Frates, a senior fellow at Claremont McKenna College's Rose Institute.

Juliet Ann Musso, an assistant professor of public policy at USC, said she thinks resolutions can be positive. However, they do not affect public policy or have any impact on issues outside a city council's jurisdiction, she added.

"It's really just a way of showing your constituents what you think about things that are very important to them, like the war in Iraq, gay marriage and nuclear weapons," Musso said. "If it's purely informational, then I think it's important for people to know where their elected officials stand on issues they are passionate about."

However, when city councils start second-guessing everything the White House does, that can be a problem, Musso added.

Pacheco said resolutions give local communities a chance to have their voices heard at the national level.

"These resolutions oftentimes are sent to our Congress members to say, 'My community is against the war escalating,' and they can pass that on to Washington," Pacheco said. "It also gives us an opportunity to encourage other cities to start writing

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the same type of resolutions."

Mike Spence, president of the Monrovia-based California Republican Assembly, said that instead of focusing on national issues, local cities should focus on issues they have control over.

"In the end, the resolutions mean very little," Spence said. "I just drove through Baldwin Park and hit a pothole. Instead, the council should make sure they are working on fixing those."