

Democrats in Senate Condemn

Party Caucus Approves A Proposal by Fulbright

By JOHN W. FINNEY
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 9—Senate Democrats today passed by a vote of 29 to 14 a resolution "disapproving the escalation of the war in Vietnam."

The proposal was offered by Senator J. W. Fulbright, Democrat of Arkansas, at a three-hour party caucus, which also voted 44 to 0 to proceed with the pending end-the-war proposal and to seek a Senate vote on it as soon as possible.

As party positions thus hardened on the war issue, Senate doves sought to incorporate the President's latest peace offer to North Vietnam into a proposed Congressional mandate for ending American involvement in the Vietnam war.

Amendment Modified

In his speech last night announcing the mining of North Vietnamese ports, President Nixon offered to withdraw all American forces from South Vietnam in four months following an internationally supervised cease-fire and the release of prisoners of war.

The Senate doves were maneuvering today to convert this offer into an amendment requiring American withdrawal in four months after therelease of prisoners of war.

Senators Clifford P. Case of New Jersey and Frank Church of Idaho modified their end-the-war amendment, now before the Senate, to provide that no funds could be used for American hostilities in Indochina four months after the release of prisoners of war. Previously their amendment to a State Department budget bill would have cut off funds for hostilities in Indochina at the end of the year, contingent upon the release of prisoners.

Senator Edward W. Brooke, Republican of Massachusetts, introduced a similar amendment that would cut off funds for hostilities in Indochina after Aug. 31. The common argument of the three Senators was that their amendments would simply give Congressional sanction and enforcement to the four-month withdrawal offer made by the President

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War in 29 to 14 Vote

Broader Support Sought

One admitted purpose of the incorporation of the President's peace proposal into a Congressional mandate was to broaden support for Senate approval of a new end-the-war amendment by making it appear not to be an anti-Administration effort.

In the process, the doves were deliberately attempting to shift the focus from the President's decision to seal North Vietnam's harbors to the President's peace offer.

Whether the offer represented a softening of just a reshuffling of the President's past negotiating position was a matter of debate within the Senate. But in either case the doves saw in it an opportunity to seem to work in tandem with the Administration while at the same time expressing Congressional opinion on termination of the war.

In shifting the focus, there was also an acknowledgement among the doves that there was little or nothing that Congress could or would do to reverse the President's decision to mine North Vietnam's harbors.

At a three-and-one-half hour caucus this afternoon, Senate Democrats, by a 35-8 vote, went on record in favor of the modified version of the Case-Church amendment. Majority Leader Mike Mansfield observed that it was the first time that the Senate Democratic caucus had gone on record in favor of an end-the-war amendment containing a Congressional cutoff of funds.

Change of Attitude

The Senate Democrats also voted unanimously to proceed immediately to consideration of a pending motion by Senator John Stennis of Mississippi, the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, to strike the Case-Church amendment from the State Department bill.

This represented an apparent change of attitude among Senate Democrats, who previously had been inclined to postpone any consideration of end-the-war amendments until after the President's trip to Moscow late this month. The White House reportedly still favored postponement of the issue until after the Moscow summit meeting.

The hardening of party positions on the Vietnam war issue was also underscored by the action of the Senate Democratic caucus in passing the resolution "disapproving the escalation of the war."

The resolution was adopted as a substitute for one offered by Senator Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, that would have expressed no confidence in the Indochina policies of the Nixon Administration. Senator Fulbright explained that his resolution was put aside because "some people thought it was too British."

To some extent, the dove strategy of playing on the widespread anxiety within the Senate over the President's decision to mine North Vietnam's harbors while still focusing on his peace offer appeared to be succeeding.

Senator Lowell P. Weicker Jr., Republican of Connecticut, who previously has voted

against all end-the-war amendments, switched today and announced he would vote for the Case-Church amendment. Senator Weicker reiterated his support of the President but said his primary concern was over the withdrawal in safety of American troops from South Vietnam.

At this point, the Case-Church amendment appears to command about 47 votes, or four short of a majority.

However, support for the amendment, particularly among wavering Republican and Democratic doves, seemed to be growing. Senator George D. Aiken, Republican of Vermont, who previously had opposed any end-the-war amendment at this time, described the modified Case-Church amendment as "a considerable step toward sanity" while not committing himself to vote for it.

Two men most influential in determining the outcome of the Senate action on end-the-war amendments will be Senator Mansfield and Senator Stennis.

In a statement, Senator Stennis pointedly failed to endorse the President's decision to mine the harbors of North Vietnam but called for national unity behind the Chief Executive.

"This grave step has already been taken," he said. "We must brace for the future and stand together to increase the chances of success for the President's initiative. Its chances for success can be greatly decreased if the American people are sharply divided."

At the same time, Senator Stennis, like the doves, placed considerable emphasis upon the President's peace offer. Expressing hope that Hanoi would carefully consider the offer, he said, "The President has provided the timetable which many have been seeking under which the United States will finally complete its troop withdrawal."