

Dems Use Troop Surge as Rallying Point

President's State of the Union Address met with large-scale protests across country

Daniel Zarchy
National News Reporter

It took the Million Man March to establish the black demographic as a force in national politics. Twelve years later, a similar march might end a war.

United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ), a coalition that formed in 2002 to "protest the immoral and disastrous Iraq War and oppose our government's policy of permanent warfare and empire-building," estimates that upwards of half a million people gathered in Washington D.C. on Saturday in protest of the Iraq War, according to their website.

Hany Khalil, organizing coordinator for UFPJ, which organized the protest, is confident that public opinion of the war has changed dramatically.

"The reason people marched with us last Saturday is they know that the voters in November voted out the war party and voted in the Democrats with the mandate to end the Iraq war," Khalil said. "Millions of people were astonished to see the Bush administration reject the will of the people

and call for an escalation."

In his annual State of the Union Address given last Tuesday, President Bush announced his plan for a troop surge into Iraq to reinforce the battered American army and seemingly prolong the war.

Amaya Smith, spokesperson for the Democratic National Committee, agrees that the weekend protests signal public rejection of the proposed troop surge.

"I think aside from his approval ratings, the numbers are pretty clear—70 percent of people are not in favor of Bush's troop surge," Smith said. "The rallies over the weekend have been an indication of that."

In the Democratic response to the State of the Union, Senator Jim Webb (D-VA) strongly criticized the course of the war.

"The majority of the nation no longer supports the way this war is being fought; nor does the majority of our military," Webb said in his speech. "We need a new direction."

According to Khalil, the protests Saturday had more tangible effects, as anti-war lobbyists gained audience with hundreds

of members of Congress to discuss new legislation, including Senators Clinton and Schumer from New York, "who had refused to engage us in a serious way."

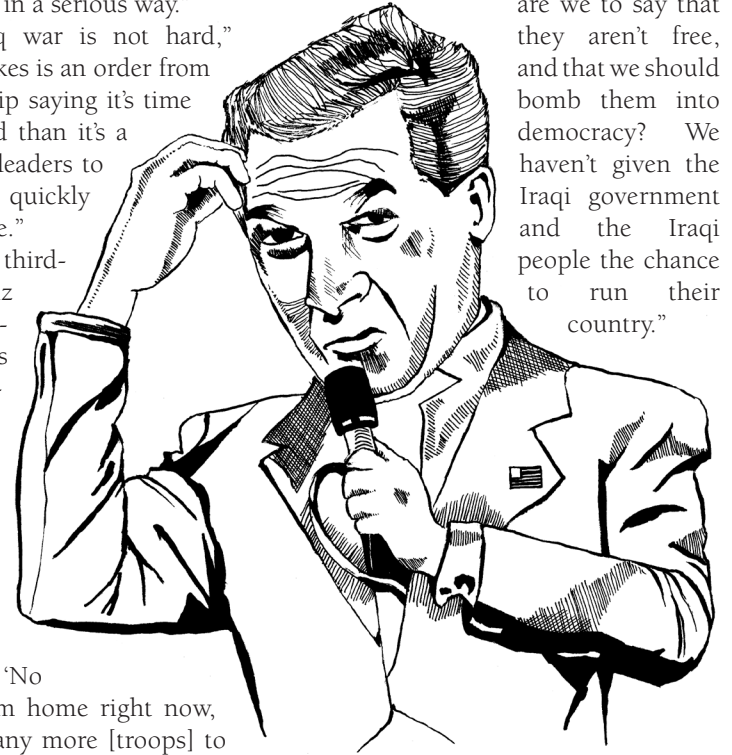
"Ending the Iraq war is not hard," Khalil said. "All it takes is an order from the civilian leadership saying it's time to end this war, and then it's a job for the military leaders to withdraw troops as quickly and safely as possible."

Janine Carmona, third-year UC Santa Cruz student and a member of Students Against War, believes that an immediate withdrawal is the best solution for Americans and Iraqis, and that this goal is the general desire behind the protests.

"They're saying 'No more, we want them home right now, and we don't want any more [troops] to

go in.' It's ridiculous to have this idea that if the United States isn't there, it'll plunge into civil war," Carmona said. "Who

are we to say that they aren't free, and that we should bomb them into democracy? We haven't given the Iraqi government and the Iraqi people the chance to run their country."



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Bush Gas Plan Criticized

Jose San Mateo
Contributing Writer

In an uncharacteristic move, President Bush acknowledged the issue of climate change with an initiative that calls for a 20 percent reduction in gasoline consumption over the next ten years.

The proposal, dubbed the "Twenty in Ten plan," aims to reduce the country's dependence on foreign oil by developing ethanol and other alternative fuels, a move Bush forecasted during his State of the Union Address.

Climate change advocates are not enthusiastic about the new plan. Jason Barbose, a representative with the statewide environmental organization Environment California, was frankly critical of the goals of Bush's Twenty in Ten initiative.

"In terms of efficiency, it does not guarantee our independence from foreign oil," Barbose said.

Scientists that examine climate change and alternative energy are also skeptical of Bush's initiative. Daniel Kammen, Director of the Renewable and Appropriate Energy lab based in Berkeley, also criticized Bush's plan.

"The president's plan is the least effective [option]," Kammen said. "It just benefits what we do now."

At issue is the focus on ethanol as a viable alternative to fossil fuels. Dan Kalb, a representative with the Union of Concerned Scientists, explained that the makeup of ethanol is critical to its effectiveness.

"Ethanol is an alternative fuel. Where it comes from determines the amount of greenhouse gas emissions it produces," Kalb said. "Ethanol produced from corn stock is not the most efficient means of reducing greenhouse gases."

However, according to Kammen, who has

published research on the use of ethanol as an alternative fuel, it is still a viable alternative that can produce modest results.

According to a 2006 study conducted by the Center for Agricultural and Rural Development at Iowa State University, corn-based ethanol could account for 20 percent of fuel consumption in the U.S. by 2015.

Kalb agreed that ethanol could produce modest reductions, but said it is a transition that "only helps in the short term."

Bush's plan garnered a lukewarm response from politicians and lawmakers in California. Part of the reason may be statewide legislation that is far more comprehensive in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The bill, called AB 32, mandates a 25 percent reduction of greenhouse gases by 2020. On Jan. 9, Governor Schwarzenegger made the first step in fulfilling the mandate by issuing a directive that would reduce the carbon intensity of passenger vehicles by at least 10 percent.

A statement from Congressman Sam Farr (D-Santa Cruz) acknowledged Bush's efforts to combat global warming, but said he was disappointed that, in comparison to AB 32, the President's goals were very vague.

"[AB 32] requires the state to find specific mechanisms to meet specific goals," Farr said. "The president's speech did not provide a clear plan for increasing our use of renewable fuels."

The president's plan is by no means a silver bullet in addressing U.S. dependence on foreign oil or growing concerns about global warming.

"Ultimately, we need to move towards a replacement for gas-powered cars," Kalb said. "[We need] something like fuel cells or electric cars."