

All-night Iraq debate ends without closure

by UPI

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Senate Democrats ended a marathon session Wednesday where they began -- without enough support for a vote on a deadline to pull U.S. troops from Iraq. Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, was the only Republican to change sides during the night and vote for cloture, The New York Times reported. She joined Republicans Olympia Snowe, also of Maine, Gordon Smith of Oregon and Chuck Hagel of Nebraska in voting with the Democrats. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., scheduled the all-night debate in an effort to win a vote for cloture or to dramatize the issue. In the end, the cloture motion, which needs 60 votes, failed 52-47. "They are protecting the president rather than protecting our troops," Reid said. "They are denying us an up-or-down -- yes or no -- vote on the most important issue our country faces." Several Republicans who have become critical of U.S. President George Bush's Iraq strategy also criticized the Democratic proposal to begin redeployment within 120 days. The Democratic plan and others are being offered as amendments to the Defense Authorization Bill. "If it did pass, it would lead to chaos in Iraq and a dramatic increase in casualties," said Sen. Judd Gregg, R-N.H., who supports a proposal based on findings of the bipartisan Iraq Study Group.

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