PROBLEM ON THE IRAQ WAR

During the 2006 election, many Democratic candidates for Congress ran on a platform of ending the Iraq war. The 2006 election ended Republican leadership in both the House and the Senate.

After the 2006 election, the Democrats and the Republicans each held 49 seats in the Senate. There are two independent Senators (Joe Lieberman from Connecticut and Bernie Sanders from Vermont), both of whom caucus with the Democrats, giving the Democrats a 51-49 edge over the Republicans for purposes of Senate organization. Senator Harry Reid, a Democrat from Nevada is Senate majority leader.

In the 2006 elections, the Democrats also won a 31-vote majority in the 435-member House of Representatives. The Speaker of the House is Representative Nancy Pelosi, a Democrat from California.

Despite these majorities in both chambers, Congress did not end the war.

In 2008, the Democrats increased their majorities in both houses. Democrats now have a 79 majority in the House (257-178) and a 17 vote majority in the Senate (58-41), including Lieberman and Sanders. (The outcome of the Minnesota Senate race has not been finalized, but it appears likely that the Democratic candidate, Al Franken, will eventually prevail, giving the Democrats an 18-vote majority.)

In 2008, Barack Obama ran for president on platform of withdrawing most U.S. troops from Iraq. On his first full day in office, President Obama asked military leaders to prepare a withdrawal plan.

What aspects of constitutional structure, congressional procedure, and/or political reality do you think contributed to Congressional Democrats’ difficulties in ending the war before now? What options did they have, and what limited the options available to them? Do you think that President Obama will be more successful? Why or why not? In considering these questions, you should refer to Articles I and II of the Constitution, to the reading and class discussion we have covered so far, and to your own observations of current events.