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American Public Gives Lawmakers an Earful on Syria

Constituents have deluged congressmen with phone calls and emails

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By ALLISON PRANG

Americans have deluged their congressmen with phone calls, emails and online-survey responses to make their opposition known to the possibility of the U.S. striking Syria, a flood that some lawmakers say is among the biggest they have seen.

The office of Rep. Bruce Braley (D., Iowa), who is undecided on the question of military action, created a web page to field responses and as of midday Friday, 75% of the 9,700 responses were against, said spokesman Jeff Giertz. He said the response ranked second only to the debate over the 2010 health-care law.



Associated Press

Arizona Sen. John McCain faced a fiery town-hall meeting this week.

Sen. [John McCain](#) (R., Ariz.), a strong backer of military action, faced a fiery town-hall meeting this week where a woman calling herself a loyal McCain supporter urged a diplomatic solution instead. "You need to also listen to the majority of the American people who do not want you to go there," she shouted.

Constituent responses aren't always a good indicator of how Congress will

act, but with support for Mr. Obama's proposed action soft, they could be a factor pushing fence-sitters into the "no" column. Similar input helped raise the temperature on the debate over health-care legislation, and contributed to the House's rejecting the Bush administration's bailout of the financial system.

The Senate, where support is stronger, is expected to vote next week on a

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measure authorizing strikes. It isn't clear when the House, where opposition is stiffer, might vote.

Rep. Peter DeFazio (D., Ore.), who plans to vote no, said his office as of Thursday had received 1,553 calls and emails in opposition and 34 in favor. "I've just never seen numbers like that before," he said.

Some lawmakers have actively sought opinions, including Rep. Jim Himes (D., Conn.), who sent an "email blast" to 106,000 constituents advertising a town-hall meeting Sunday. Mr. Himes is undecided on how he will vote but is leaning toward opposition.

Audio

WSJ This Morning's Gordon Deal and Allison Prang discuss public reaction to strikes in Syria

00:00 | 02:54

In the Senate, Bernie Sanders of Vermont, an independent who caucuses with the Democrats, said, "We're just detecting very little support for this proposal." He said he has serious concerns but will keep an open mind. The senator's office had received 1,856 calls, faxes and emails for the

week from constituents as of early Friday afternoon, spokesman Michael Briggs said. Of those, 1,740 were opposed and 116 in favor, he said.

Rep. Tom Reed (R., N.Y.), said in a statement it is clear his constituents don't want "military action in Syria" after hearing them out at "listening sessions" and by phone and email. He plans to vote no, as is Rep. Tom Cole (R., Okla.), who cited his constituents' opposition in his decision to oppose the motion.

"I have heard their opposition loud and clear and will not vote in favor of military intervention in Syria," Mr. Cole said.

Anna Reed, a personal trainer and fitness model from Huber Heights, Ohio, said she called between six and eight congressmen. "They are supposed to be our voice," she said. She doesn't see a compelling U.S. interest in Syria, she said, and thinks strikes would eventually expand into a full ground war.

"And I don't care what they say, the troops will go in," said Ms. Reed, whose husband is in the military.

A few lawmakers say they hear both sides of the argument.

"My constituents don't want to see another repeat of Iraq; my constituents don't want to see boots on the ground; my constituents don't want to see any more children murdered with sarin gas, though, either," said Rep. Betty McCollum (D., Minn.).

Ms. McCollum said she won't decide how to vote until she has studied the resolution's wording. "I'm not going to vote for anything that's open-ended," she said.

—Kristina Peterson contributed to this article.

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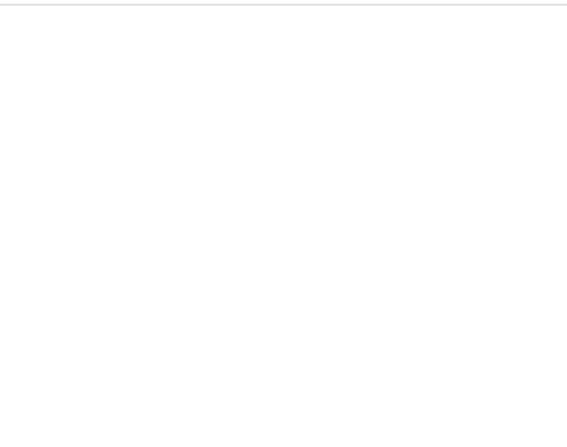
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