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Hawaii lawmakers vote for contempt

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WASHINGTON -- While House Republicans staged a walkout to protest lack of action on a proposed surveillance law, Hawaii's two House members voted today to hold two presidential aides in contempt of Congress.

As a result, the contempt resolution passed 223-32 with 173 Republicans and 10 Democrats not voting.

U.S. Reps. Neil Abercrombie and Mazie Hirono, both Hawai'i Democrats, voted for the resolution, which holds former White House Counsel Harriet Miers and White House chief of staff Josh Bolton in contempt. Both refused to testify before Congress about the firing of nine U.S. attorneys in 2006.

"No one in the United States of America is above the law, not the president or those who work for the president," Abercrombie said. "Nor do they get to pick and choose which laws they will obey and which laws they can ignore."

The resolution authorizes the House Judiciary Committee to go to court to enforce subpoenas against Miers and Bolton.

The Republican walkout came after House Minority Leader John Boehner, R-Ohio, complained that Democrats had time for a "partisan political stunt" but no time to finish a reauthorization of the surveillance law.

The law, which expires Saturday, gives the government leeway to eavesdrop on phone calls and intercept e-mails of suspected terrorists.

The Senate approved its version of the surveillance bill Tuesday on a 68-29 vote with U.S. Sen. Daniel K. Inouye, D-Hawai'i, voting for it and U.S. Sen. Daniel K. Akaka, D-Hawai'i, voting against it. The Senate bill grants immunity for telecommunications companies against lawsuits for participation in surveillance, but the House bill does not.

House Democratic leaders had tried to temporarily extend the current law for 21 days to negotiate with the Senate for a final version of the surveillance bill. That effort lost on a 191-229 vote Wednesday, with both Abercrombie and Hirono voting for the extension.