

February 27, 2014

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Richard J. Durbin
Majority Whip
United States Senate

The Honorable Steny H. Hoyer
Democratic Whip
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Vice Chair of the Conference and Chair of
the Senate Democratic Policy and
Communications Center
United States Senate

The Honorable James E. Clyburn
Assistant Democratic Leader
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Patty Murray
Secretary of the Conference
United States Senate

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Democratic Caucus Chairman
United States House of Representatives

Dear Democratic Leaders:

We are writing to caution against any Congressional action that would jeopardize the diplomacy now underway between the United States, our international partners, and Iran.

Last month, Iran and six major powers began to implement the November 2013 Joint Plan of Action (JPA) as a first step in negotiations aimed at assuring that Iran cannot develop nuclear weapons. As a result, for the first time in a decade, Iran has begun to freeze and roll back key parts of its program under stringent and intrusive international monitoring and verification.

Although success in achieving a final agreement is far from guaranteed, Congress should allow these fragile negotiations to proceed without making threats that could derail them or tying the hands of the negotiators by imposing unrealistic terms for a final agreement.

Iran has made clear that it would view enactment of new US sanctions, even if they did not take effect immediately, and could be suspended under certain conditions, as a violation of the JPA. It has publicly stated this would cause it to withdraw from negotiations and resume nuclear activities it has begun to roll back.

Moreover, passing such legislation would likely lead to an immediate and substantial lessening of economic pressure on Iran because other countries, like China, Russia, the European Union, Japan, South Korea, India and Turkey, might cease implementing sanctions on the ground that the US had undermined negotiations. Legislating sanctions now is an especially unnecessary risk given that the Iranians know that Congress could swiftly pass new sanctions if Iran violated the JPA or failed to negotiate toward a permanent agreement in good faith.

Similarly, a Congressional demand that Iran give up even low-level uranium enrichment for verifiably peaceful civilian purposes would threaten talks by tying the hands both of US

negotiators and Iranian President Rouhani, who could not feasibly finalize a deal that zeroes out domestic enrichment. Like sanctions, such a legislative poison pill would only serve to erode the prospects for diplomatic success. Even if Congressional action took the form of a non-binding resolution, or if the President vetoed such legislation, its initial passage would strengthen the hand of Iranian hardliners arguing against negotiations on the ground that Congress will not accept any deal reached at the negotiating table.

The failure of diplomacy would lead to one of two extremely negative options: either military action or Iranian acquisition of nuclear weapons. Americans are understandably wary of fighting another war in the Middle East, with multiple polls showing that large majorities of voters want Congress to hold off on actions that would undermine diplomacy. We urge you to oppose risky Congressional action that, if taken, may lead you to wake up the next morning knowing the result has been to take the diplomatic option off the table.

Sincerely,

Naomi Aberly, Boston, MA
Gerald H. Acker, Southfield, MI
Ralph Alpert, Santa Cruz, CA
Kathleen C. Barry, Berkeley, CA
Marc Baum, New York, NY
Georgia Berner, Zelienople, PA
David Blair, Dublin, NH
Leonore Blitz, New NY
Bob Bowditch, Boston, MA
Bob Burnett, Berkeley, CA
Connie Caplan, Baltimore, MD
Diana Shaw Clark, London, UK
Simon Clark, London, UK
Ben Cohen, Burlington, VT
Steven H. Cohen, Chicago, IL
Suzanne F. Cohen, Baltimore, MD
Gary Collins, Portland, CT
Pilar Crespi, Robert, NY
Stephen Davis, Cambridge, MA
Laurie Dewey, Lincoln, MA
Kirk Dornbush, Atlanta, GA
Andrew Faulk, San Francisco, CA
Chris Findlater, Miami FL
Fathali Ghahremani, New NY
Morton Halperin, Washington, DC
Martin Hellman, Stanford, CA
Lawrence Hess, San Diego, CA
Suzanne Hess, San Diego, CA
Arnold Hiatt, Boston, MA

Lester S. Hyman, Washington, DC
Frank Jernigan, San Francisco, CA
Wayne Jordan, Oakland, CA
Amb. (ret.) Samuel L. Kaplan, Minneapolis, MN
Sylvia Kaplan, Minneapolis, MN
Sarah Kovner, New York, NY
Victor Kovner, New NY
Janet Kranzberg, Berkeley CA
Betsy Krieger, Baltimore, MD
Ira Lechner, Escondida, CA
Stephanie Low, New York, NY
Priscilla McMillan, Cambridge, MA
Roger Milliken, Cumberland, ME
Holly Mosher, Venice, CA
Edward J. Nalbantian, London, UK
Rebecca Newman, Irvine, CA
Riley Newman, Irvine, CA
Sandy Newman, Washington, DC
Arthur Obermayer, West Newton, MA
Zach Polett, Little Rock, AR
Eleanor Ravelle, Evanston, IL
William Revelle, Evanston, IL
Stephen Robert, New NY
Charles Rodgers, Boston, MA
Marjorie Roswell, Baltimore, MD
Guy Saperstein, Piedmont, CA
Deb Sawyer, Salt UT
John Schram, San CA
William S. Singer, Chicago, IL

Daniel Solomon, Bethesda, MD
Amb. (ret.) Alan D. Solomont, Weston, MA
Marc R. Stanley, Dallas, TX
Alexandra Stanton, New York, NY
Mary Ann Stein, Bethesda, MD
Robert Stein, Berkley, CA
Faye Straus, Lafayette, CA
Carolyn Summers, Hastings-on-Hudson, NY
Amb. (ret.) Louis B. Susman, Chicago, IL
Ritchie Tabachnick, Carnegie, PA
Marge Tabankin, Marina Del Rey, CA
Valerie Tarico, Seattle, WA

Michael Thornton, Boston, MA
James A. Torrey, New York, NY
Philippe Villers, Boston, MA
George Wallerstein, Seattle, WA
Marc Weiss, New York, NY
Beverly Westheimer, Petersborough, NH
Tom Westheimer, Petersborough, NH
Carol Winograd, Stanford, CA
Terry Winograd, Stanford, CA
Judith Zee, Steinberg, CO
Robert Zevin, Cambridge, MA
Tal J. Zlotnitsky, Trinity, FL