

As West Virginians concerned with our state and our nation's security, prosperity, and well-being, we urge you and our entire congressional delegation to exert all your influence to promote a peaceful resolution to the growing tensions between the United States and Iran.

Nearly six years ago, Congress gave the Bush administration a blank check to pursue its ill-advised decision to go to war with Iraq. The rationalizations for the invasion crumbled even as the human and financial toll to the United States mounted.

Since that time, the cost of the Iraq war has continued to grow. At this writing, over 4,100 American military personnel have died in that unnecessary war and over 30,000 have been wounded. The National Priorities Project estimates the financial costs of the war to be around \$540 billion dollars to date for the nation and over \$1.7 billion for West Virginia. Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz calculates the present and future cost of the war to be \$720 million per day, or \$500,000 per minute. The war has placed great strains on the U.S. military as well as on the families of those who serve and has damaged the image and influence of our nation on the world stage.

While the situation in Iraq is still far from resolved, growing tensions between the U.S. and Iran threaten to lead to yet another disastrous military conflict, one which is likely only to increase the turmoil in the Middle East and around the world and to further damage the public, personal and financial interests of the American people.

While we were encouraged by the administration's recent commitment to face to face talks with Iran, recent actions in Congress threaten to escalate conflict. In addition to reports of congressional approval of up to \$400 million for covert actions against Iran, House Concurrent Resolution 362 calls for "stringent inspection requirements" on all person and goods entering or leaving that country. While that measure appears to have stalled at present, it represents an escalation of this conflict.

That measure, if enacted, would be more extreme than the current public position of the Bush administration and would likely be perceived as a blockade of Iran and essentially as an act of war. Its likely effects include weakening diplomatic efforts, increasing the possibility of incidents that could lead to overt war, and strengthening the political positions of Iranian hard-liners.

A majority of Americans favor diplomacy with Iran, as do five former secretaries of state representing both major political parties (Albright, Baker, Christopher, Kissinger, and Powell).

This sentiment has been echoed by prominent military leaders. Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told Fox News in July that "Right now I'm fighting two wars, and I don't need a third one." Vice Admiral Cosgriff, the Navy's Commander in the Persian Gulf, has warned that war with Iran would be "disastrous" and said that "the preferred path by far is the diplomatic path."

The current international situation is already precarious and the U.S. economy is fragile and the potential costs—financial, political, environmental, and moral--of yet another conflict could be devastatingly high. The last thing the American people need is another unnecessary war. Please do all that you can to prevent this calamity and promote a diplomatic resolution to this conflict.