

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 26, 2015

The Honorable Richard Shelby
The Honorable Sherrod Brown
U.S. Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
534 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ed Royce
The Honorable Elliot Engel
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Shelby and Royce and Ranking Members Brown and Engel:

We write to urge you to postpone enacting new sanctions legislation against Iran. We fully support the P5+1 effort to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon and stand strongly opposed to legislation that threatens to derail these negotiations. Thanks to the tireless work of our diplomats and our negotiating partners, Iran's nuclear program is frozen and there is a real prospect for peacefully ensuring Iran does not develop a nuclear weapon.

Enacting new sanctions legislation now undermines the efforts of the P5+1 and is contrary to a peaceful solution. Given the sensitive timing, Congressional action should reflect support for a negotiated settlement over the Iranian nuclear dispute rather than pushing legislation that could take us off the negotiating track and escalate towards war. There is significant risk in passing sanctions legislation now, whereas there is no risk in waiting. Congress has proved that it can quickly pass sanctions legislation if necessary.

We are unequivocal in our agreement that Iran acquiring a nuclear weapon would pose a grave threat to international peace and stability and the national security of the United States and our allies. As the IAEA has confirmed, the Joint Plan of Action (JPOA) went into effect in January 2014, Iran has complied with the preliminary agreement by terminating the enrichment of

uranium beyond the 5 percent level, eliminating its stockpile of medium enriched uranium, halting progress at the Arak nuclear reactor, and allowing far more intrusive inspections from the IAEA. The JPOA has made Americans and the rest of the world safer; it does not make sense to pass new sanctions legislation when the IAEA has determined that Iran has adhered to the obligations outlined in this agreement and when negotiators are within reach of a final agreement.

The only logical reason to pass sanctions legislation now is if the goal is to derail negotiations. As Senator Tom Cotton (R-AR) recently said, “the end of negotiations isn’t an unintended consequence of congressional action; it is an intended consequence.”¹ There is widespread agreement that new sanctions legislation would compromise the negotiations, not provide leverage to negotiators.

In December National Security Advisor Susan Rice said that new sanctions on Iran would “blow up” nuclear negotiations and that “the P5+1 would fracture, the international community would blame the United States rather than Iran for the collapse of the negotiations, and the Iranians would conclude that there’s little point in pursuing this process at the negotiating table.”² Last week Israeli Mossad chairman Tamir Pardo echoed Rice, saying a new sanction bill would be “like throwing a grenade into the process.”³ Sanctions may have brought Iran to the table, but they aren’t keeping them there – negotiators are doing that.

A diplomatic solution to preventing Iran from getting a nuclear weapon is in the best interest of U.S. national security. During his Congressional testimony Ambassador Tom Pickering noted that “without a realization to reach a negotiated agreement, the U.S. may be left with two unpalatable options: containing a nuclear armed Iran or war.”⁴

We are committed to ensuring that a diplomatic solution succeeds and will not support legislation that compromises nuclear negotiations with Iran. We stand ready to urge the Congressional Progressive Caucus to sustain a veto of harmful legislation.

In the event that a final status agreement is reached, we are prepared to work with the Administration to repeal sanctions legislation in accordance with the terms of such an agreement upon stringent verification that Iran has adhered to its obligations.

¹ Tom Cotton remarks, <http://www.armscontrol.org/issue-briefs/2015-01-15/Congress-Should-Support-Negotiations-Not-New-Iran-Sanctions>

² Susan Rice remarks, <http://thehill.com/policy/international/225759-rice-new-sanctions-would-blow-up-iran-talks>

³ Tamir Pardo remarks, <http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2015-01-22/netanyahu-mossad-split-divides-u-s-congress-on-iran-sanctions>

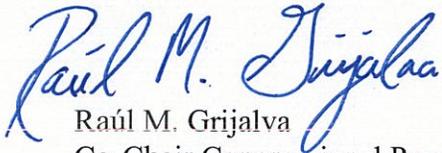
⁴ Tom Pickering testimony, <http://iranprojectfcsny.org/ambassador-thomas-pickering-testimony-to-the-u-s-armed-services-committee/>

Our negotiators need support from Congress to accomplish the objective shared by lawmakers, the Administration, and the American people, which is to peacefully prevent a nuclear-armed Iran.

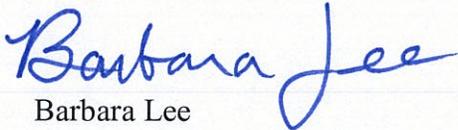
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Keith Ellison". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Keith Ellison
Co-Chair Congressional Progressive Caucus

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Raúl M. Grijalva". The signature is cursive and includes a tilde over the 'l' in Raúl.

Raúl M. Grijalva
Co-Chair Congressional Progressive Caucus

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Barbara Lee". The signature is cursive and elegant.

Barbara Lee
Congressional Progressive Caucus
Whip and Peace & Security
Task Force Chair