



April 30, 2026

The Honorable Mike Rogers
Chair
U.S. House of Representatives Committee
on Armed Services
2469 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
U.S. House of Representatives Committee
on Armed Services
2264 Rayburn Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Roger Wicker
Chair
U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services
425 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services
728 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Wicker, Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Reed, and Ranking Member Smith:

We are writing as a bipartisan group of former members of Congress, governors, and Cabinet officials who are united in our belief that Congress must reclaim its constitutional authority to determine whether and how this nation engages in armed conflict, including in the current conflict in Iran.

This responsibility, vested in Congress by Article I of the Constitution, has been eroded over time and across presidential administrations. President Clinton took military action in Yugoslavia without congressional approval; President Obama did the same in Libya.

In 1973, during the Vietnam War, Congress sought to reassert its authority by passing the War Powers Resolution with a bipartisan, veto-proof majority. That law established a clear framework: the President must terminate U.S. involvement in hostilities within 60 days (with a possible 30-day withdrawal period) unless Congress has declared war or authorized the action through an Authorization for Use of Military Force.

The War Powers Resolution also requires the President to consult with Congress “in every possible instance” before introducing U.S. forces into hostilities, and to continue those consultations regularly thereafter. Within 48 hours of introducing forces, the administration must report to Congress on the legal basis, scope, and expected duration of the action.

On February 28, 2026, the United States and Israel launched large-scale airstrikes against Iran, targeting military, nuclear, and leadership sites. These strikes — undertaken without congressional approval or advance notice to lawmakers — killed Iran’s Supreme Leader and other senior officials, marking one of the most serious escalations possible between states.

In the days and weeks following, Congress, the American people, and the service members placed in harm's way have been left in the dark about the objectives, scope, and end state of U.S. military action. Basic questions remain unanswered: What are the strategic objectives of this conflict, and what constitutes success? What are the limits – geographic, operational, and temporal – of U.S. involvement? We've heard conflicting messages: at times, threats that "a whole civilization will die" and that the U.S. could "blow up the whole country," and at others, far narrower aims such as degrading Iran's missile capabilities. Without clear answers, policymakers cannot exercise meaningful oversight or properly assess the risks involved. This lack of clarity not only undermines democratic accountability, but also increases the risk of miscalculation, escalation, and open-ended military engagement.

Amid insufficient transparency, the costs have mounted rapidly. By mid-March the conflict had resulted in the deaths of [13 American service members](#) (with more than 200 wounded) and over 1,300 Iranian civilians. The Pentagon briefed Congress that the conflict cost the U.S. [\\$11.3 billion in the first 6 days](#) alone, with experts estimating the costs to be [\\$2 billion per day](#). An additional \$200 billion was requested by the Pentagon – though OMB Director Russell Vought [has refused](#) to tell Congress exactly how much the war is costing – and has led to soaring everyday costs for Americans.

The Constitution assigns Congress the authority to declare war, fund military operations, and oversee their execution. The American people support these checks and balances: [66% of Americans](#) support requiring congressional approval for acts of war, and 78% think congressional oversight strengthens our political system.

Reasserting Article I authority is not about one president or one party. It is about restoring the constitutional balance that protects our democracy, our national security, and our troops. We urge members of Congress to meet this responsibility by insisting on adherence to the War Powers Resolution as the governing framework for this conflict.

While the War Powers Resolution is the strongest example of Congress reasserting its war powers authorities, the framework too often falls short in practice. As currently written, the law allows for ambiguous interpretations of what constitutes "hostilities" and lacks clear enforcement mechanisms. Congress must close these loopholes and reform the Resolution to ensure that the first branch has a meaningful consultative and decisionmaking role in any significant military deployment.

At this moment of heightened risk and uncertainty, Congress has both the obligation and the opportunity to reaffirm its role in matters of war and peace. Doing so will help restore the balance of powers that underpins our system of government.

Sincerely,

The Undersigned Former Members of Congress, Governors, and Cabinet Officials

Les AuCoin, Former Member of Congress (D-OR)
Brian Baird, Former Member of Congress (D-WA)
J. Gresham Barrett, Former Member of Congress (R-SC)
Mark Begich, Former Member of Congress (D-AK)
Cheri Bustos, Former Member of Congress (D-IL)
Mike Capuano, Former Member of Congress (D-MA)
John Carlin, Former Governor (D-KS)
Arne Carlson, Former Governor (R-MN)
Russ Carnahan, Former Member of Congress (D-MO)
Matt Cartwright, Former Member of Congress (D-PA)
Ben Chandler, Former Member of Congress (D-KY)
Rodney Chandler, Former Member of Congress (R-WA)
William Lacy Clay, Jr., Former Member of Congress (D-MO)
Barbara Comstock, Former Member of Congress (R-VA)
Jim Cooper, Former Member of Congress (D-TN)
Sam Coppersmith, Former Member of Congress (D-AZ)
Tom Daschle, Former Member of Congress (D-SD)
Lincoln Davis, Former Member of Congress (D-TN)
Susan Davis, Former Member of Congress (D-CA)
Charlie Dent, Former Member of Congress (R-PA)
Chris Dodd, Former Member of Congress (D-CT)
Donna F. Edwards, Former Member of Congress (D-MD)

Russ Feingold, Former Member of Congress (D-WI)
Dick Gephardt, Former Member of Congress (D-MO)
Jim Gerlach, Former Member of Congress (R-PA)
Dan Glickman, Former Secretary of Agriculture and Former Member of Congress (D-KS)
Jim Greenwood, Former Member of Congress (R-PA)
Chuck Hagel, Former Secretary of Defense and Member of Congress (R-NE)
Jane Harman, Former Member of Congress (D-CA)
Thomas Hartnett, Former Member of Congress (R-SC)
Paul Hodes, Former Member of Congress (D-NH)
Joseph Hoeffel, Former Member of Congress (D-PA)
Jerry Huckaby, Former Member of Congress (D-LA)
Bob Inglis, Sr., Former Member of Congress (R-SC)
Steve Israel, Former Member of Congress (D-NY)
Ron Kind, Former Member of Congress (D-WI)
Ron Klein, Former Member of Congress (D-FL)
Peter Kostmayer, Former Member of Congress (D-PA)
Larry LaRocco, Former Member of Congress (D-ID)
John LeBoutillier, Former Member of Congress (R-NY)
Mel Levine, Former Member of Congress (D-CA)
Marjorie Margolies, Former Member of Congress (D-PA)

Matthew McHugh, Former Member of Congress (D-NY)

Jim Moran, Former Member of Congress (D-VA)

Patrick Murphy, Former Member of Congress (D-PA)

Glenn Nye, Former Member of Congress (D-VA)

Leon Panetta, Former Secretary of Defense and Former Member of Congress (D-CA)

David Price, Former Member of Congress (D-NC)

Marc Racicot, Former Governor (R-MT)

Reid Ribble, Former Member of Congress (R-WI)

Bill Ritter, Former Governor (D-CO)

Tim Roemer, Former U.S. Ambassador to India and Former Member of Congress (D-IN)

Claudine Schneider, Former Member of Congress (R-RI)

Chris Shays, Former Member of Congress (R-CT)

Gerry Sikorski, Former Member of Congress (D-MN)

Peter Smith, Former Member of Congress (R-VT)

David Trott, Former Member of Congress (R-MI)

Mark Udall, Former Member of Congress (D-CO)

Fred Upton, Former Member of Congress (R-MI)

James Walsh, Former Member of Congress (R-NY)

Christine Todd Whitman, Former Environmental Protection Agency Administrator and Governor (R-NJ)

Susan Wild, Former Member of Congress (D-PA)

Tim Wirth, Former Member of Congress (D-CO)