

Dear California Democratic Congressional Delegation:

As leaders and delegates in the California State Democratic Party, we are writing to urge you to oppose funding for the war in Afghanistan unless it is used for a responsible, orderly withdrawal of U.S. troops and a nonmilitary strategy based on diplomacy, humanitarian aid, and development. We also urge you to take advantage of every opportunity to work toward ending the war, such as participating in debate and votes on Afghanistan-related legislation and serving as vocal champions in Congress and the media for a new approach.

In November of 2009, the California Democratic Party adopted a resolution that put our state party on record. It calls for “a timetable for withdrawal of our military personnel; calls for an end to the use of mercenary contractors, as well as an end to air strikes that cause heavy civilian casualties, and urges our President to oversee a redirection of our funding and resources to include an increase in humanitarian and developmental aid, multi-party talks aimed at ensuring a democratic and legitimate representation of the people of Afghanistan, as well as multi-party regional diplomacy for the safety and stability of neighboring countries.” As we prepare now to mobilize voters in a challenging year for Democrats, it is abundantly clear to us that our party must exercise stronger leadership for a policy that puts resources into communities rather than misguided wars.

After nearly nine years of war, there is no evidence that the current strategy will make Americans and Afghans safer. More than 1,000 Americans have died in the war, and casualties are on the rise. June was the bloodiest month for NATO troops since 2001. Despite efforts to protect civilians in Afghanistan, civilian casualties caused by NATO have skyrocketed in 2010. The “government in a box” in Marjah has failed to take hold, and the Afghan government and NATO forces have faced serious pushback from civilians in Kandahar who oppose the planned military offensive. CIA Director Leon Panetta recently estimated that there are between fifty and one hundred Al Qaeda fighters in Afghanistan. The U.S. is sending 1,000 soldiers for every Al Qaeda fighter, at a cost of \$1 million per soldier per year. This is not a recipe for success; it is a path toward squandering more lives and dollars on a misguided and unnecessary war with no end in sight.

The pain of losing those squandered billions is felt daily by families here in California. The United States has already spent more than \$270 billion on what is now the longest war in US history--\$35 billion of that out of the pockets of California taxpayers. Meanwhile, the state of California now faces a budget gap of more than \$19 billion. One hundred California state parks will be closed for lack of funding this year. During the last two years, more than \$17 billion has been cut from public education funding and California schools now rank last in the nation in staff-to-student ratio and 49th in per pupil spending. Massive layoffs of teachers and school employees have deprived our students of libraries, school transportation, arts, counselors, physical education, summer school, custodians and other critical services. Governor Schwarzenegger's elimination of safety net programs like CalWORKS and services for children, the disabled, and the elderly devastate the most vulnerable members of our society.

As Martin Luther King, Jr. eloquently stated, “A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.” Against the backdrop of priorities set by our national Party, how can we as leaders in the California Democratic Party explain to our most vulnerable citizens that we must spend \$7 billion per month on a war that has shown little success while they struggle to make ends meet? There are alternative strategies available that are far more likely to contribute to stability in Afghanistan and free up much-needed resources at home.

While we strongly believe that ending the U.S. war effort in Afghanistan is the best approach from a moral and strategic standpoint, we also feel it is in the political interest of President Obama and Democrats in Congress to change course. The American public's opposition to the war in Afghanistan is growing by the day. A majority now say the war is not worth fighting, and in a recent Rasmussen poll, 48% of those surveyed said ending the war in Afghanistan is a more important goal than winning it. This dissatisfaction with the war is only likely to grow as casualties mount and Americans continue to feel the strain of the economic crisis. With Democrats facing an enthusiasm gap leading into the 2010 elections, the American people need to see our Party's members in Congress fighting for policies that will meet their needs.

We appreciate the efforts of those of you who have moved this debate forward through congressional initiatives such as the recent amendments mandating an end date for the U.S. military presence. What we need now is bold leadership to articulate an alternative vision for Afghanistan that the American public can support. As party leaders, we pour ourselves into building, mobilizing and energizing the California Democratic Party. In return, we ask our congressional delegation for the visionary leadership we can be proud to support on critical issues of war and peace.

Please write to tell us what action you will take.

Sincerely,