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Dear Senate Majority Leader Reid, Speaker Pelosi and the Leadership of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives,

Our organizations represent military and Gold Star families; Veterans of the Iraq War; current servicemen and women including Active Duty, National Guard, Reserves and Individual Ready Reserves; Vietnam Veterans and Veterans of other eras. Our members have all been impacted by this war, some of us directly, and some because of what we know from combat in other wars. We all believe that the U.S. military occupation of Iraq must be brought to an immediate end. The people of the United States voted for a change in Congressional leadership last November, due in large part to the desire to see the disaster in Iraq come to an end. Congress now has the opportunity to end this unjust war and bring our troops home. But as we write this letter, it appears that this is an opportunity you are prepared to squander.

In the next several weeks, Congress will vote on President Bush's 2007 Supplemental Appropriations request that will, if passed, provide the funds to continue the war in Iraq. Legislative hearings, increased oversight and funding restrictions will not end the war. The President has defied the voice of the American people as expressed in November's vote, and ordered over 21,000 more combat troops into harm's way. He has made it clear he will not bring our troops home. Congress can and must use its Constitutional "power of the purse" to de-fund the war and bring it to an end.

As leaders in Congress, none of you has advocated for de-funding the Iraq war. As organizations representing thousands of people with family, loved ones and friends in harms way, we need to know why. Why won't you take the most direct path to bringing this war to an end?

Many of you have said, "We can't de-fund the troops," and "We can't abandon the troops." As military and Gold Star families and as Veterans of the Iraq and other wars, we understand the difference between "de-funding the war" and "de-funding the troops". In fact, voting more funds for this war would be abandoning our troops. It would leave them with the possibility of joining the over 3,160 who have died as a result of a war that should never have started, or the tens of thousands who have been wounded physically, psychologically, or both.

There is a tragic parallel here with the Vietnam War. The last 28,000 troops who died in that war were abandoned to political game-playing long after Congress and the President knew that it was time to bring the troops home. This was a tragedy that you must not allow to be repeated.

We need to understand from you, here and now, what you think you have to lose by crafting a Supplemental Appropriations bill that cuts off all funds for continuing the war in Iraq. We know how much is at stake for our loved ones, friends and fellow troops who will be condemned to remain in Iraq,

with a vague and unclear mission based on a failed policy, in the middle of a civil war. Are you really more worried about losing a vote in Congress or maintaining the majority and winning the White House in 2008 than you are about losing the lives of our troops? We do not wish to assign motives, but we must ask these questions. For us this war and what you are doing is very personal. Every day that you debate and every day that you allow this to go on, an average of three of our loved ones, friends and fellow troops die in Iraq, along with countless Iraqi children, women and men.

We are asking that, as leaders in Congress, you exercise leadership. Your voice is needed now more than ever. Tell the American people the truth about President Bush's funding request. President Bush is not asking for more funds for the troops. He is asking for more funds to continue a war that should never have happened, a war that is killing so many U.S. service members and leaving even more physically and psychologically damaged on a daily basis. This is a war that has killed untold numbers of Iraqis, is draining our national treasure and cultivating a growing hatred against our nation

Hope, a rare commodity for us these days, is even harder to find within the current morass of non-binding resolutions and rhetorical statements in Congress about preventing "surges" and changing strategies. Hope is hard to find when we see so many in Congress adopting the morally indefensible stand of opposing the escalation of this war, while poised to support its continuation.

It is not too late for you to do the right thing. We ask you to exercise your leadership, stand up and call for the de-funding of the Iraq War. Stand strong when you explain that de-funding the war is not de-funding or abandoning our troops. Let the American people know what we as military families and Veterans know -- that de-funding the war will not leave our troops without equipment or supplies. Stand strong when you explain that there are sufficient funds available to bring our troops home quickly and safely, and that if more funds are ever needed, Congress has the ability to re-program monies from the Department of Defense budget to use for this purpose. Stand strong and fight to bring our troops home.

Stop telling us that you don't have the votes, and work with us to secure them. That is what leaders do.

Right now, it seems that you cannot see the political upside of doing what we and the majority of people in this country are calling on you to do. It is important that you understand the political downside of allowing this war to continue. If you provide further funding for the war in Iraq, it will no longer be President Bush's war. You will be co-owners. You will share responsibility for the continued chaos and loss of life in Iraq. You will have lost the opportunity to provide leadership when it is sorely needed. You will have given license to more years of a failed policy and countless deaths.

We ask you now: support our troops, de-fund the war, and bring them home now. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Kelly Dougherty, Co-founder and Executive Director, Iraq Veterans Against the War; US Army National Guard, 1996-2004; Veteran, Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Nancy Lessin and Charley Richardson, Co-founders, Military Families Speak Out; parents of a Marine who served in Iraq in spring, 2003

Michael McPhearson, Executive Director, Veterans For Peace; Gulf War Veteran, US Army Captain 1981-1992; member of Military Families Speak Out

Elliot DS Adams, President, Veterans For Peace; Vietnam Veteran, Spec-4, Army, infantry, paratrooper, 1966-69