June 24, 2011

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to you with serious concerns about the pace of withdrawal of our American troops from Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. We applaud your announcement Wednesday of an initial withdrawal of 10,000 troops this year, but believe withdrawal should be dramatically accelerated. Like all Americans, we are deeply proud of the hard work and incredible sacrifice of our brave men and women in uniform, and we know they are carrying out the mission in Afghanistan with dedication and extraordinary competence. Throughout this nearly ten-year military campaign, they have done all we have asked of them, and represented our nation's very best values and ideals.

But now, especially considering the recent death of Osama bin Laden, we believe the time has come to dramatically accelerate the reduction of our military presence in Afghanistan. We respectfully request that you accelerate your Administration's withdrawal plan so that the so-called "surge troops" who were deployed in 2009 be redeployed by the end of this calendar year; with the additional goal of developing a plan to bring all of our remaining troops home safely and honorably by the end of next year.

We remain convinced that an ongoing U.S. presence will do little to advance U.S. national security while continuing to take the lives of our brave military personnel. While the military has made gains in isolated areas, they are not sustainable given the nature of the Afghan government and the insurgency's sanctuary in Pakistan.

The American people have grown rightfully concerned about the cost and the wisdom of sustaining this mission, which reportedly costs U.S. taxpayers nearly $8 billion a month. Many of us have travelled to Afghanistan and have learned how American taxpayers are supporting the construction of schools, roads, and bridges, and the training of police and military forces. Rather than spending billions per month constructing schools, bridges, roads and hospitals in Afghanistan, we believe the United States must make any such critical investments in our country first, and begin to close our own domestic budget gap. Moreover, as a recent Senate Foreign Relations Committee report reveals, the effectiveness of this generous assistance package, both for development and stabilization purposes, is very much in doubt.

The American people know that we can no longer afford to spend billions of dollars each month to try to build the nation of Afghanistan and to defeat a regenerating insurgency, which does not directly threaten the United States. We firmly believe that it is ultimately the responsibility of
the Afghan people to build, operate, and maintain their own civilian and military operations. The long-term security interests of the United States, and stability in that region of the world, will only be advanced when the people of Afghanistan assume these responsibilities. The United States cannot maintain a presence there indefinitely. We need to focus our resources on rebuilding our own country; both addressing the urgent needs of our own people and beginning to close the federal deficit. On behalf of our constituents who have resoundingly expressed their opposition to our continued involvement in Afghanistan, we respectfully request that you give serious consideration to our sentiments on this issue.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,

David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress

Walter B. Jones
Member of Congress

Michael Honda
Member of Congress

Loretta Sanchez
Member of Congress

Carolyn B. Maloney
Member of Congress

Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress

John W. Olver
Member of Congress

Lynn C. Woolsey
Member of Congress

Barney Frank
Member of Congress

Luis V. Gutiérrez
Member of Congress
Laura Richardson  
Member of Congress

Alcee L. Hastings  
Member of Congress

Joseph Crowley  
Member of Congress

Raul M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress

Fortney Pete Stark  
Member of Congress

Mike Quigley  
Member of Congress

Judy Chu  
Member of Congress

Yvette D. Clarke  
Member of Congress

John Lewis  
Member of Congress

Hansen Clarke  
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee  
Member of Congress

Paul Tonko  
Member of Congress

Keith Ellison  
Member of Congress

Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Member of Congress

Brian Higgins  
Member of Congress
Maxine Waters
Member of Congress

Mike Thompson
Member of Congress

Edolphus Towns
Member of Congress