

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

Friday, April 18, 2008

The Honorable Jim Nussle
Director, Office of Management and Budget
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Mr. Nussle:

Thank you for replying to our March 19th letter to President Bush. In that letter, we requested that the President provide the Joint Economic Committee with an estimate for the current and projected future cost of the Iraq war and make a member of his Administration available to testify before us.

As you know, this is not the first time we have made a written request for an honest dialogue on the cost of the war. For years, Democrats have been concerned that the war in Iraq is overburdening our military, weakening our economy and making us less secure. Although we appreciate your reply, you did not provide the information we requested. Just as troubling, you declined to make an Administration official available to testify before Congress on these matters. The American people deserve both.

In your letter, you argue that whatever the cost of the Iraq war, it is a small price to pay to keep our country safe from terrorism. Democrats agree that we must stop at nothing to keep our country safe, but there is no evidence that the war in Iraq has aided the war on terrorism. To the contrary, the war in Iraq has compromised the fight against Al Qaeda by draining resources and military manpower and, according to a recent National Intelligence Estimate, by serving as a valuable recruiting tool for Al-Qaeda.

Despite the heroic efforts of our troops in Iraq, there has been little progress in establishing a functioning independent government, levels of attacks and violence remain unacceptably high and the cost of the war for American taxpayers keeps rising with no end in sight. President Bush's recent announcement to abandon plans to reduce the number of U.S. troops in Iraq only serves to confirm this sad reality.

Equally disturbing, the Bush Administration has never been forthcoming with the American people on the cost of war in lives, treasure or impact on our national security.

The Bush Administration initially estimated that the war would cost about \$60 billion. In fact, the Administration has already requested more than 10 times that much – more than \$600 billion – just to cover the costs of the operations and replacement of some of the equipment used in Iraq. Last year, the Joint Economic Committee prepared a report

showing that the full economic cost of the war will total \$1.3 trillion by the end of this year. This figure includes the "hidden costs" of deficit financing, the future care of our wounded veterans, and disruption in oil markets. And some economists now predict that the total economic price tag for the war could reach \$3 trillion to \$5 trillion over the next decade if we remain in Iraq.

Regardless of which figure you choose, two things are clear: The funds used for the Iraq war are diverted from important national priorities. And there has yet to be an accounting by the Administration of the cost of the war to our budget and to our economy.

In your letter, you argue that the benefits of the war outweigh the high cost. We strongly disagree. However, the American people deserve more than an exchange of letters: they deserve an open, honest dialogue. To that end, we renew our request that you or a representative of the Bush Administration be made available to testify before the Joint Economic Committee. We look forward to receiving a long-overdue accounting of the current and projected budgetary and economic costs of the war in Iraq. We hope you will agree that the American people, who are shouldering a heavy burden for the war, merit nothing less.

Sincerely,



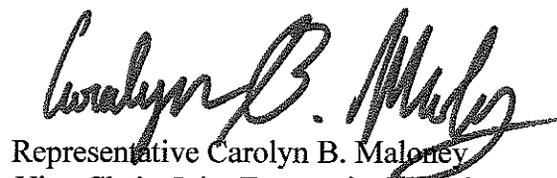
Senator Harry Reid
Majority Leader



Representative Steny Hoyer
Majority Leader



Senator Charles E. Schumer
Chairman, Joint Economic Committee



Representative Carolyn B. Maloney
Vice-Chair, Joint Economic Committee