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**Congresswoman Betty McCollum
Statement for the Record on H.R. 850
July 31, 2013**

Mr. Speaker, last week *The Hill* published a column entitled “Don’t force an irresponsible vote on Iran sanctions.” The column started with the following two sentences: “The House of Representatives is under pressure to vote on a new Iran sanctions bill, H.R. 850, before members leave town for August recess. Scheduling such a vote would be irresponsible and highly counterproductive to U.S. strategy on Iran.”

The authors of the column were not some peaceniks or pundits, but experts with real life experiences in military, diplomacy and fighting for a future of freedom for the people of Iran – Gen. (retired) Joseph Hoar, former Commander in Chief of United States Central Command, Col. (retired) Lawrence Wilkerson, former Chief of Staff to General Colin Powell, and Trita Parsi, president of the National Iranian American Council.

Today, the House of Representatives is advancing this “irresponsible and highly counterproductive” bill to push Iran deeper into a state of isolation and push the U.S. further away from a diplomatic resolution to Iran’s pursuit of nuclear weapons. Most disturbing, by severely limiting diplomatic options for the U.S. and our international partners, this bill advances the agenda of those who seek to once again push the U.S. towards military confrontation. Our nation has been down this irresponsible, dangerous and costly path before with the war in Iraq and I completely reject the idea that war with Iran is inevitable or a viable solution to this situation.

On August 3rd the new president of Iran, Dr. Hassan Rouhani, will take office. Dr. Rouhani was elected as a moderate voice who campaigned to “pursue a policy of peace and reconciliation” with the West. The new president was Iran’s former lead nuclear negotiator and was critical of the nuclear “extremism” of his dangerous predecessor, President Ahmadinejad. This is the absolute best opportunity and most favorable conditions to proceed with a diplomatic course.

Just in the past month, I received over 100 calls, e-mails and letters urging me to sign a letter to President Obama calling for a renewed diplomatic effort with Iran’s new leader.

On July 19th I joined 130 Democrats and Republicans in signing the letter to Mr. Obama urging him "to pursue the potential opportunity presented by Iran's recent presidential election by reinvigorating U.S. efforts to secure a negotiated nuclear agreement." Our letter goes on to say, "we believe it would be a mistake not to test whether Dr. Rouhani's election represents a real opportunity for progress toward a verifiable, enforceable agreement on Iran's nuclear program that ensures the country does not acquire a nuclear weapon. In order to test this proposition, it will be prudent for the United States to utilize all diplomatic tools to reinvigorate ongoing nuclear talks."

H.R. 850 and its extreme sanctions takes the opposite course. It sends the signal that the U.S. wishes to punish the Iranian people and will only settle for submission, rather than a negotiated, face saving solution that meets the security needs of the United States, Israel, and the entire international community and the economic needs of the Iranian people. This bill is a blunt instrument that harms U.S. interests, undercuts President Obama, and gives no hope to the millions of Iranians who look to the U.S. as a beacon of freedom and inspiration.

Clearly there are no guarantees that diplomacy will work in the near term and preventing a nuclear-armed Iran is an absolute. So, advancing H.R. 850 and tougher sanctions can proceed at anytime in the months ahead if Iran rejects negotiations or refuses to take tangible, verifiable steps towards an agreement. The House could vote on this bill in October or November, giving President Obama, our international partners, and the new Iranian leadership a legitimate window of time to seek peaceful progress.

This bill has 375 co-sponsors so there is absolute certainty that this bill will pass and then Congress can go on its August recess. This bill will not move in the U.S. Senate in the days ahead so nothing will be accomplished by the passage of H.R. 850 other than some chest pounding by politicians, the imposition of an embarrassing obstacle to U.S. diplomats, and a victory for the hardliners in Iran who reject negotiations as much as hardliners in this country.

Today, at this moment in time, this is a bill that harms U.S. interests and I will vote against it.