

# **Reports on Communications with Sen. Carl Levin's Offices January 18 – 20, 2007**

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## **Attachments:**

**MFSO Talking Points (Addendum to Report 2.)**

**MFSO Additional Talking Points (Addendum to Report 4.)**

## **1. Letter to Levin's Detroit office (submitted by apcjerry@sbcglobal.net)**

January 18, 2007

Senator Carl Levin  
477 Michigan Avenue, Room 1860  
Detroit, MI 48226  
By Fax: 226-6948

Dear Senator Levin:

Our organization is an active anti-war and social justice organization in the State of Michigan. We will be at the McNamara Federal Building in Detroit on Friday, January 19, 2007, at 4:00 pm, and are requesting a meeting with you or representatives from your office at that time.

We are writing to request that you take immediate action to implement the mandate from the November, 2007 elections to end the war in Iraq, a mandate which you have acknowledged in numerous public statements.

We believe that the best way for Congress to implement that mandate is to immediately cut-off funding for the war and bring the troops home now! We are encouraged that two resolutions have been introduced into the House of Representatives, HR 508 and HR 455 to cut-off funding and bring the troops home. In contrast, the vague Senate Resolution you introduced yesterday says nothing about cutting off funding and immediately ending the war.

As the Senator from Michigan, you surely are aware of the severe economic crisis facing our state, with schools shutting, foreclosures at record levels, tens of thousands losing their health care and unable to keep their utilities on. The war in Iraq has already cost the state of Michigan \$9.5 billion. Rather than wasting that money on an illegal and immoral war, we need those funds spent to meet the needs of the people of Michigan facing real economic disaster.

As the chair of the Armed Forces Committee we hope you reconsider your position and take action to end the war by immediately cutting off all funding for the war and implementing resolutions to fund human needs at home, not war abroad.

We look forward to meeting with you or your representatives this Friday.

Sincerely,

Jerome D. Goldberg, for the  
Michigan Emergency Committee Against War and Injustice

cc: Senator Stabenow, Congressman Conyers, Congressperson Kilpatrick

## **2. Report of Meeting with Levin's Staff in Grand Rapids (submitted by Dave Blakeslee, [blakeslee@gmail.com](mailto:blakeslee@gmail.com))**

On Friday, January 19, 2007, Betty Ford and I met with two staffers for U.S. Senator Carl Levin (D-MI): Paul Troost, Regional Representative, and Dave Casey, Staff Assistant. They were very hospitable and I believe genuinely interested in hearing our views.

Our interest in this meeting was to advise the Senator that he should align himself with efforts to withdraw American troops from Iraq using funds that Congress has already approved. We were very pleased to be able to represent many people in this area who want to see the war end in the shortest possible time. We talked briefly about our involvement with the Institute for Global Education, the West Michigan Justice & Peace Coalition, and the statewide Michigan Peace Network.

We entered the meeting with the purpose of sharing a list of talking points developed by Military Families Speak Out and getting their response. The central thrust of the argument is that de-funding the war is the most humane and effective way of opposing President Bush's announced plans to escalate the conflict by sending in an additional 21,000 + troops over the next several weeks. The list of points that I presented is posted at this website:

[http://www.mfso.org/downloads/Defund%20the%20War%20Talking%20Points%20final\\_1.pdf](http://www.mfso.org/downloads/Defund%20the%20War%20Talking%20Points%20final_1.pdf)

Or try this if the above link doesn't work: <http://tinyurl.com/39fh5v>

Knowing in advance (based on public statements that he and others in the Democratic Party leadership have made) that Sen. Levin was unlikely to agree with our stance, we sought to learn more about the approach he plans to take regarding future funding and troop deployments in Iraq.

One day prior to our visit, Senator Levin made headlines by co-sponsoring a bipartisan, non-binding resolution expressing opposition to Bush's plan. His idea is to develop a broader consensus against the "surge" that includes as many Republicans as possible. His reasoning for disagreeing with the de-funding proposal is that it would change the argument, fragment a developing bipartisan agreement and wind up portrayed in the news media as "Democrats abandoning the troops."

Sen. Levin is using political tactics in an attempt to obstruct Bush's plans to deepen U.S. military involvement in Iraq. He wants to help create an environment where prominent Republican politicians will be willing to speak critically against the Iraq occupation and Bush's handling of his responsibilities as Commander in Chief.

We asked about what effect this approach will have on future appropriations bills, which will come up on the congressional agenda beginning in February. On this point, the staffers were non-committal, acknowledging that it's hard for them to anticipate where matters will stand, politically speaking, several weeks from now. They recognize that many thousands of lives are on the line as the conflict drags on. Levin's interest is in sending a message to the administration that their ability to prosecute the war without checks and balances no longer exists as it did under the previous Congress.

However, they offered no details on any specific limitations, conditions or directions for military spending that Sen. Levin or his colleagues have in mind. They did mention some current hearings that are taking place aimed at creating more oversight and accountability on the numerous no-bid contracts that

have been doled out to corporations like Halliburton and Bechtel since before the invasion took place in 2003.

Betty shared some very interesting observations and reflections from the months, in the early 1960's, when she lived in Baghdad that put the human suffering of the Iraqis in the forefront of our thinking.

Though we were not able to come to a point of agreement on the immediate next steps to be taken regarding U.S. involvement in Iraq, I believe that we had a candid and open exchange. I see this as a first step in building a stronger sense of understanding and clear communication between the Senator and the community of peace activists here in Grand Rapids and across the state. We let the staffers know that there are a number of others in our area who would appreciate a chance to meet with them (or better yet, the Senator himself). They indicated a willingness to meet again, but due to space limitations indicated that they would like to meet with no more than three or four people at the next meeting.

At this point in the political process, a significant difference remains between our senator and those of us who want to see the troops withdrawn immediately. However, I believe we need to persevere and press for continued movement in that direction. Political momentum is definitely on the side of the antiwar perspective, and we need to do all we can to encourage that trend, as frustrating as it is having to wait. Senator Levin occupies a uniquely influential position when it comes to determining U.S. military policy and I sense an opportunity on our part to help bolster his willingness to strongly oppose the misguided and destructive policies that President Bush continues to foist upon our nation and our world.

### **3. Report of Meeting with Levin Staffperson in Lansing (Submitted by Joan Peace, lifeissacred2004@yahoo.com)**

There were five of us who showed up at Levin's Lansing office at 11:30a.m. on Friday, in solidarity with activists around the state. We met with a staffperson (Andy) for about 30 minutes before we joined up with the regular weekly vigil in front of the Capitol. We brought forth a number of issues of concern surrounding the war in Iraq, including the need for a *binding* resolution to actually end the war, the abuse of female military personnel, the attacks on Somalia, environmental impacts, community loss of resources, and the need for further investigations of 9-11 (to name a few). Andy took extensive notes that he agreed to pass on to Levin, as well as the following letter. He relayed a lot of information to us noting that Levin is mostly in agreement. Hopefully this is more than just good P.R.!

Peace, Kathie

To the Honorable Senator Carl Levin,

We understand that you are co-sponsoring a bill that would put Congress on record as being against an escalation of the military occupation in Iraq. For this we are grateful. We have worked for many years to try to encourage an end to this senseless violence and the drain of valuable resources.

We are very concerned however regarding the provision in the resolution that could be interpreted to authorize the U.S. military to attack Iran. This is completely unacceptable. We value the lives of Iranians, Iraqis, and Americans equally. A continuance of the current policies of imperialism using military might, scattering depleted uranium, and destroying the environment is nearly suicidal.

Many in Michigan have felt a deep personal loss as so many soldiers have returned with critical wounds or, in the case of 115 of our soldiers, died in combat. Our state is suffering due to the overwhelming needs by our schools, shelters and all arenas of human services. Our state- particularly those most in need, bear this huge financial burden of the Iraq war and occupation: currently at \$10,000,000,000, according to the National Priorities Project.

We are reminded at this time of these words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: "A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death." April 4, 1967

Though we cannot change the past, let us decide to move forward to a sane, just and sustainable future.

Sincerely,

Members of the Lansing peace and justice community

#### **4. Report of Meeting with Levin in Pinckney (Report submitted by Deb Regal, [mfso.michigan@gmail.com](mailto:mfso.michigan@gmail.com))**

January 24, 2007

Here are notes that follow my chance to converse with Levin last weekend. This summary was sent to MFSO National. Additional talking points (issued after receipt of this summary) address some of the "arguments" Levin put forward.

Let's keep in touch about what others have found in their meetings.

Deb

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On Jan. 20, my husband and I attended a fundraiser held in our town (Pinckney, MI) for Sen. Carl Levin. These are his official positions and intentions as stated and re-stated:

This week the Bipartisan Resolution on Iraq (Levin, Biden, Hagel, Snow; non-binding, sense of the Senate resolution) will come up for a vote (most likely Wednesday). Here's Levin's floor statement made on Jan.17: <http://levin.senate.gov/senate/statement.cfm?id=267687> Levin stated that the republicans are threatening to filibuster the resolution, so "that shows how important opposing this resolution is to the White House." He also stated that this was part of the overall democratic strategy to "increase pressure on the Iraqis to move the main players there toward negotiation of a political solution" in contrast to "Bush's plan to send in more troops to give the Iraqis breathing space."

When Levin was challenged (several times) about the lack of real impact of non-binding, poetic resolutions when defunding is the only viable, veto-proof way to bring our troops out of Iraq *now*, he responded:

"The *worst* thing we can do is lose a vote against Bush's Iraq positions now. Bush would turn a loss against us and use the loss to manipulate public opinion and any bipartisan efforts would die."

"We do not have the votes to defund, and that is the wrong approach anyway. Defunding sends the wrong message to our troops....Our goal is to fight Bush's Iraq policy, not take it out on our troops."

"We did not actually cut off funding for Vietnam. It was the threat of us doing so that ended the war." (Is this true? This leaves somewhat of a gap in logic.)

"We can accomplish the same goal as defunding with a troop cap. Clinton and Obama are introducing resolutions to cap the number of troops...The cap can be lowered over time."

*My analysis/questions:*

First: There was a definite effort on Levin's part to link support for vets' health care, employment and education programs, etc. to our calls to defund the war. This makes *no* sense because appropriations to the VA are handled separately from funding for the war. (Right?) He implied that connection over and over. (We need to add a counter to this in the talking points.) This is part of a larger political effort to tie Iraq war funding to troop welfare. Way off the mark.

Second: The accounting reality (per Charley's eloquent statement) is clear that redeployment out of Iraq (not just pulling troops back to camp along the Iraqi border, either!) is possible with money already appropriated. The money is there to redeploy the troops out of Iraq safely, so no one is talking about taking anything out on our troops.

Between what is left from the \$70 billion supplemental appropriation approved in fall of 2006 to money that could be re-programmed from DoD funds, we can bring our troops out now with everything necessary to do that safely. We need to clearly and consistently reinforce this accounting reality and tie this to support for the troops! Any other accounting info?

Third: Troop caps do not solve the problem! Levin alluded to a drawdown as a possibility. Good grief, this is not a solution since all that does is ensure that our loved ones who remain over there are exposed to more and more risk as troop levels decrease "over time." Sitting ducks. Should the troops feel supported by this plan? *Not!* Please share your comments/responses with me so I can put them out to Michigan chapter members. We need to work together to stay on him about these issues and his failure to act in ways not symbolic but instead are effective *actions*. It is so important to get MFSO members to his office this week!

**More MFSO Talking Points 1-23-07:  
Things You May Hear From Senators and Members of Congress – And Ideas  
for Responding**

***We can't just leave.***

We have been told for almost four years that we can't just leave Iraq. In the meantime, over 3,000 U.S. troops have been killed, tens of thousands have been injured, cases of PTSD and suicide continue to increase, and hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children, women and men have died. The U.S. occupation is a major cause of the violence in Iraq, not a solution to the violence. No effective resolution of the problems in Iraq will be reached as long as the U.S. military is occupying the country. The only thing worse than having so many die in this war that should never have happened is to have even more die.

***We can't leave the troops stranded/abandoned.***

We agree – which is why we are asking you to cut off funds to continue a war that has stranded and abandoned our troops in Iraq – some of them through third, fourth and even fifth deployments. Leaving our troops in Iraq means that even more of them will be wounded and die for a war based on lies. There are funds now in the pipeline to bring our troops home quickly and safely. Should more funds be needed to bring our troops home, monies currently in the Department of Defense budget (\$500 billion/year) could be re-programmed to provide the necessary funds.

***We don't have the votes to cut off the funding.***

The response “I won't vote to cut off the funding because we don't have the votes to cut off the funding” leaves U.S. troops fighting and dying in Iraq in a war that should never have been started. We are calling on our Members of Congress and Senators to be leaders not followers (or sheep). We are calling on Congress to show both leadership and courage. Not being willing to step forward unless everyone steps forward is a death sentence for an average of 3 U.S. troops and countless Iraqis per day.

For the Democrats: We were told before the election by many Democrats that they were very sympathetic to our call for ending the war in Iraq and bringing our troops home now, but that “*there is nothing I can do because the Democrats are not in power.*” Well the election has turned the tide and the American people have registered their dissatisfaction with the war. Now that the Democrats are in power, we expect you to make good on the mandate from this past election and end the funding that will allow this unjust and unjustifiable war continue. If you abandon our troops and their families and vote funding to continue this war, it will no longer be George Bush's war, it will be yours. You will have bought it – and then you will own it.

***The President is the Commander in Chief – Congress can't intervene.***

The power that Congress has is the power of the purse. What Congress can do is end the funding that allows the war in Iraq to continue. De-funding the war will be supporting our troops, as it will allow the safe and orderly withdrawal from Iraq. It is clear that President Bush has no intention of ending the war in Iraq but Congress has the constitutional authority and the moral duty to act. .

***We don't have a veto-proof majority.***

If Congress in the majority votes down the President's appropriation request for the war in Iraq, the President won't have an opportunity to veto it. Therefore, a simple majority can take the action needed to bring the war to an end, bring our troops home now and take care of them when they get here.

***I am with you, but if I get too far out in front of the rest of them, I will lose my credibility.***

There are times to protect credibility and there are times to protect our troops and this nation. Now is a time to do the latter. You are losing credibility with the American people and the people of the world through your failure to act. Leadership is needed and that is what we expect of you.

***I'm voting for the non-binding resolution opposing the "surge" and I will vote against funding for the "surge".***

We are glad that you will vote to oppose the escalation of this war and even deny funding for an escalation.. But this administration has made it clear that they simply don't care what anyone thinks – from the generals to the troops to the American people to the Iraqis – they are moving forward with their disastrous war. We all know that non-binding resolutions will not work to end this war. And voting against funding for the escalation of the war, even if the administration paid attention to it, might halt 21,500 troops from being extended in the war zone or sent/sent back earlier than expected. But that still leaves over 130,000 troops still deployed in Iraq, in harm's way. Don't abandon our troops, don't abandon our loved ones.

***We can cap troop levels at the level they were on January 1, 2007 and that will be a real blow to the President.***

Capping troop levels may be a political blow to the President, but it doesn't do anything for the over 130,000 U.S. troops who are currently in Iraq, and those who are facing deployment. We are tired of politicians playing political games with the lives of our loved ones and their families, and the loved ones of others. This isn't about you. It is about our troops and our nation.

***We can put restrictions on the use of troops in Iraq, including prohibiting troops from being deployed unless they are at a high level of readiness, and/or stipulating that troops could not be deployed for longer than 12 months.***

If the goal is to end the war, take care of the troops and get them home, playing games with restrictions on the use of the troops only means that the end of the war will be delayed, and an average of three US troops and countless Iraqis will continue to die each day. We expect our political leaders to set aside all political games and do what is right for our troops, for our nation and for Iraqis. Now is not the time for bold leadership. Honor our loved ones by showing that leadership now.

***We can't just cut of the funds for this war.***

Yes you can. And you must. The lives of thousand of U.S. troops and tens of thousands of Iraqis depends on you doing just that.

# **SUPPORT OUR TROOPS! DE-FUND THE WAR!**

## **MFSO Talking Points**

- In the November elections, the American people made clear their overwhelming opposition to the war in Iraq.
- Congress can hold hearings, debate and even pass legislation on the war, but none of these will bring the war to an end. Congress' real power lies in their control over funding for the war and their ability to cut off funds except for those that are needed to bring our troops home quickly and safely.
- Unless Congress acts, the war will continue. The Bush administration has made it clear that they have no intention of ending the war and bringing our troops home.
- Every day that the war continues, on average, three U.S. troops and countless Iraqi children, women and men die.
- December 31, 2006 marked the death of the 3,000<sup>th</sup> U.S. troop in Iraq. If the U.S. military occupation continues through 2007, we expect 800-1,000 more U.S. troops and 180,000 more Iraqis will die.
- In February or March, 2007, an appropriations bill will come before Congress seeking approximately \$130 billion dollars to continue the war in Iraq.
- Senators and Members of Congress cannot simultaneously oppose *and* fund this war.
- Congress must vote against any further appropriation that will continue the war in Iraq.

## **DE-FUNDING THE WAR DOES NOT MEAN DE-FUNDING THE TROOPS**

- In September, 2006 Congress approved \$70 billion for the war in Iraq, money that is currently available to the military. This is more than enough to ensure the troops have what they need (armor, protective equipment, weapons, ammunition, food, water, supplies, vehicles, etc) to come home quickly and safely.
- It is the Bush administration that has not supported our troops. They were sent off to fight a war based on lies without proper armor, equipment and supplies. The Bush administration has not allocated sufficient monies to provide the medical and psychological support for our troops when they return home or help them transition back to civilian life - including funding for education and job programs.
- The most supportive thing that Congress can do for our troops is to end the funding for this disastrous, unjust and unjustifiable war.

## **DE-FUNDING THE WAR AND PULLING U.S. TROOPS OUT IS ESSENTIAL TO BRINGING PEACE TO IRAQ**

- There is chaos and civil war in Iraq now. The U.S. military occupation of Iraq is not the solution, it is the problem. It is a major source of the violence in Iraq.
- The Iraqi people in overwhelming numbers have expressed a desire for the U.S. military occupation to end.
- Ending the U.S. military occupation is a pre-requisite to any real attempts for peace in Iraq.
- The U.S. has a responsibility to contribute financially to the re-building of Iraq. But that responsibility can not be carried out by a U.S. military occupying force or by contractors such as Halliburton.

## **HONOR THE FALLEN, END THE WAR NOW!**

- The continued war in Iraq will mean more deaths, more wounded, and more troops suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.
- The only thing worse than having so many die in a war that should never have happened is to have this war claim even more lives.
- Those who have already fallen in this war will best be honored by a nation and a Congress with the courage to end the war.