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Mr. Speaker, while much of the attention here in Congress is focused on the difficulties here at home, as we have heard in speeches this evening, rising unemployment rates, home mortgage foreclosures, increasing health care costs, stock market decline, I rise tonight to remind us that we cannot forget about the pressing challenges to global stability and our national security interest posed by Iran.

One of the best ways to understand the seriousness of the Iranian threat is to listen to the words of its leaders. Iran's President has called the Holocaust a lie, has said that Israel "must be wiped off the map" and frequently speaks about a future world in which

"Israelis will be eradicated" and Israel no longer exists. Iran's supreme leader joined in this hateful refrain recently when he called Israel a cancerous tumor.

The hatred of Iran's leaders is not just directed at Israel. Ahmadinejad has called American objectives and influence "Satanic" and has spoken before crowds that chant "death to America." Such aggressive and intolerable words are not just simply rhetoric.

They represent the policies of a government committed to terror and destruction.

Iran is the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism and is pursuing a nuclear program in defiance of three United Nations Security Council resolutions. Iran's support for terrorist groups Hezbollah and Hamas have enabled these organizations to carry out

attacks on Israel and kill innocent civilians. With training and other assistance from Iran, Hamas increased the range of its rockets so now 1 million Israelis are within the scope of attack.

Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons threatens Israel, other nations in the region and our U.S. national security. No government that calls for the complete destruction of another nation should be allowed to have nuclear weapons. Yet Iran continues to move

closer and closer to being capable of constructing such a weapon.

Although Iran reportedly does not currently have a sufficient amount of highly-enriched uranium to build a nuclear weapon, Iran does possess enough low-enriched uranium that can be converted into material needed to create an atomic bomb. Using existing centrifuges, Iran could enrich its low-level uranium to that of weapons grade in

several months. Time is not on our side. The Obama administration must back engagement with tougher sanctions and guard against Iranian diversions and delays.

Appropriate economic, political, and diplomatic means are the best tools we have to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons.

Last year I cosponsored legislation that declared it was in the national interests

of the U.S. to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and urged the President to impose tough sanctions on Iran, specifically its banks engaged in proliferation activities and companies doing business with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard. I also voted in favor of legislation that expanded the types of entities in Iran that are subject to sanction and allowed state and local governments and individuals to divest in any company

that invests in Iran's energy sectors.

America's efforts must go further. I support sanctioning Iran's Central bank and foreign banks that conduct transactions with sanctioned Iranian entities. Efforts to prohibit the export to Iran of refined petroleum products should be pursued.

Israel is one of America's closest allies and plays a central role in the peace and security of the most volatile region of the world. We must continue to demonstrate our support for our Israeli friends in the face of continued defiance and threats.

A nuclear-armed Iran is unacceptable. I urge my colleagues in Congress and the Obama administration to act with the urgency this situation demands and devote the necessary attention to this serious threat. While there are problems at home that require our attention, we must not waiver in our efforts to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.